



Te Pānui Kaitiaki o Ata Whenua

In this issue we explain the obligations of the Guardians and what we are trying to achieve with the recent changes to the amateur fisheries regulations that affect all recreational fishers throughout the Fiordland Marine Area (FMA). We also provide an update on some other fisheries initiatives that are underway.

Science and local knowledge are extremely important for managing the area, and we celebrate both in this issue with a report from the inaugural Fiordland Marine Research Symposium and the much-anticipated launch of our new book *Fiordland by Sea*.

This issue pays tribute to two long-serving Fiordland personalities: we begin with a yarn with Guardian Pete Young, and end with a farewell to Fisheries Compliance Officer, Stephen Logie.

As always, we welcome your thoughts and feedback.

Meet the Guardians

The Fiordland Marine Guardians are an advisory committee that works with government agencies and their Ministers to manage the Fiordland Marine Area (FMA). Pete Young has spent most of his life exploring Fiordland for fun, for work and to lead volunteer conservation efforts.

What is your first memory of the fiords?

I went to Deep Cove for school camp when I was twelve or thirteen with Rosedale School, which clearly sparked something in me! I've always been a big advocate for the Deep Cove camps as it gives Southland and Otago school kids a chance to go in and experience their backyard: the wilderness, the bush and the sea.

How have you made a living on the water over the years?

I worked on cray boats in Fiordland from 16 years old, but also skippered tourist boats and guided on the Milford track. I progressed to having my own boat. I worked out of Riverton in the southern fiords for cray and we'd fish for blue cod in the winter. I took a slight change in direction in the early 2000's when I skippered the Southern Winds which is the Department of Conservation's Fiordland-based vessel that supports conservation, research and compliance activities.

Tell us about your volunteer work.

Wayne Pratt and I did a coastal rubbish cleanup back in 2002 – we had gazillions of volunteers. There were people who had a whole lot of passion to do something, so that's how the Southern Coastal Charitable Trust came about. I'm also a trustee of the Coal Island Trust, which is in Preservation Inlet. The aim was to have Coal Island predator free, which we achieved in 2006 and we started relocating endangered birds to the island in 2009.

You must have seen (and heard) it all. Are you still learning about the FMA?

My time on the Southern Winds probably changed my opinion on things. I've never been a 'greenie' but I've always had a 'tinge' I guess. The invasive seaweed, *Undaria*, ignited things for me because that was something to get rid of, it was seen as a threat to Fiordland and when things like that occur, it does change your perspective. I don't think I would have had the same understanding of the implications if I hadn't become so invested in the area. I've learnt so much about biodiversity, pests, deer eradication, stoats and rats. You can see the conservation outcome of it, but there's still a lot to learn.

When did you join the Guardians and what has your role been over the years?

When I was fishing in Riverton in the 90s, I was part of the Riverton Fishermen's Association and was put forward as a rep to the original Guardians group. There were a whole bunch of people from different sectors who were taking an interest in the future of Fiordland. So I guess I was one of the originals and I've always been there in the background, helping and advising, but wasn't appointed as an official Guardian until 2018.

What compelled you to get involved with the Guardians?

Originally it was suggested that I go along and see what was happening, then it just grew from there. I think it's really important that we have local people involved in this. I have always seen Fiordland as a giver, and few people really give back. Times have changed, and we need to start looking after this amazing place.

What parts of the Guardians' work do you put particular focus on?

The local knowledge that I have is my strength and my experience allows me



to provide practical input. I can support the local agencies with biosecurity, fisheries information and planning of activities as well as supporting the Department of Conservation with monitoring programmes. I also know lots of the people on the water in there so that helps too.

What do you see as the biggest challenge currently facing the FMA?

There's an increase in visitors to Fiordland and some still have a mindset of fishing to fill their freezers. The challenge is in trying to get people to understand the sensitivities of the fisheries and think about the impact their activities might have on future generations. As an original Guardian, that was what we all talked about on day one – we wanted our grandchildren and future generations to be able to enjoy Fiordland just like we have.

What's one thing about the Guardians that you'd like people to know?

I'd like people to know that we are here for the future of the fisheries and for the people.

Finally – what's your favourite kai moana?

Not caught in Fiordland, but turbot is my fave. Otherwise, you can't go wrong with cod!

A diver in a wetsuit and mask is underwater, holding a large crab. The background is a deep blue-green water with light filtering through from above.

Fisheries update: Changes to Fiordland's recreational fishing rules

Widespread changes to the recreational fishing rules in the Fiordland Marine Area (FMA) have been in force since 25 April 2024. This is a significant milestone for maintaining sustainable fisheries. The suite of changes to individual species and bag limits were proposed by the Guardians following their work with fishing community stakeholders and Fisheries New Zealand. While there was widespread support for these changes, we understand that some fishers are unhappy and possibly do not understand why substantial reductions were made to recreational limits.

The Guardians are bound by legislation to ensure that “the quality of Fiordland’s marine environment and fisheries, including the wider fishery experience, be maintained or improved for future generations to use and enjoy”. With many indicators showing that the level of fishing pressure was unsustainable, the Guardians had no option but to recommend reducing limits. These changes were made to halt and hopefully reverse the decline in many fish species throughout the sheltered areas of Fiordland. The future health of the FMA is enshrined in law and directs the requirement for its continual protection through adaptive management measures. We are hopeful that the community will join together to support this restoration vision.

The changes include reductions to individual species limits as well as finfish bag limits for many species within the FMA. For many finfish species and pāua, limits within the fiords (from the entrance headlands inwards) are now lower than the wider the FMA. This will encourage fishing on the productive outer coast and reduce the pressure in more sheltered waters to protect and rebuild depleted populations.

People are still able to fish inside the fiords, but at lower levels. There are a few exceptions: due to serious concerns about the state of groper, scallop and oyster stocks, it is now prohibited to take groper from the Internal Waters of Fiordland (inside the habitat lines), and it is prohibited to take scallops and oysters from the entire FMA. We thank all stakeholders who look after Fiordland’s unique and treasured environment. Please familiarise yourself with the new rules before you head into the FMA. You can get a copy of the new fishing rules from www.fisheries.govt.nz/rules and download the free ‘[NZ Fishing Rules](#)’ app from your app store or by texting ‘app’ to 9889.



Consultation on proposed further amendments to fishing regulations

In the last issue we provided an update on the public consultation regarding a proposal to prohibit most bulk harvesting fishing methods in the waters of the fiords and introduce a boat limit to restrict the total amount of amateur take per vessel. The public submission process concluded in late August 2023. Progress on this matter has been slow due to the change in Government, and the Guardians and Fisheries New Zealand focusing on implementing the amateur fishing rule changes.

We appreciate that the delay in providing advice to the Minister of Oceans and Fisheries on this proposal may be causing uncertainty to operators in the FMA. Be assured that we are paying close attention to the matters raised in the submissions,

considering the interplay between the proposal and the new rules, and drawing on the latest fisheries data. The Guardians are also progressing discussions with commercial fisheries operators.

Reporting

Recreational fishers are strongly encouraged to download and use the recreational reporting app that has been developed by Fish Mainland: [Mainland Catch](#). By reporting your fishing effort and catch, we will be in a stronger position to assess which direction stocks are heading in, and this will be able to be tuned to different parts of Fiordland. Also, for the first time we will all be able to get a sense of the collective fishing effort by all fishers, across all sectors. This information will support recreational fishers when they are consulted on any future management proposals.

The Guardians continue to advocate strongly for the existing amateur fishing charter vessel paper-based reporting system to be migrated to an electronic system. This upgrade would lead to significant improvements in the accuracy and precision of this informative data set not to mention making reporting a lot more user-friendly for operators. It is encouraging to see this work advertised recently on the Government Electronic Tenders Service.

In our December issue we will focus on developments for improving the monitoring of fishing intensity and fish stocks, including a video-based method (that captured the image above of a hāpuku).

Secretive groper proving a challenge to manage

Draws on information provided by Stephen Logie

Over the past few years as the Guardians have led a review of the sustainability of key fishery stocks, groper have provided a classic case of “you can’t manage what you don’t measure”. Widespread concerns about the declining trend of stocks in Fiordland have led to recent rule changes for groper and a call for better monitoring of abundance. But before we get into that – some groper 101.

Hāpuku/groper (*Polyprion oxygeneios*) and bass groper (*Polyprion americanus*) are closely related and their distributions overlap. They are typically treated as one-in-the-same for fishing management purposes, and the name groper is used as a collective term for hāpuku and bass. Hāpuku are most commonly encountered in the fiords, with bass usually only caught in deep waters offshore. It is widely accepted that mature hāpuku move in and out of the fiords to offshore locations according to their reproductive cycle.

Despite groper being one of New Zealand’s most prized fish, they are one of the least studied and understood. While there is some general knowledge of their life history and migration to be gleaned from scientific studies around New Zealand, local fishers suspect that their behaviour in Fiordland may vary.

Both species of groper inhabit a wide depth range, from surface waters down to at least 400 metres. Historically, they were often observed in shallow waters around New Zealand, but today they are generally restricted to deeper waters. Groper are slow growing and long lived, making them vulnerable to over-fishing. They don’t reach maturity until 10–13 years of age and have been known to live for up to 60 years.

The groper fishery

In Fiordland, resident groper tend to be found in the fiord entrances, whereas school groper are often associated with freshwater inflows into the fiords.

A commercial fishery began in the 1940s, and groper are now managed under the quota management system. In 2024, the national total allowable commercial catch (TACC) for groper was 1,491 tonnes, which included a TACC of 451 tonnes for the HPB5 stock, which spans Southland (including Fiordland) and the Subantarctic. In recent years, the commercial catch of this stock has been significantly lower than the TACC (124 tonnes for year ending September 2023).

When the Guardians of Fiordland’s Fisheries assembled in the 1990s, the community raised concerns about the decline of stocks. In 2005, the Guardians recommended that daily limits for groper be reduced, and a tiered daily limit was introduced to encourage fishers to focus on more productive fishing grounds.

In recent years the Guardians have received strong feedback that it has become increasingly difficult to catch groper in the area, particularly in the inner fiords. We took a precautionary response to this information and in 2024 the Internal Waters of all fiords were closed to groper fishing. Fishers can target this species in the remaining fiords’ waters (the entrance areas), although they are incentivised by a higher daily limit to fish on the open coast when possible.

The drastic measure to close this fishery was not a move taken lightly. While the Guardians consider the lowest setting – a daily limit of one fish per fisher – is

currently too risky, we are working with Fisheries New Zealand and stakeholders to develop a proposal for a vessel limit (eg, one groper per vessel) to allow a more sustainable level of catch in the Internal Waters.

The Guardians are now supporting the development of new monitoring methods for groper and other finfish species so the effect of the new rules can be measured. Groper abundance has never been measured in the fiords, so this will be a big step forward.

New recreational groper (hāpuku/bass) fishing limits

Note that:

- groper fishing is prohibited in the Internal Waters of Fiordland
- you can fish for groper in the fiord entrances (up to the beginning of the Internal Waters), but the daily limit is one
- the daily limit for groper on the open coast is three
- there is no minimum legal length for groper (as catching the fish typically bursts the swim bladder leading to the eventual death of the fish)
- high grading (returning captured fish so that a bigger one can be retained) is illegal
- all fishing or taking of fish is strictly prohibited in marine reserves.



Latest findings shared at Fiordland Marine Research Symposium

The audience were treated to a huge range of topics including:

- the daily lives of penguins, dolphins and whales
- how marine heatwaves develop and the consequences for marine life
- how the Manapouri freshwater outflow is monitored
- how technology is being used to detect marine pests
- how the fiords are helping to combat climate change by locking away carbon dioxide
- what happened in the marine environment during the COVID travel restrictions
- how measuring underwater noise is giving insight to the natural world and human activities.

Marine researchers from around the country travelled to Te Anau in March to take part in the inaugural Fiordland Marine Research Symposium.

It was well worth the trip with a large audience packing out the venue and devouring their latest research findings.

There were many surprises. For example, did you know that most humpback whales that visit Fiordland are in the middle of a journey between Antarctica and East Coast of Australia? And that listening devices have led to descriptions of a dawn and dusk choruses in the fiords under the water? This cacophony is made by reef animals like fish and kina eating their dinner. We also learned that Fiordland is one of the country's largest natural carbon sinks due to forest debris getting buried in the depths of the fiords.

If you would like to hear more, the presentations are available to view via the Guardians' website www.fmg.org.nz. The event was held as part of Sea Week and organised by the Department of Conservation and the Guardians. A huge thank you to all who joined us and helped make the symposium a success. Special thanks to Shelley Hersey for recording and editing the presentations.

If you are considering carrying out research in the fiords the Guardians would love to hear from you. You can email us at info@fmg.org.nz

Farewell Stephen Logie

At our June meeting we bid farewell to Stephen Logie, who is retiring from the Ministry of Primary Industries after a long career in fisheries and fisheries compliance. Stephen has worked closely in support of the Fiordland Marine Guardians over the past 26 years, beginning in 1998 when he attended his first meeting as a compliance advisor for the Ministry of Fisheries. He was appointed as the minute secretary and held this role for many years. This was during the time when the group was forming and developing the conservation strategy for the Fiordland Marine Area, which would in time become enshrined in legislation. Fair to say, there were a LOT of minutes to be taken.

Stephen is widely respected and regarded by the Guardians, agency representatives and the wider community as a fountain of knowledge and advice. He has often provided context at Guardians' meetings regarding the intent and history of various management decisions and is a strong advocate for collaborative and integrated management of the area.

The Guardians extend their gratitude to Stephen for his service to the Fiordland Marine Area and to the Guardians, and we wish him all the very best for his retirement.



‘Fiordland by Sea’ guide now available

The popular guidebook for users of the FMA, formerly called Beneath the Reflections, has had a significant update and is now called Fiordland by Sea. The book is a must-have for boaties, whether you are a regular visitor or planning your first trip into the fiords. It includes comprehensive information and rules relating to marine biosecurity, fishing, marine protected areas and protected species. But arguably the most popular section is the fiord-by-fiord guide, where the Guardians share their local knowledge relating to navigation, moorings and anchorages and special features of each fiord.

You can download an interactive pdf of Fiordland by Sea from the [Fiordland Marine Guardian’s website](#).

A free hard copy of Fiordland by Sea is provided when you apply for your Fiordland Clean Vessel Pass (visit [Environment Southland website](#)). Additional copies can be purchased from the Department of Conservation’s Fiordland National Park Visitor Centre: Lakefront Drive, Te Anau 9600, Phone: +64 03 249 7924, Email: fiordlandvc@doc.govt.nz. Printed copies cost \$25 if collected from the visitor centre. Inquire about postage rates within New Zealand and overseas.



Lost: Acoustic monitoring mooring in Taumoana Marine Reserve, Dusky Sound

Last seen at the mouth of Cormorant Cove, Five Fingers/ Taumoana Marine Reserve, and has hopefully washed ashore.

Line consisting of a 14-inch orange hard buoy, could have significant fouling attached with approximately 3 metres of trailing line with 1-2 instruments attached. May have thin black braid trailing from the bottom black instrument.

If found, please contact: Jenni Stanley, jstanley@waikato.ac.nz, 021 812 854.

FMG-Agency meetings 2024

Thursday 5 September,
Environment Southland,
Invercargill

Tuesday 26 November,
Invercargill

For more information visit
www.fmg.org.nz

All welcome

Our quarterly FMG agency meetings are open to the public and agenda items for discussion at these meetings can be sent to the Guardians. The agenda is set three weeks in advance of a meeting.

Do you have a current Clean Vessel Pass?

Applying for a clean vessel pass is a simple process that can be completed online at www.es.govt.nz/fmpp or by calling Environment Southland on 0800 76 88 45 to receive a hard copy form.

Te Pānui Kaitiaki o Ata Whenua is available online at fmg.org.nz or via email.

In the interest of sustainability, we encourage people to opt for an electronic copy. Please email info@fmg.org.nz to update your contact details or to switch to electronic communication with the Guardians.



Te Rūnanga o NGĀI TAHU



Fiordland
Marine Guardians
Beneath the Reflections



Biosecurity New Zealand

Ministry for Primary Industries
Manatū Ahu Matua



environment
SOUTHLAND
REGIONAL COUNCIL
Te Taiāo Tonga



Fisheries New Zealand

Tini a Tangaroa



Ministry for the
Environment
Manatū Mō Te Taiāo



Ministry for Primary Industries
Manatū Ahu Matua



Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai