



**Fiordland
Marine Guardians**
Beneath the Reflections

Annual Report **2023/24**

Thank you to the following for providing photos in this year's report: Abi James, G Thomas, Kathryn McLachlan, Rebecca McLeod, Richard Kinsey, Sonja Bohn, Warrick Powrie.

This year's cover image is provided by James Bell.

The Fiordland Marine Guardians welcome feedback on our work. We invite you to contact us directly with questions or concerns about the Fiordland Marine Area.

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Vision and purpose

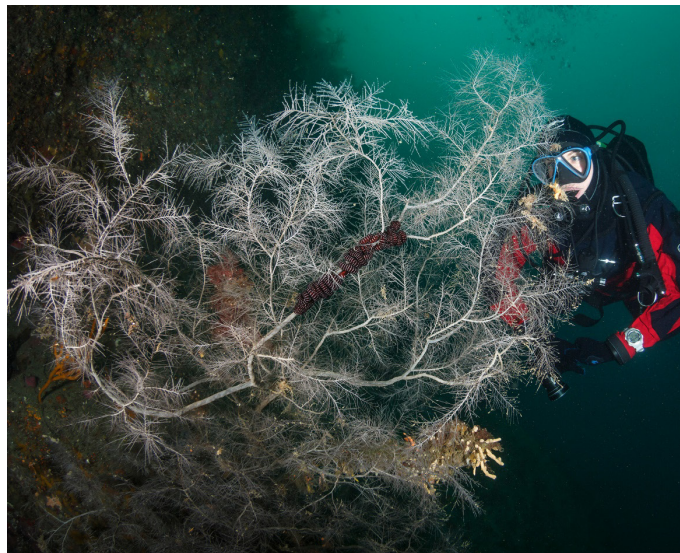
The Fiordland Marine Guardians (the Guardians) were formally recognised in the Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) Marine Management Act 2005.

Our focus is the Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) Marine Area, which extends from Awarua Point on the West Coast to Sandhill Point, Te Waewae Bay, and to 12 nautical miles offshore. However, we frequently address issues at a regional and national level, if we believe they will have an impact on the Fiordland Marine Area.

We work closely with the agencies that have an interest in the Fiordland Marine Area, to enhance collaboration in the region and ensure our strategy is aligned. We also engage with the wider community to ensure our focus remains relevant and directed towards the future.

Our challenge is ensuring the values of Fiordland are protected as the area faces increasing pressure from competing interests and a changing physical environment.

»» Our vision is 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. ««



Statement of responsibility

The Fiordland Marine Guardians are proud to present, in compliance with section 20(1) of the Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) Marine Management Act 2005, the annual report for the Fiordland Marine Guardians for the year ended 30 June 2024.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Rebecca', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dr Rebecca McLeod
Chairperson
Fiordland Marine Guardians

Chairperson's report

Tēnā koutou katoa



At times, the Fiordland Marine Guardians (the Guardians) have had to make unpopular decisions to fulfil our responsibility of ensuring the values of the Fiordland Marine Area (FMA) are maintained for future generations. We've faced two such moments over the past year, providing advice to agencies that has resulted in substantial rule changes: Plan Change 5 to the Southland Regional Coastal Plan, which essentially puts a pause on vessel-based tourism growth; and advice that led to the launch of more conservative recreational fishing rules for the area. We do not provide such advice to central and local government lightly. Rather, we take seriously the responsibilities we have been tasked with by previous Guardians and those involved in establishing the original Fiordland Conservation Strategy.

The FMA is one of the few coastal areas in Aotearoa New Zealand that has an independent advisory board advocating for it. Individual Guardians are not appointed as representatives of any sectors or interest groups. Rather, the Guardians come together to form a holistic and future-focused view for the area, an approach warranted by the specialness and significance of Fiordland's marine environment.

The success of this model is contingent on the continued support and resourcing of the management agencies. Aware of the growing complexity of risks to the FMA and challenges with resourcing work in this vast and remote area, the Guardians are developing an overarching strategy for the FMA. This will signal to the agencies the priority work areas, set clear targets to measure progress against and clarify work that will require collaboration among agencies. We hope this fosters ongoing support for integrated management of the FMA.

Our current focus is on rebuilding fish stocks within the fiords and improving the monitoring of stock health and fishing pressure, so we can better manage the recreational fishing experience in future. We are also working hard to support the regional council, Environment Southland, in the review of the coastal plan, to ensure the values of the fiords are upheld in future and that the fiords are a safe and enjoyable place to explore for many years to come. Our third priority is marine biosecurity: ensuring measures are in place to prevent marine pest incursions in future, and to prevent any further spread of the invasive seaweed *Undaria pinnatifida* within the FMA.

Throughout the year, we engaged with the Milford Opportunities Project team as they tested ideas and developed their final proposal for transforming the 'Milford experience'. The project team relayed that they have found it helpful to understand the history of the Guardians, to recognise our priorities for the entire FMA, and to draw on our local knowledge.

I acknowledge my fellow Guardians for contributing their extensive local knowledge, experience, expertise and time to these processes. I also acknowledge the Guardians' Secretariat, Kate Brooking, and the many officials who work closely with us as representatives of their agencies. We continue to learn from and challenge each other, and we collectively carry

the legacy that was established back in the 1990s. In June, we farewelled Ministry for Primary Industries' Fisheries Compliance Officer, Stephen Logie. Stephen has been closely involved with the Guardians since our inception in the 1990s. He has always exemplified the values of the group and is an absolute wealth of knowledge. We wish him all the very best for his retirement.

I invite you to read more about our work and achievements over the past year in this report.

Ngā mihi nui



Dr Rebecca McLeod
Chairperson

Working together for the good of Fiordland

The Fiordland Marine Guardians (the Guardians) work closely with agencies with an interest in the Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) Marine Area (FMA) to enhance collaboration in the region and align focus and strategy. Representatives from these agencies attend our meetings to report on progress and engage on matters of concern.

Subcommittees made up of Guardians and representatives from our partner agencies focus specifically on biosecurity, monitoring, compliance, communication and engagement with users, and progress matters outside the Guardians' main meetings. We also have a working group to coordinate our involvement in the review of the Regional Coastal Plan for Southland.

The working relationship between the Guardians, Ministry for the Environment, Department of Conservation (DOC), Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) and Environment Southland is outlined in a protocol. The purpose of the protocol is to facilitate and promote cooperation between the Guardians and agencies to manage the FMA in an integrated way.

The Guardians acknowledge the relationship between Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, as tangata whenua, and Te Moana o Atawhenua. An expression of this special relationship is a requirement under section 15 of the Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) Marine Management Act 2005 that one member of the Guardians is nominated by Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu.

The Ministry for the Environment administers the Guardians and provides a budget to support our functions. Each of the other agencies contributes funding and resources to enable our vision to be realised.



Fiordland Marine Guardians/ Management Agency hui at Takutai o Te Titi Marae, Colac Bay.

The Fiordland Marine Guardians



Dr Rebecca McLeod (Chairperson)

Guardian since 2012

Rebecca has chaired the Guardians since 2015. She is a marine scientist at the University of Otago, specialising in southern marine ecosystems and carbon cycling, and has been involved with shaping Aotearoa New Zealand's Antarctic science programme. Rebecca was working on her PhD in Fiordland when the Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) Marine Management Act 2005 was established. Her research informed the Fiordland Marine Conservation Strategy, and she feels very honoured to be able to ensure the Guardians' vision for the area is realised. Rebecca is a keen diver and boatie and enjoys getting out on the water with her family.



Ali Ballantine

Guardian since 2018

Ali's passion for and interest in Fiordland began when she moved to the area in the early 1980s. During her tenure as Environment Southland Chairperson and Councillor, she advocated for the formation of the Guardians, and for the ongoing support and assistance the council provides for them. Under her watch as Chairperson, biosecurity threats in Fiordland were prioritised, which resulted in the initiation of the Fiordland Marine Pathways Plan. Ali has been involved in wilding conifer issues in Southland and nationally for over 20 years, chairing the Mid Dome Wilding Trees Charitable Trust since its formation in 2007.



Stewart Bull

Guardian since 1995

Stewart has extensive knowledge of the customary uses of Fiordland, particularly customary fishing. He is the former Chair of the Ōraka-Aparima Rūnaka and the former Ōraka-Aparima Rūnaka representative on the Board of Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu. Stewart is a Tāngata Tiaki, appointed by the Minister of Fisheries in recognition of his expertise in local customary fishing management and resource issues. He is the Ōraka-Aparima Rūnaka representative on the Customary Fisheries Advisory Group and the Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu representative to the Southland Conservation Board. Stewart has been a member of the Guardians of Fiordland since the group's inception and, in 2018, was awarded a Queen's Service Medal for his services to conservation and Māori.



John Cushen

Guardian since 2021

John has a passion for Fiordland and has worked there as a tourism business advisor, nature guide and boat skipper. He is involved in several community conservation projects, including the Rakiura/Stewart Island Community and Environment Trust, the Whakatipu Wildlife Trust and the Tucker Beach Wildlife Reserve group. When not working as a tourism advisor, John likes nothing better than being out on his launch, cruising and fishing in southern waters.



Mark Peychers

Guardian since 1995

Mark was a commercial fisher for almost 30 years, working throughout the Fiordland area. He is a shareholding director of the Fiordland Lobster Company. Mark has been a Guardian since the group began in 1995 and was involved in setting up Fiordland's first two marine reserves. Mark has built strong relationships with our partner agencies (Department of Conservation, Fisheries New Zealand and Environment Southland). He is actively involved with fisheries management in Fiordland and other parts of Aotearoa. Mark is also a trustee of the Southern Coastal Charitable Trust, which manages the coastal clean-ups of Fiordland and Rakiura/Stewart Island.



Gavin Tayles

Guardian since 2021

Gavin's heritage is in Southland, and he resides in rural Northern Southland. He has had a lifelong association with recreation in the Fiordland National Park and has been a recreational fisher and diver in the Fiordland Marine Area for more than 20 years. Gavin has a deep connection to the area and a strong desire to preserve it for future generations to enjoy. He works as a senior executive with FarmRight Limited and has extensive networks in the recreational fishing sector.



Peter Young

Guardian since 2018

Pete has worked on boats since he was 15 years old. He lives in Te Anau and works in the fiords as a commercial fisher and skipper for charter vessels. He is also a keen recreational fisher and hunter. For more than a decade, he crewed and subsequently skippered the Department of Conservation vessel *GV Southern Winds*, where he was involved in marine research and monitoring programmes conducted throughout the Fiordland Marine Area. Pete was an original 'Guardian of Fiordland', contributing to the development of the Fiordland Marine Conservation Strategy. In 2003, he was also one of the original instigators of the Fiordland Coastal Clean-up. Pete is a trustee of the Southern Coastal Charitable Trust, which manages regular coastal clean-ups of Fiordland and Rakiura/Stewart Island.



Dr Simon Childerhouse

Guardian since 2023

Simon is a marine scientist, specialising in marine mammals, with more than 25 years' experience undertaking applied science in and out of government. His experience includes working for Fisheries New Zealand, the Department of Conservation, the Australian Antarctic Division and independent research organisations. His work focuses on both conservation and sustainable use. He has a love of remote places, especially Fiordland, with experience in both Antarctica and the Aotearoa New Zealand subantarctic region. Simon is based in Nelson and works as a Principal Scientist at Blue Planet Marine.

Agency representatives

The Guardians acknowledge the dedication of our partner agencies to achieving our vision for the Fiordland Marine Area, particularly the efforts contributed by these representatives, who regularly attend our meetings.

Ali Meade	Biosecurity and Biodiversity Operations Manager <i>Environment Southland</i>
Andrea Faris	Marine Biosecurity and Dive Safety Officer <i>Environment Southland</i>
Ash Rabel	Team Leader Aquatic Ecosystems <i>Environment Southland</i>
Dean Lowry	Policy Planner <i>Environment Southland</i>
Kathryn McLachlan	Team Leader Marine <i>Environment Southland</i>
Lacey Bragg	Consents Manager <i>Environment Southland</i>
Lucy Hicks	General Manager Policy and Government Reform <i>Environment Southland</i>
Lyndon Cleaver	Maritime Manager / Regional Harbourmaster <i>Environment Southland</i>
Michael Sarfaiti	Consents Officer <i>Environment Southland</i>
Nick Perham	Partnerships Manager – Integrated Catchment Management <i>Environment Southland</i>
Paul Hulse	General Manager – Integrated Catchment Management <i>Environment Southland</i>
Ryan Hodgson	Senior Consents Officer <i>Environment Southland</i>
Zak Smith	Deputy Harbourmaster – Maritime Officer <i>Environment Southland</i>
Fiona Newlove	Manager, Mauri Moana – Marine Policy <i>Ministry for the Environment</i>
Kate Brooking	Fiordland Marine Guardians Secretariat <i>Ministry for the Environment</i>
Hannah Williams (outgoing)	Ranger Biodiversity – Marine <i>Department of Conservation</i>
John Lucas	Te Anau Operations Manager <i>Department of Conservation</i>
Millie Mannering (incoming)	Project Lead – Marine/Freshwater <i>Department of Conservation</i>
Richard Kinsey	Senior Ranger – Marine and Freshwater <i>Department of Conservation</i>

Graham Allen (outgoing)	Manager – Marine Pest Management – Aquatic <i>Biosecurity New Zealand, Ministry for Primary Industries</i>
Jen Geange	Senior Adviser – Pest Management – Aquatic <i>Biosecurity New Zealand, Ministry for Primary Industries</i>
Justyna Paplinska	Team Manager – Pest Management – Aquatic <i>Biosecurity New Zealand, Ministry for Primary Industries</i>
Mark Geytenbeek	Principal Advisor – Sector Support and Innovation <i>Fisheries New Zealand, Ministry for Primary Industries</i>
Robert Win (outgoing)	Senior Inshore Fisheries Analyst <i>Fisheries New Zealand, Ministry for Primary Industries</i>
Samuel Heenan	Fisheries Analyst <i>Fisheries New Zealand, Ministry for Primary Industries</i>
Greg Forbes	Senior Fisheries Officer <i>Ministry for Primary Industries</i>
Stephen Logie (outgoing)	District Team Leader – Southland <i>Ministry for Primary Industries</i>

Our year in review

July 2023

The then Minister for Oceans and Fisheries, Hon Rachel Brooking, accepted the Guardians' advice and announced new recreational fishing rules for the FMA. This is a real milestone in the Guardians' review of Fiordland's fisheries sustainability, which began in 2019.

August 2023

The Rock Southland Boat Show in Invercargill provided an excellent opportunity for the Guardians to speak with boaties about our work and to hear their experiences and concerns. A hot topic was MPI's public consultation on proposed further sustainability measures for the fisheries, and we took the opportunity to host two well-attended public meetings on the topic.

September 2023

The Guardians began a strategic review to enable prioritisation of work and better align the efforts of partner agencies. The strategy will focus on achieving the future vision that was set by the original group in the 1990s. The Guardians held a hui to give the Milford Opportunities Project team a comprehensive overview of the roles and responsibilities of Guardians, and of local and central government agencies in the FMA, as facilitated by various legislation, policies and plans.

October 2023

Environment Southland allocated \$500,000 through its annual plan process to fulfil its marine biosecurity function. This allocation will enable further *Undaria* biomass removal in Fiordland and additional marine pest surveillance throughout Murihiku/Southland. These funds come from Environment Southland's Marine Fee via a levy on cruise ship operators, which is part of the Deed of Agreement between the council and those operators.

November 2023

The Guardians were grateful to be able to hold our meeting at Takutai o Te Titī Marae, Colac Bay. Discussion focused on three main areas that will likely be identified as priorities in the Guardians' strategy: improving key fishery stocks, zero increase in invasive weeds and pests, and safe, accessible anchoring and mooring areas throughout Fiordland.

December 2023

The Guardians released two important publications: our *Annual Report 2022/23* and Issue 10 of our newsletter *Te Pānui Kaitiaki o Ata Whenua*. In these publications, we reported that the pressures on the FMA are changing and, in some cases, amplifying. Fiordland's marine environment is experiencing the effects of warming seas, and the Guardians remain focused on ensuring other human-driven pressures do not compromise this precious environment.

January 2024

Plan Change 5 to the Southland Regional Coastal Plan passed an important milestone; the appeals period through to the Environment Court closed, and no submissions were received. The plan change is intended to put a limit on the growth of vessel-based tourism in the FMA until the carrying capacity of the region can be determined. The plan change was initiated by Environment Southland, following concerns raised by the Guardians about unchecked growth and the effects of that on Fiordland's values.

February 2024

The Guardians continued discussions with Environment Southland about the inadequacies of the Bluff haul-out facility. The lack of containment of waste generated through hull maintenance poses biosecurity risks, because Bluff is the main port of entry to Fiordland. Options include upgrading the existing facilities or building a new facility at Bluff.

March 2024

The Guardians and DOC hosted the inaugural Fiordland Marine Research Symposium in Te Anau as part of Seaweeek. Researchers from throughout Aotearoa New Zealand presented their work to a large and engaged audience. The Guardians encourage research in the FMA that will help inform management of the area in the future.

April 2024

The new amateur fishing rules for Fiordland came into effect on 25 April. The Guardians extended their appreciation to everyone who participated in the process of reviewing the sustainability of the fisheries. We are optimistic we can turn around the decline in key stocks and return this precious resource to past levels.

May 2024

At the Biosecurity subcommittee meeting, the Guardians were updated on the new Fiordland Marine Biosecurity Strategy 2024–2034. The purpose of the strategy is to establish clear goals for the agencies, the Guardians and stakeholders, with the aim of reducing the risks of marine pests adversely affecting Fiordland's unique marine environment. The strategy continues the strong emphasis on managing marine pest 'pathways' risks to Fiordland, with the goal of preserving, protecting and managing Fiordland's marine environment and biological diversity.

June 2024

The Guardians signed off the final copy of the revamped user guide, *Fiordland by Sea*, (formerly known as *Beneath the Reflections*). The guide includes information on clean vessel pass requirements, fisheries rules and guidelines, Marine Protected Areas and other protected areas, pest-free island sanctuaries, and safety and local knowledge. We farewelled long-serving agency representative Stephen Logie at our June meeting.



Fiordland By Sea is a 'must-have' guide for boaties.

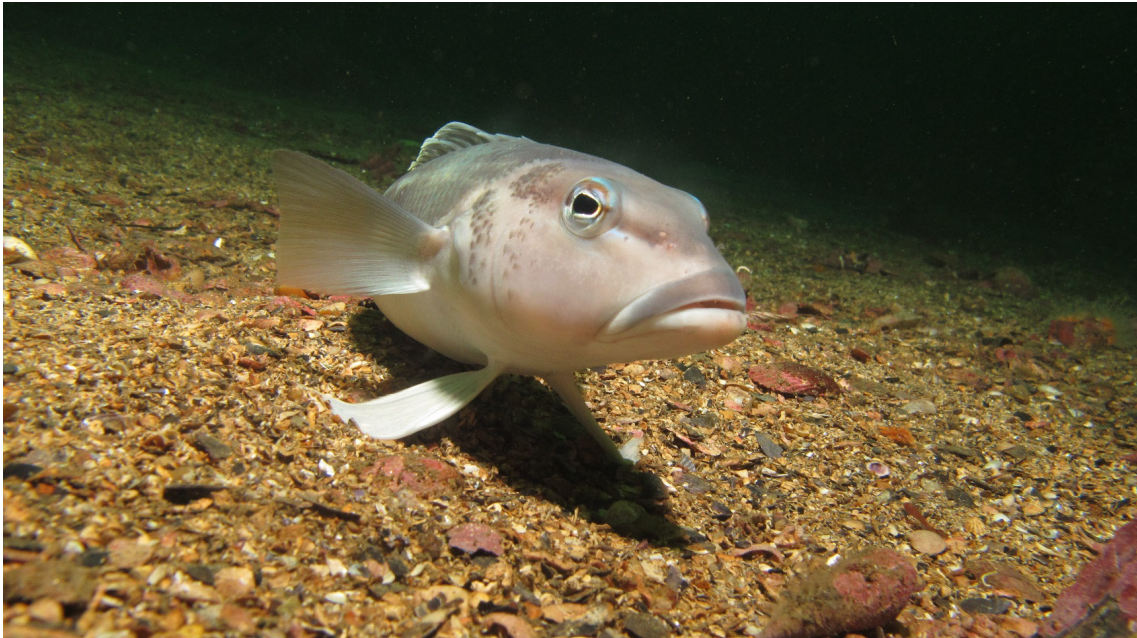
A vision for Fiordland's fisheries

The Guardians' vision guides our work across a wide range of issues, with fisheries management being one area that requires regular review and adaptation. To better understand the rationale behind recent fisheries rule changes, we explain the role of the Guardians as defined in the **Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) Marine Management Act 2005 (FMM Act)**.

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.

This is the vision that focused the Guardians of Fiordland in developing the Fiordland Marine Conservation Strategy, which was presented to the Minister of Fisheries and the Minister for the Environment in 2003. The strategy provided a framework for the future management of what was to officially become the FMA in 2005, with the passing of the FMM Act. In effect, this was a formal commitment from the Government to implement the strategy, and also an acknowledgment of the community's wealth of knowledge about the FMA. The Guardians were formally established in the FMM Act as a body to ensure local input into the management of the FMA.

The Guardians are committed to ensuring the intent of the FMM Act is upheld, along with the guiding principles upon which all decisions that relate to the FMA are founded.



This year, changes were made to Fiordland's amateur fisheries rules and regulations that affect all recreational fishers.

An important function of the Guardians, as outlined in section 13(1) of the FMM Act is “to advise and make recommendations to management agencies and Ministers who exercise functions under the enactments listed in Schedule 13 [including the Fisheries Act 1996], to achieve the purpose of this Act...”.

New recreational fishing rules

This year, changes were made to Fiordland’s amateur fisheries rules and regulations that affect all recreational fishers. These changes were made on the advice of the Guardians, with the intent to halt and hopefully reverse the decline of several fish stocks in the sheltered fiords. This advice was not given lightly, and we appreciate that the changes will affect people’s fishing experience in the near term. We hope that, by explaining the Guardians’ commitment to Fiordland’s future, fishers will develop an understanding of what we are trying to achieve.

Maintain or improve

The vision sets the target for Fiordland’s fisheries that they “...be *maintained or improved* for future generations to use and enjoy”.

The intention when the vision was set in the FMM Act was to ‘maintain’ the health of fisheries that were considered to be in good health, essentially, fisheries on the outer coast and the more remote and difficult-to-access fiords. The reference to ‘improving’ fisheries related specifically to fisheries that were not considered healthy at the time. This included species such as blue cod, kōura/rock lobster and hāpuku/groper that had suffered from localised depletion around the public access points of both Patea/Doubtful Sound and Piopiotahi/Milford Sound.

There were also concerns about stocks in Tamatea/Dusky Sound, where there was a burgeoning charter fishing industry. Before the FMM Act passed into legislation, charter fishing clients were able to accumulate large quantities of various species throughout their trip, and the cumulative effect of that fishing pressure had caused the decline of stocks of targeted species throughout that area.

It was hoped that key amateur fishing rules and regulations instated in 2005 (including the no daily accumulation rule and lower species limits), alongside the exclusion of commercial fishing from the internal waters, would be enough to improve these fisheries.

Increasing fishing pressure – the COVID-19 tipping point

Since 2005, fishing pressure has steadily increased throughout the FMA, driven by increasing affluence (people buying more capable trailer boats), demand from tourists (a growing charter boat sector) and an overarching desire from people to experience all that Fiordland has to offer. However, Fiordland experienced the most dramatic growth in visitors, somewhat counterintuitively, when Aotearoa New Zealand’s borders locked down during the COVID-19 pandemic. Fiordland, one of those ‘bucket list’ places for many Kiwis, experienced a sudden and dramatic increase in demand from domestic visitors.

This played out in several ways, with some people investing in larger trailer boats and exploring all corners of Fiordland and others opting for a trip of a lifetime aboard a charter vessel. Demand for charter vessels outstripped the supply, and demand for trips in the southern fiords caused many operators to move their vessels southwards. This migration of pressure to the south was caused also by flood damage to the Piopiotahi/Milford Sound access road reducing visitor activity in the northern fiords.

A third factor was at play too. A persistent La Niña weather pattern caused uncharacteristically stable and calm conditions in Fiordland, and consecutive marine heatwaves led to schooling of large game fish that further attracted fishers to the area. Unfortunately, Fiordland's fisheries were the collateral damage from this dramatic upsurge in recreational fishers.

Fiordland's fish stocks and their sudden decline over this unprecedented time have strongly emphasised that effective management must be informed by sound measurement. The fiords are a purely recreational fishery, yet recreational catch and effort are not measured. Without good visibility of the catch being taken, the Guardians were unable to effectively intervene in a timely manner to prevent the substantial decline in many stocks. We now find ourselves in the challenging position of needing not to maintain these fisheries but to improve them.

We want future generations to enjoy fishing in Fiordland

The vision for the Guardians identifies the beneficiaries of our work: the future generations, with the intent being for these generations to be able to use and enjoy the fisheries as we have. The Guardians are the first to acknowledge that the new rules are not perfect, but we remain hopeful they will have enough impact on fisheries' sustainability to rebuild stocks back to a state of abundance for future generations. We are advocating strongly for improved measuring and monitoring of stocks and fishing pressure, and we have committed to reviewing the settings in five years' time. If stocks rebuild, we will consider increases to the limits. If we all work together on this problem, current generations may well benefit, too.

The future health and longevity of the FMA is enshrined in law, which directs the requirements for its continual health and protection. The Guardians hope the community has respect for this special area and will join us in striving towards our restoration vision.

Fiordland Marine Research Symposium

Marine researchers from around the country travelled to Te Anau in March 2024 to take part in the inaugural Fiordland Marine Research Symposium. The event was held as part of Seaweeek and organised by the Guardians and DOC.

The Guardians have a long history of drawing on research to inform our advice on management measures. The symposium served multiple objectives: encouraging networking and collaboration among researchers; building awareness among researchers and end-users of research interests, needs and priorities; and informing everyone of the latest research findings.

The Guardians facilitate research by providing local knowledge to help with planning, offering letters of support for researchers applying for funding, identifying areas where increased knowledge could help to inform management and policy, and connecting researchers with each other and agency officials.

The symposium was well attended by the public, and videos of the presentations continue to be viewed online. Topics covered included:

- 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-19 travel restrictions
- how measuring underwater noise is providing insight into the natural world and human activities.



A great turnout for the inaugural Fiordland Marine Research Symposium, Te Anau.

Looking ahead – the next 12 months

The issues and activities we are involved in continue to become more complex, and the workload for the Guardians and our partner agencies has increased significantly. We risk losing focus on critical activities. To manage this risk, we have embarked on a review of our strategic focus to ensure the delivery of our vision. Our priority work areas for the year ahead are outlined below.

Begin to rebuild key fish stocks by:

- requesting that MPI Fisheries Compliance puts additional resources into ensuring the fishing community understands and complies with the new amateur fisheries rules
- reviewing proposed further sustainability measures, including boat limits and gear restrictions
- advocating for new methods to be developed to monitor key stocks in a more cost-effective and non-destructive manner
- promoting catch and effort reporting for recreational fishers with the Mainland Catch app, and advocating for charter vessel catch and effort reporting to be transformed into an electronic system.



Priority work areas: begin to rebuild key fish stocks; prevent new incursions of marine invasive species; ensure safe, equitable access to moorings and anchorages; engaging the community in our mahi.

Prevent new incursions of marine invasive species by:

- promoting integrated management among the agencies through the Guardians' Biosecurity subcommittee
- helping Environment Southland in its review of the Fiordland Regional Marine Pathway Plan
- encouraging partner agencies to continue regular monitoring of the FMA for marine pests and compliance with relevant rules by vessel operators
- supporting the development and implementation of national marine biosecurity initiatives
- advocating for improved vessel-cleaning facilities in the port of Bluff.

Ensure safe, equitable access to moorings and anchorages by:

- providing local knowledge, experience and practical solutions to the Environment Southland planning team as they review the Southland Regional Coastal Plan
- continuing to hold the line on consents for moorings until the revised Southland Regional Coastal Plan is operational
- ensuring the Coastal Plan review will adequately manage the effects of current and future consenting activities.

Engaging the community by:

- rolling out printed copies of the new guidebook *Fiordland by Sea*
- developing educational material targeted at younger generations
- building the network of marine researchers in Fiordland and encouraging research that can inform management.

Resource consents

The Guardians considered and responded to several resource consent applications to Environment Southland during the year.

These fell into three categories:

1. non-notified – where we were identified as an affected party
2. notified – where we felt that the conditions in current legislation (such as the Regional Coastal Plan for Southland) sufficiently addressed any concerns
3. notified – where we provided a submission with recommendations for conditions that should be included in any consent granted, or we provided a submission in opposition.

These applications are listed in the [Environment Southland](#) report below.



Blanket Bay, Patea/Doubtful Sound.

Guardians' advocacy results in new improved mooring design for FMA

The Guardians consistently advocate for safe and accessible mooring and anchoring facilities throughout Fiordland. We want to make sure all vessels in the area can seek shelter during a storm, both now and in the future, when we expect more visiting vessels of increasingly larger size. Sheltered embayments are at a premium, particularly in the northern fiords. Even rarer are 'all-weather' anchorages, which provide shelter from storms coming from any direction. Ideally, some of the space in these all-weather anchorages should be reserved for anchoring, to reduce the risk of anchoring gear getting tangled with mooring gear, or vessels colliding when in position.

The Southland Regional Coastal Plan is under review and is currently rather permissive with respect to moorings. The plan does not provide direction about the kinds of mooring designs that are appropriate for Fiordland's environment.

The Guardians have prompted discussion with RealNZ about its multi-arm screw anchor (MASA) mooring design. The MASA design includes a mooring buoy connecting to a central point, then spanning out via midwater cables to several anchors that are screwed into the sea floor. The span of the screw anchors varies between sites, but results in a seafloor footprint of up to 280 x 195 metres (more than 5 hectares).

In 2021, RealNZ installed MASA moorings in Piopiotahi/Milford Sound, Patea/Doubtful Sound (First Arm) and Tamatea/Dusky Sound (Cascade Cove). The Guardians quickly started to field concerns from operators about the size of the seafloor footprint of the MASA moorings and the unseen snag hazard they pose to vessels deploying anchors. The Guardians and other parties raised these concerns with RealNZ and the regional council. We regarded this mooring design to be an inefficient way to use the limited seafloor space in Fiordland.

The Guardians acknowledge RealNZ for taking our feedback into consideration, and we are pleased they have worked with a mooring engineer to produce a new design for use in Fiordland. The new design, 'Te Umu Karoro', uses a single anchor point to secure the vessel. Compared with the original MASA moorings, this is a far more efficient use of seafloor space. And compared with classic block-and-chain moorings, it causes far less benthic disturbance, because there is no chain dragging around the anchor. RealNZ is to replace the two MASA moorings in Harrison Cove, Piopiotahi/Milford Sound with the new Te Umu Karoro design, and we hope that, in time, the company will do the same in First Arm and Cascade Cove.

Meetings

Fiordland Marine Guardians general meetings

Four meetings involving Fiordland Marine Guardians and management agencies were held during the year.

Date	Meeting location
14 August 2023	Invercargill
14 November 2023	Colac Bay
6 March 2024	Te Anau
17 June 2024	Invercargill

Subcommittee meetings

We operate four subcommittees that include representatives from the Guardians and management agencies. Each subcommittee works to a plan, which is typically reviewed every four to five years.

The subcommittees align with the requirements of the FMM Act, to develop plans and disseminate information on:

Convenor	Committee
Richard Kinsey, Department of Conservation	Monitoring
Jen Geange, Biosecurity New Zealand	Biosecurity
Gavin Tayles, Fiordland Marine Guardians	Communications and Engagement
John Cushen, Fiordland Marine Guardians	Compliance

A working group also progresses work relating to Environment Southland's consultation on the Regional Coastal Plan for Southland (Convenor: Ali Ballantine, Fiordland Marine Guardians).

The Guardians' subcommittee and working group members are as follows.

Member	Subcommittee
Dr Rebecca McLeod	Chair, with oversight of all subcommittees
Gavin Tayles	Biosecurity, Communications and Engagement
Mark Peychers	Monitoring, Resource Consents, Review of Regional Coastal Plan for Southland
Stewart Bull	Biosecurity, Compliance
John Cushen	Biosecurity, Compliance
Peter Young	Monitoring, Compliance
Ali Ballantine	Biosecurity, Resource Consents, Review of Regional Coastal Plan for Southland
Dr Simon Childerhouse	Communications and Engagement, Monitoring

The following subcommittee meetings were held during the past year.

Subcommittee	Date	Meeting location
Biosecurity subcommittee	24 May 2024	Video conference
Communications and Engagement subcommittee	18 July 2023	Video conference
	24 October 2023	Video conference
	12 February 2024	Video conference
	12 April 2024	Video conference
Compliance subcommittee	18 June 2024	Invercargill and video conference
Monitoring subcommittee	21 May 2024	Video conference



Agency Reports

Role

The Ministry for the Environment | Manatū mō te Taiao administers the Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) Marine Management Act 2005 (FMM Act). In this capacity, we provide secretariat support to the Fiordland Marine Guardians (the Guardians) and support the Minister for the Environment in fulfilling their obligations under the FMM Act.

Achievements

***Fiordland by Sea* guide**

This year, we supported the Guardians in a significant update of their popular guidebook for users of the Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) Marine Area (FMA). Formerly called *Beneath the Reflections*, the updated guidebook is now called *Fiordland by Sea*. It includes comprehensive information and rules relating to marine biosecurity, fishing, Marine Protected Areas and protected species. The book includes 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 Guardians' website.

Fiordland Marine Research Symposium

In March 2024, the Guardians and the Department of Conservation held the Fiordland Marine Research Symposium in Te Anau. This well-attended public event was part of Seaweeek. Marine researchers from around the country shared their latest research on the FMA. The 13 presentations covered a range of marine wildlife and marine environment topics. You can view [the research](#) on the Guardians' website.

Looking ahead

Fiordland Marine Guardians appointments

The terms of five Guardians are due to end in June 2025. In the coming year, we will be focused on supporting the Minister for the Environment to appoint Guardians.

Role

The Department of Conservation | Te Papa Atawhai (DOC) has been working with the Fiordland Marine Guardians (the Guardians) since before the implementation of the Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) Marine Management Act 2005 (FMM Act).

DOC is involved in all of the Guardians' meetings and subcommittees, but its main responsibility from the FMM Act and subsequent protocol is to lead the biological monitoring plan for the Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) Marine Area (FMA). This plan covers how we will monitor the state of the marine environment and its biological diversity. The plan also includes social monitoring to canvass what stakeholders think of the FMA.

In addition to the role DOC plays with the Guardians, it is responsible for managing its statutory responsibilities within the FMA, most importantly, the:

- [Marine Reserves Act 1971](#) (Fiordland has 10 marine reserves)
- [Marine Mammals Protection Act 1978](#) and [Marine Mammals Protection Regulations 1992](#)
- [Wildlife Act 1953](#)
- [National Parks Act 1980](#) (for the Fiordland National Park).



DOC's main responsibility is to lead the biological monitoring plan for the Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) Marine Area.

Achievements

DOC carried out several notable projects during 2023/24 that will help inform the management of the FMA in the future.

Although DOC is working in a financially constrained environment, it remains committed to the Guardians and its associated responsibilities. As always, it is a pleasure to work with the Guardians and wider agency group to help realise the goals of the FMM Act.

As part of its work, DOC facilitates the efforts of talented, dedicated researchers and institutions, which are providing both DOC and the Guardians with a wealth of knowledge that will help them understand the marine environment. Highlights from 2023/24 are outlined below.

Fiordland Marine Research Symposium for Seaweed

This year, DOC and the Guardians had an opportunity to hold a public symposium, bringing together most of the main marine researchers working in Fiordland. On 5 March 2024, as part of Seaweed, 14 researchers gave presentations to members of the public in Te Anau on topics ranging from Fiordland crested penguins (tawaki) to marine heatwaves.

The event was well supported, both by the researchers and public attendees, and we extend our thanks to all who contributed to its success.

We recorded the presentations, for those who are interested but were unable to attend the symposium. These [research presentation recordings](#) are available on the Guardians' website.

Baited remote underwater video

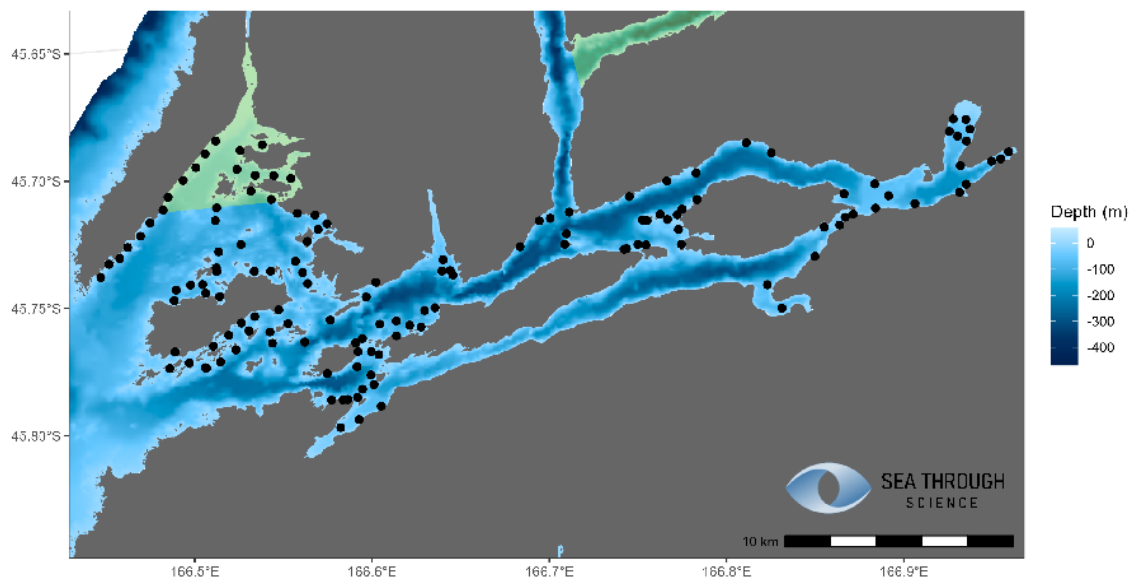
An ongoing high priority for DOC and the Guardians is the ability to better understand the impact of fishing on the marine environment of the fiords and how marine reserves help to protect that. DOC currently monitors fish via diver transects, but this approach has limitations for a wider, broad-scale understanding of fish assemblages and abundance.

In February 2024, DOC contracted Dr Adam Smith to run a baited underwater fish survey for Tamatea/Dusky Sound. Baited remote underwater video (BRUV) is a non-lethal, remote way of counting fish in situ, and could prove to be useful for understanding stocks of recreational fish such as blue cod.

In February, 135 BRUV drops were carried out throughout Tamatea/Dusky Sound in depths ranging from 15 metres to 86 metres. Several species were encountered on the videos, which were collated with the help of funding from Fisheries New Zealand.

Over the next year, we hope to analyse the numbers and create a better understanding of fish abundance and distribution in Tamatea/Dusky Sound and how the Taumoana (Five Fingers Peninsula) Marine Reserve is functioning.

Figure 1: Baited remote underwater video deployments within Tamatea/Dusky Sound in February 2024



Kōura/rock lobster monitoring – Te Awaatu Channel (The Gut) Marine Reserve

The Te Awaatu Channel (The Gut) Marine Reserve is one of Fiordland’s original marine reserves, first gazetted over 30 years ago in 1993. In 1999, as part of a monitoring programme to look at changes to the reserve over time, a kōura/rock lobster monitoring survey was initiated.

The monitoring programme is still running, 25 years later, and this year DOC re-surveyed the three sites inside the reserve and three control sites around the reserve. The data are yet to be analysed, so we cannot compare current lobster numbers to previous years. However, continuing to collect a long-term dataset is important for understanding how the reserve functions over time.

Undaria pinnatifida

DOC continued working with Environment Southland and Biosecurity New Zealand on the *Undaria* incursion in Te Puaitaha/Breaksea Sound and Tamatea/Dusky Sound. In 2023/24, we completed nine trips and managed to contain the current infestations, preventing them from spreading any further. Plenty of hard work is still needed to keep *Undaria* in check, but we remain committed to the programme (for more information, please see the [Environment Southland report](#), p 35).

The most encouraging news on the *Undaria* front this year was the conclusion of the Taiari/Chalky Inlet incursion response. After five years of finding no *Undaria*, the Northport area can once again be declared free of *Undaria*. This is a positive result for the agencies and proof it is possible to remove *Undaria* from natural substrate if it is detected early enough.

Fiordland marine mammal programme

Bottlenose dolphins

In 2023/24, DOC, the University of Otago and New Zealand Whale and Dolphin Trust carried out three monitoring trips into Patea/Doubtful Sound and three trips into Tamatea/Dusky Sound to check on bottlenose dolphin populations.

Currently, the population estimate for Patea/Doubtful Sound is around 64 individuals. This number has been relatively stable in recent times after a drop in the mid-2000s. The past two summers had a low number of calves born, with only one confirmed for the 2023/24 summer season and only two for the previous year (both of which may have died, because they have not been sighted again).

In Tamatea/Dusky Sound, 109 individuals were photographed between the winters of 2023 and 2024. As with the Patea/Doubtful Sound population, only one calf was confirmed to have been born in the 2023/24 summer period and two in the previous year (one of which is still alive).

It appears that some of the Tamatea/Dusky Sound dolphins have had interactions with sharks over the past year, with one individual being photographed with large wounds. The team are working on confirming the cause, but it appears to be a great white shark bite, a demonstration of how the role of the dolphin can alternate between predator and prey.

Humpback whales

In November 2023, DOC and the University of Auckland carried out the final survey of an initial five-year study on the humpback whales that migrate past the FMA. Using skin biopsy samples and photo ID of tail flukes, we know most of the whales that use the FMA are from the Eastern Australia population rather than the Pacific. For more information, please watch the research presentations of [Emma Carroll](#) and [Chloe Corne](#) from the Fiordland Marine Research Symposium.

In addition to the work DOC has been doing in the FMA this year, we continue to help researchers from multiple institutions in their work on other projects in the area. Synopses of the major projects are provided below.

Victoria University of Wellington (James Bell and Alice Rogers)

James Bell has been working with DOC since he was contracted to carry out deep reef monitoring in 2017. James, his colleague Alice Rogers and their postgraduate students are working on the following research streams.

- Temporal variation in subtidal and mesophotic (deep/low light) communities – the team has been sampling three sites in Patea/Doubtful Sound since 2018.
- Understanding marine heatwave impacts on Fiordland sponges. Since the major heatwave in 2022/23, when an estimated 30 million sponges were bleached, James has been experimenting to understand the susceptibility of sponges to heat stress in the fiords.
- Detritus production by Fiordland sponges, to look at how sponges recycle phytoplankton and bacteria to the sea floor.

- Development of a habitat-mapping programme in Fiordland.
- Population connectivity, demographics, and fisheries impacts on black coral. James is aiming to sequence a whole genome of black coral and to understand how corals are related.
- Climate change impacts on black corals, to understand how black coral will respond to future marine heatwaves in the FMA.
- How climate change will affect broadnose sevengill sharks in Fiordland. Alice has tagged several sharks within Te Puaitaha/Breaksea Sound and will use acoustic recorders to track them over time. Anyone who catches a tagged shark in the fiords should advise Alice (either by emailing alice.rogers@vuw.ac.nz or passing on a message via VHF to the *MV Pembroke*).

University of Waikato (Jenni Stanley)

Jenni has a series of acoustic arrays in Tamatea/Dusky Sound that record the underwater soundscape. Her project has been under way for a few years and is providing a lot of information about both biological and anthropogenic inputs into the marine environment.

Future research directions could involve surveying other parts of the FMA to see how they compare to Tamatea/Dusky Sound.

The relationship between DOC and these researchers is invaluable for generating more research in the fiords and fostering a greater understanding of important species. DOC would like to pass on its thanks to everyone it works with in the FMA.

Looking ahead

In 2024/25, DOC aims to carry out the following activities.

- Finalise a clear plan and strategy for future monitoring of the FMA that will help to guide our priorities.
- Continue to work with the Guardians, Environment Southland and iwi on the Southland Coastal Plan Review.
- Analyse the data collected from the Te Awaatu Channel (The Gut) Marine Reserve.
- Re-survey the long-term kōura/rock lobster sites in the Piopiotahi/Milford Sound Marine Reserve.
- Continue monitoring marine mammals in Fiordland, working with the University of Otago and local operators. This will include bottlenose dolphins and humpback whales.
- Analyse the data from the BRUV trip in February 2024 in Tamatea/Dusky Sound.
- Continue to work with James Bell from Victoria University of Wellington on black coral, sponges and climate change.
- Continue to work with Jenni Stanley from the University of Waikato on understanding the soundscape of the fiords.
- Continue working to control *Undaria* within the fiords.
- Install new kiosks in Deepwater Basin, Piopiotahi/Milford Sound, Deep Cove and Patea/Doubtful Sound with updated signage.

It is an ongoing privilege to work with the Guardians and management agencies in Fiordland on realising the vision for the FMA and helping to protect such an extraordinary part of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Role

As a regional council, Environment Southland | Te Taiao Tonga is responsible for the sustainable management of Southland's natural resources (land, water, air and coast), in partnership with iwi and the community. Environment Southland plays an important role in managing Southland's coastal marine area, including in marine biosecurity, navigational safety and consents (and their compliance) within the Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) Marine Area (FMA). We are most successful in this role when we work in collaboration with other relevant agencies and organisations.

Achievements

Marine biosecurity

Environment Southland, the Department of Conservation (DOC) and Biosecurity New Zealand have continued to collaborate on marine biosecurity in Fiordland, with the priority remaining on controlling and preventing the spread of *Undaria* within the FMA.

***Undaria* progressive containment programme – Te Puaithaha/Breaksea Sound and Tamatea/Dusky Sound**

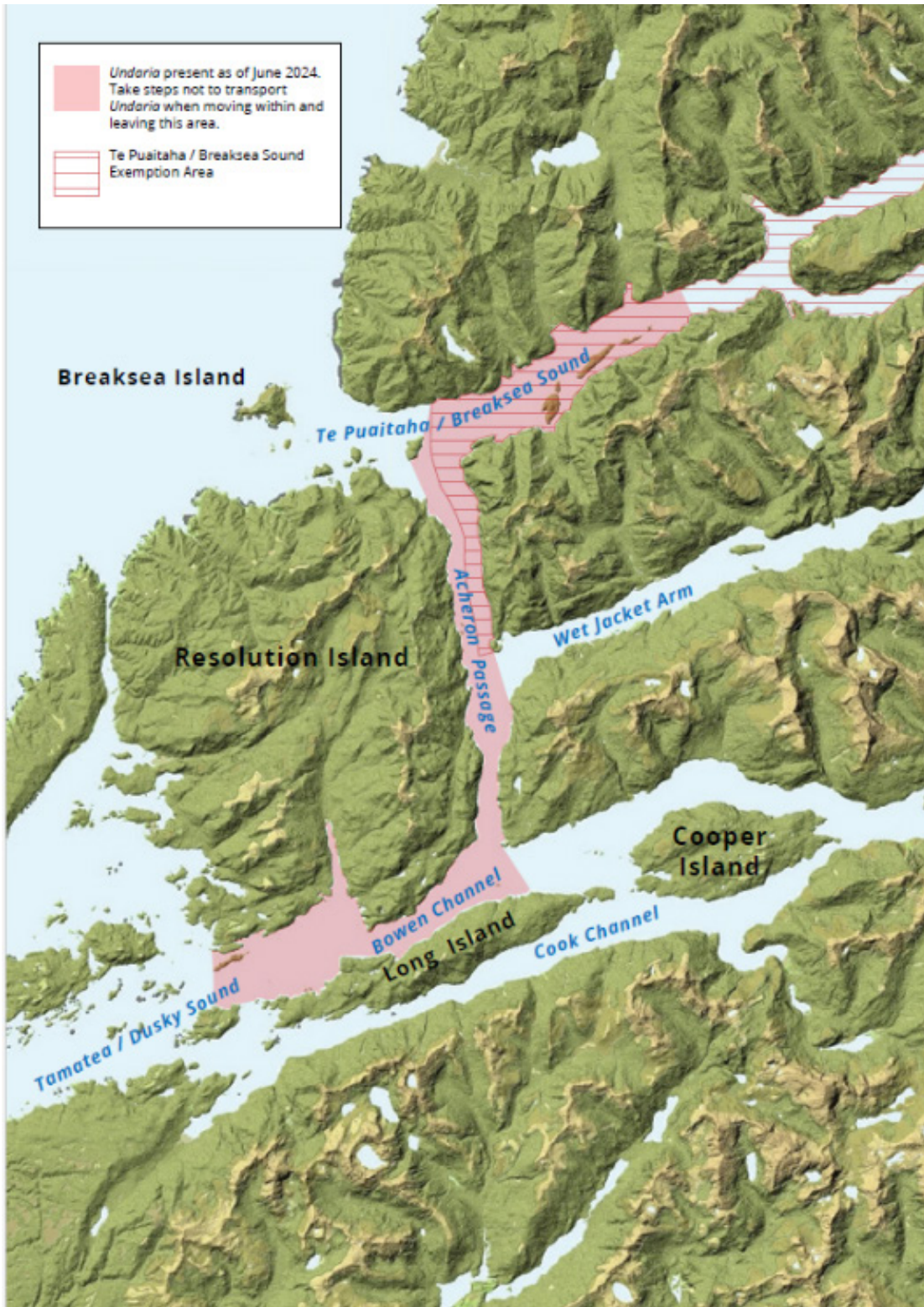
In the past year, nine containment trips were undertaken in the Te Puaithaha/Breaksea Sound and Tamatea/Dusky Sound complex. Several *Undaria* specimens were found and controlled throughout the year at known sites, with particular focus on the most recent Duck Cove incursion site. Although *Undaria* is now present across a larger area, progressive containment to the known locations is still the goal.

Figure 2 shows the wider management area in the Te Puaithaha/Breaksea Sound and Tamatea/Dusky Sound complex. Although *Undaria* is present in isolated patches here, much of this area and wider Fiordland remain free of *Undaria*. Vessels must take steps not to transport *Undaria* when moving within and leaving this area.

***Undaria* elimination programme – Taiari/Chalky Inlet**

Inspections in Taiari/Chalky Inlet continued this year and, after five years of no *Undaria* finds, we are pleased to declare the area is free from *Undaria* again. This is an important success story, which shows that elimination is an achievable goal, if *Undaria* incursions are detected and managed early. Details on the incursion history are provided in the [Biosecurity New Zealand summary](#) (p 42).

Figure 2: *Undaria pinnatifida* management area in Fiordland



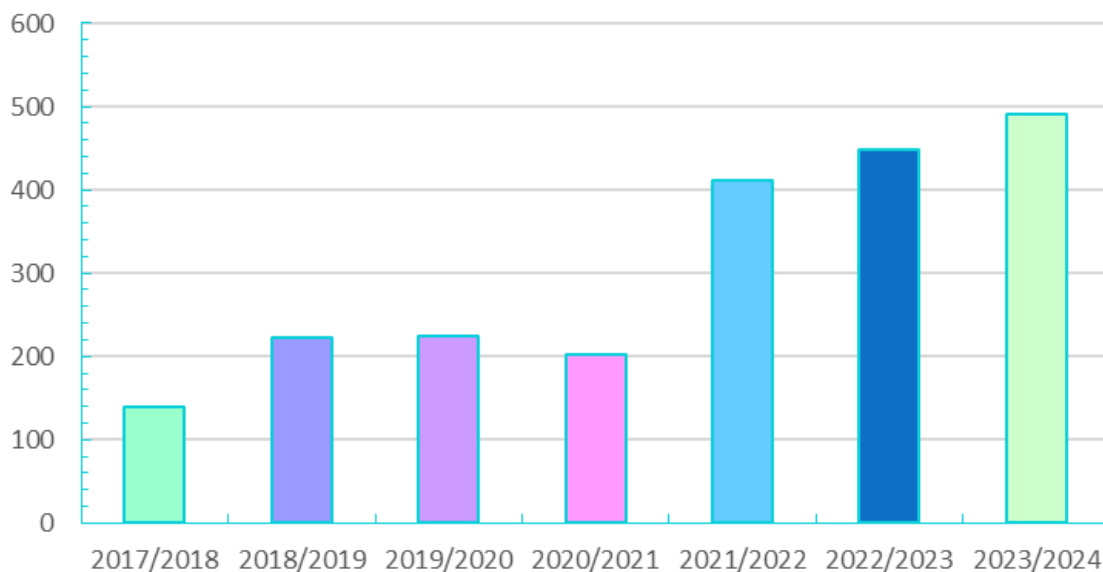


Environment Southland plays an important role in managing Southland’s coastal marine area, including in marine biosecurity, navigational safety and consents (and their compliance) within the Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) Marine Area.

Clean vessel passes

Clean vessel pass (CVP) applications continue to increase, with 491 applications this year, compared with 449 the previous year (figure 3). Our aim was to improve CVP outreach, with communications ranging from print and digital media, to radio advertisements and face-to-face. A feature story was run in the *Envirosouth* magazine, and staff attended the Southland Boat Show. Greater focus was given to social media and digital ads on websites like Stuff.co.nz and Google.

Figure 3: Annual clean vessel pass applications



Marine biosecurity compliance and surveillance

Four Fiordland compliance trips were completed this year: three joint-agency trips on the *GV Southern Winds* in the northern and southern fiords, and an additional trip to Piopiotahi/Milford Sound. No marine pests were found on any vessels, structures or natural substrate during these inspections.

In Fiordland, the team interacted with 127 vessels, and 99 hull inspections were completed. CVP compliance remains an issue, with 23 vessels not having current CVPs at the time of inspection. Environment Southland also took over the Fiordland-bound vessel inspections in Bluff Harbour and Rakiura/Stewart Island this year, which were previously completed by Biosecurity New Zealand. Overall, 480 vessel inspections were completed this season, and this continues to be a successful way to identify and treat vessels infected with *Undaria* before they head into the FMA.

Harbourmaster

Cruise ship numbers remain lower than before the COVID-19 pandemic but are slowly increasing. Many vessels are being decommissioned and new ships are being introduced. During the 2023/24 season, 117 cruise ships visited Fiordland out of the scheduled 130. Cancellations were for various reasons, with fewer being related to vessel biofouling, which was a primary concern last season.

The maritime team have continued to build oil spill response capability, with new staff completing their senior responder training this year. Maritime New Zealand has also increased the oil spill equipment for the Fiordland/Milford Sound areas, and necessary equipment is being stored in Te Anau.

Resource consents

Under the Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) Marine Management Act 2005, the Fiordland Marine Guardians (the Guardians) provide advice on resource consents to Environment Southland, which we then consider during the decision-making process. The Guardians may also make submissions on notified applications or attend pre-hearing meetings and hearings for which they have provided submissions.

For the year 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024, Environment Southland received and processed the following eight applications in the FMA.

* = not yet decided

- **Fiordland Charters Limited (APP-20242146) ***

To occupy the coastal marine area with a mooring (retrospective) and the preferential occupation of that mooring – Broughton Arm, Te Puitaha/Breaksea Sound – and the preferential occupation of three existing moorings in Beach Harbour, Te Puitaha/Breaksea Sound; Outer Luncheon Cove, Tamatea/Dusky Sound; and Supper Cove, Tamatea/Dusky Sound.

- **Real Journeys Limited (APP-20242047)**
MP145698 – to remove one 10-tonne concrete block and two chains, and to install and maintain a new fore and aft mooring, and for exclusive use of the mooring.
- **Real Journeys Limited (APP-20242044)**
MP145687 – to install, maintain and exclusively occupy part of the coastal marine area with a swing mooring (one single anchor leg mooring system (SALM)) for the purposes of mooring vessels of up to 40 metres in overall length in Deepwater Basin, Piopiotahi/Milford Sound.
- **Real Journeys Limited (APP-20233625) ***
To carry out commercial surface-water activities, namely to operate guided kayaking trips in Patea/Doubtful Sound, Piopiotahi/Milford Sound and the southern fiords.
- **Southern Discoveries Ltd (APP-20233593) ***
To occupy the coastal marine area with a mooring and stern line at Harrison Cove, Piopiotahi/Milford Sound.
- **Real Journeys Limited (APP-20233404)**
To retrospectively authorise the removal of two block-and-chain swing moorings; to install and maintain two new SALM systems (known as mooring number one and mooring number two); to occupy the coastal marine area with the two new SALM moorings; to retrospectively authorise the installation of two multi-anchor leg mooring (MALM) systems and their continuing use until 12 May 2024; to remove the two MALM systems after 12 May 2024, before the installation of the two SALM moorings, except that the two MALM systems' screw anchors/piles will remain in place; and to occupy the coastal marine area with the two MALM systems' screw anchors/piles.
- **Fiordland Cruises Limited (Duplicate) (APP-20233288) ***
To replace and exclusively occupy an existing wharf and pontoon gangway, and to extend the concrete wharf with an additional pontoon wharf in Deep Cove, Fiordland.
- **Fiordland Cruises Limited (Duplicate) (APP-20233276) ***
To carry out commercial surface-water activity in the waters adjacent to Patea/Doubtful Sound, Fiordland.

Consent compliance

Environment Southland undertakes desktop assessments of reports required by resource consents, site inspections and audits of consented and permitted activities in the Fiordland region, and responds to complaints from the public.

The Resource Management team joined the multi-agency compliance trip to Fiordland in October 2023. During this trip, 33 moorings required follow up; the most common issues were that moorings were not identified with the owner and tonnage ratings.

In October 2023, Environment Southland accepted a diversion to RealNZ for the installation of two moorings in Piopiotahi/Milford Sound without the required consents. As part of the

diversion, RealNZ paid \$100,000 towards environmental projects in the Fiordland area and made formal apologies. Following the diversion, charges filed in the courts were dismissed. RealNZ has since received consents for the removal of the unconsented moorings and the installation of moorings with an alternative design.

Looking ahead

Marine biosecurity

In the coming year, Environment Southland's focus will be on increasing compliance and improving its communication and education about CVPs. The review of the Fiordland Marine Regional Pathway Management Plan is under way, and we aim to engage with FMA users about their values and views on future management options.

Staff will be rolling out a new spatial management tool for surveillance and inspections, and managing *Undaria* will remain a priority in the Te Puitaha/Breaksea Sound and Tamatea/Dusky Sound complex. Fiordland-bound vessel inspections will continue in Bluff Harbour and at Rakiura/Stewart Island, to ensure vessels are free from marine pests before entering the FMA.

Harbourmaster

We recognise the need for our team to have a greater presence in Fiordland, and we have applied to Maritime New Zealand for funding to support more on-water compliance. Priority areas will include Piopiotahi/Milford Sound, the Fiordland coastline and Rakiura/Stewart Island. The maritime team will continue to support other Environment Southland teams, such as biosecurity and compliance, with their Fiordland workstreams.

Southland Regional Coastal Plan review

Plan Change 5 to the Southland Regional Coastal Plan has progressed. This was a change to the Regional Coastal Plan for Southland, addressing commercial surface-water activities on the internal waters of Fiordland from Yates Point to Puysegur Point. The hearing panel recommendations were notified and no appeals were lodged. Environment Southland accepted the recommendations, and the redrafted provisions now sit with the Minister of Conservation for final approval.

In the meantime, the review of the wider Regional Coastal Plan for Southland continues. Preliminary drafting is being carried out, along with further detailed work on: biodiversity and ecosystems, Bluff Harbour Zone, Fiordland, aquaculture, and natural hazards. A revised regional coastal plan is due to be publicly notified by the end of April 2025, preceded by pre-notification conversations.

The Guardians will continue to engage with the coastal plan review process leading up to and after the public notification date (when submissions will be possible). Of particular interest is the Fiordland workstream, for which a working group is being established with key external stakeholders to test and receive feedback on management options within Fiordland, including carrying capacity. The Guardians have kindly provided suggestions for participation, and this work is due to start shortly.



The Ministry for Primary Industries | Manatū Ahu Matua (MPI) and its five branded business units – Biosecurity New Zealand, Fisheries New Zealand, Food Safety New Zealand, Agriculture and Investment Services, and Forestry New Zealand – help to grow and protect Aotearoa New Zealand’s primary industries. Our role is to maximise export opportunities and improve sector productivity, increase sustainable resource use, and protect Aotearoa New Zealand from biological risk.

For the Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) Marine Area (FMA), we:

- provide policy advice and programmes that support the sustainable development of Aotearoa New Zealand’s primary industries, including in fisheries and aquaculture management
- provide whole-of-system leadership of Aotearoa New Zealand’s biosecurity system
- purchase science services to maintain the effective management of Aotearoa New Zealand’s fisheries.

We work to ensure fisheries and other resources are managed sustainably, using a ‘voluntary, assisted, directed, enforced’ approach to compliance. Providing education and information to the public and stakeholders is essential to ensuring effective voluntary compliance.



Biosecurity New Zealand plays a critical role in preventing harmful organisms crossing Aotearoa New Zealand’s borders.

Role

Biosecurity New Zealand plays a critical role in preventing harmful organisms from crossing Aotearoa New Zealand's borders. It manages border and compliance activities, as well as preparing for, and responding to, any biosecurity incursions that may occur. The branch also manages MPI's centralised intelligence, planning and coordination group, which was established to manage food, biosecurity and animal welfare responses consistently and effectively. The Recovery and Pest Management Directorate leads the work related to the FMA.

Achievements

Biosecurity New Zealand has once again enjoyed working with the Fiordland Marine Guardians (the Guardians) and partner agencies on marine biosecurity issues relating to the FMA. This year mainly involved working collaboratively to contain the Asian kelp *Undaria pinnatifida* to Te Puaitaha/Breaksea Sound and Tamatea/Dusky Sound, and participating in joint-agency compliance trips.

***Undaria* in Te Puaitaha/Breaksea Sound and Tamatea/Dusky Sound**

Since 2010, Biosecurity New Zealand has been working with partner agencies Environment Southland and the Department of Conservation (DOC) on the management of *Undaria* in Te Puaitaha/Breaksea Sound. This focus area expanded in November 2022, when *Undaria* was devastatingly found in Tamatea/Dusky Sound. We remain committed to progressively containing *Undaria* in Te Puaitaha/Breaksea Sound and Tamatea/Dusky Sound. When required, we also seek advice from the *Undaria* Technical Advisory Group (TAG), established in 2021, on the most realistic *Undaria* management option for these affected areas in the future. For maps and more information on the management of *Undaria* in the FMA, see the [Environment Southland report](#) (p 35).

***Undaria* in Taiari/Chalky Inlet**

Undaria was first discovered in Taiari/Chalky Inlet in April 2019. Biosecurity New Zealand, DOC and Environment Southland joined forces, working with guidance from the *Undaria* TAG, to locally eliminate *Undaria* from Taiari/Chalky Inlet. When *Undaria* was discovered, the *Undaria* TAG recommended that five years of no sightings would be needed since the last mature specimen was found before the site could be declared free of *Undaria*. Gratifyingly, we can say the last time we saw *Undaria* there was 2019 so, as of April 2024, we can declare Taiari/Chalky Inlet *Undaria*-free. This is the first area of Fiordland to be declared *Undaria*-free.

Review of the Fiordland Marine Biosecurity Plan

Biosecurity New Zealand has continued to lead the implementation of the Fiordland Marine Biosecurity Plan 2015/16–2020/21, together with partner agencies and the Guardians. In 2024, further updates were made to the draft plan to include the management of *Undaria* in Tamatea/Dusky Sound after its discovery in late 2022.

The plan is now known as the Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) Marine Biosecurity Strategy 2024. The strategy sets out nine goals for the next ten years to guide the actions of the Guardians, partner agencies and stakeholders, to reduce the risk of marine pests adversely affecting Fiordland's special marine environment. A two-year operational plan, which sits alongside the strategy, outlines and prioritises the main operational activities to help deliver the goals of the strategy. The strategy is currently being signed off by all the management agencies and the Guardians.

Vessel hull inspections in the FMA

Biosecurity inspections of hulls continue to be an effective way to help prevent future marine pests from becoming established in the FMA. We participated in the October 2023, February and April 2024 joint-agency compliance and marine surveillance patrol, by providing support for in-water inspections of vessel hulls, high-risk anchorages and structures. Our staff also helped communicate marine biosecurity messaging and implement the Fiordland Marine Regional Pathway Management Plan.

Fiordland messaging on MetService

Fiordland clean hull messaging was advertised on the MetService website's marine pages and the MetService app from November 2023 to June 2024.

Targeted marine pest surveillance

As part of the National Marine High-risk Site Surveillance programme, MPI undertakes biannual surveys (winter and summer) in 12 locations around Aotearoa New Zealand (including the South Island ports of Bluff, Dunedin, Lyttelton, Waikawa/Picton and Nelson). This programme aims to achieve early detection of new unwanted marine pests in some of Aotearoa New Zealand's busiest (and therefore highest-risk) locations, namely, ports and marinas of first arrival for international vessels.

Undertaking surveillance in the port of Bluff has benefits for the FMA, such as the early detection of new and emerging marine pests that may pose a threat to the region.

Over the past year, one new-to-New Zealand and seven non-indigenous species range extensions were detected by this programme.*

New-to-New Zealand species comprise:

- Lyttelton
 - bryozoan *Alcyonidium verrilli*.

Range extensions comprise:

- Ōpua
 - bryozoan *Celleporaria nodulosa* and gastropod *Thecacera pennigera*
- Whangārei
 - ascidian *Symplegma rubra* and shrimp *Oratosquilla oratoria*
- Tauranga
 - fish *Parablennius tasmanianus* and gastropod *Thecacera pennigera*
- Napier
 - ascidian *Lissoclinum perforatum*.

Other significant marine pest species, such as the Mediterranean fanworm *Sabella spallanzanii*, Asian kelp *Undaria* and clubbed tunicate *Styela clava*, continue to be detected at South Island ports. Vessels arriving to Fiordland from such ports, including those in the North Island, are at risk of transporting these and other marine pests to the FMA.

To map the current nationwide distribution of any marine species mentioned, see the [Marine Biosecurity website](#).

*One sample is pending identification.

Revised Craft Risk Management Standard for Vessels

The revised Craft Risk Management Standard for Vessels (CRMS-Vessels) was published in October 2023. MPI has continued to ensure the requirements and how to comply are clear to stakeholders and internal parties within MPI. One of the main changes in the CRMS-Vessels is the addition of new information requirements (Schedule 2 and Schedule 3). Evidence of hull biofouling has been one of the main issues, because MPI receives reports with a broad variation in quality. Creating a standard for reporting is likely to reduce these issues, resulting in a lower marine biosecurity risk. The minimum evidence requirements for vessel biofouling inspection have been released – with an 18-month lead-in period for service providers and industry to get used to the new requirements – and will come into effect around April 2025.

This means that, while the rest of the CRMS-Vessels was enforced at the time of issue, the minimum evidence set of requirements were not, to allow time for the shipping industry to ensure it can work to reach compliance.

Enforcement of the Craft Risk Management Standard on international arrivals

In the 2023 calendar year, most vessels (95.2 per cent) were compliant with the requirements under the CRMS-Vessels. Biosecurity New Zealand issued 118 Notices of Directions (NODs) for non-compliant vessels, which make up 4.8 per cent of the vessels arriving. Most of the non-compliance (59 NODs) was due to a combination of insufficient documents and biofouling over the allowable thresholds.

The 2023/24 summer cruise season finished in April 2024. This season, Biosecurity New Zealand introduced changes to the management of cruise vessels, for which the revised CRMS-Vessels includes a specific section. Cruise vessels now have the option

to operate under an MPI-approved system, which replaces but functions similarly to the Craft Risk Management Plan that was in place last season. The new system also includes measures for managing topside risk. Along with the new standard, Biosecurity New Zealand has also introduced new legislation that requires commercial craft (carrying 20 or more passengers, excluding crew) to actively present audio or audiovisual biosecurity information to their passengers during port disembarkation while in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Most (49 of 54) cruise vessels that have arrived in Aotearoa New Zealand this season entered compliant with the CRMS-Vessels requirements, with only five facing issues with biofouling non-compliance. Aotearoa New Zealand has seen a 25 per cent increase in vessels arriving this season, compared with last season, but biofouling-related non-compliance has decreased (comparing the 5 non-compliant vessels in the 2023/24 cruise season with 11 for the 2022/23 season).

Biofouling in the International Maritime Organization

In February 2024, the Aotearoa New Zealand team, led by MPI, participated in discussions on developing in-water cleaning guidance at the 11th meeting of the International Maritime Organization's Sub-Committee on Pollution Prevention and Response.

During the meeting, a drafting group was established to develop the draft terms of reference for the correspondence group. The main topics for the correspondence group to address are:

- planning, conducting and reporting on in-water cleaning operations
- verification and testing of in-water cleaning systems
- conducting pre-cleaning and post-cleaning inspections.

The correspondence group was established with the target completion timeframe of early 2025.

Fisheries management



Fisheries New Zealand

Tini a Tangaroa

Role

Fisheries New Zealand works to ensure that fisheries resources are managed to provide the greatest overall benefit to New Zealanders. Our focus is the sustainability of Aotearoa New Zealand's wild fish stocks, aquaculture and the wider aquatic environment, now and for future generations. In line with this goal, the Guardians are charged with providing advice and recommendations to Ministers and management agencies for the FMA.

Achievements

Large-scale changes to the recreational fishing rules for the FMA proposed by the Guardians were implemented in April 2024. Fisheries New Zealand has worked with the Guardians and their respective iwi representatives to develop and implement these changes through well-supported consultation over 2022 and 2023. The aims of the changes were to shift increasing recreational fishing pressure to the more productive outer coast of Fiordland, and ensure the ongoing sustainability of key fish species within the less productive, more accessible fiords.

The combined finfish daily limit and individual daily limits were reduced for many species within the fiords (up to the headlands), to rebuild these at-risk fish stocks while still allowing a sustainable level of use within the fiords during poor weather. Smaller reductions to daily and combined species limits were implemented for the rest of the FMA, to address any corresponding shift in fishing effort to the outer coast. Due to sustainability concerns, recreational fishing for scallops and oysters was banned within the FMA. Additionally, recreational fishing for groper (Hāpuku)/Bass was closed within the Internal Waters of Fiordland.

Additional consultation was carried out in 2023 on proposals raised during public feedback on the recreational rule changes, including recreational vessel limits and bulk harvesting fishing methodology restrictions for both commercial and recreational fishing.

Baseline monitoring has also been carried out in Tamatea/Dusky Sound this year, with baited underwater video surveys conducted in February 2024 in conjunction with surveys of DOC marine reserves.

MPI Fisheries compliance

Ministry for Primary Industries
Manatū Ahu Matua



Role

The MPI Fisheries Compliance Directorate is responsible for delivering compliance inspection services and investigations across all three fisheries sectors – commercial, recreational and customary – to support the sustainable management of Aotearoa New Zealand’s wild fish stocks, aquaculture, and marine systems.

A team of seven fishery officers and a district manager enforce the [Fisheries Act 1996](#) and various fisheries regulations. The team conducts routine surveillance and inspections, as well as undertaking investigations and intelligence analysis across the fishing sectors.

A representative from the team regularly attends scheduled Guardian and partner agency meetings, providing updates on all relevant fisheries compliance matters including detected non-compliance and any emerging risks.

Achievements

Multi-agency patrolling

Over 2023/24, three multi-day, multi-agency patrols were supported by fishery officers, covering most of the fiords and outer coast in the FMA. During the patrol, inspections were completed of recreational, customary and commercial fishers, to check compliance with the various fishing regulations. Through inspections of more than 300 people, fishery officers detected a range of offences.

Offences in the recreational space included:

- unmeasurable blue cod
- undersize kōura/rock lobster

- kōura/rock lobster carrying external eggs
- possessing kōura/rock lobster in excess of the daily limit without meeting the defence provisions ('bagging and tagging')
- unmeasurable pāua
- possessing underwater breathing apparatus and pāua.

Offences detected in the commercial space included:

- permit holders failing to operate geospatial position reporting (GPR) devices correctly
- incorrect reporting of effort data
- late reporting
- possessing unreported catch.

Recreational inspections

Sea and land patrolling resulted in inspections conducted in Fiordland, or of fishers returning from Fiordland. Inspections detected a range of offences around the possession of kōura/rock lobster in excess of the daily limit without meeting the defence provisions for the FMA. Several undersize kōura/rock lobster and finfish were also detected. In addition, one rock lobster pot was seized from the Hawea (Clio Rocks) Marine Reserve, and the investigation was handed to DOC to follow up.

Commercial inspections

Inspections of both commercial fishing vessels and licensed fish receivers who have taken or received fish from Fiordland were also carried out through greater Southland. These routine inspections provide a deterrent to offending by commercial entities. The inspections also provide an opportunity to check that all commercial fish coming out of the FMA are being accounted for within the Quota Management System.

OP TOROA II

Fishery officers conducted OP TOROA II, using an RNZAF NH90 helicopter and crew from Number 3 Squadron, RNZAF, to conduct aerial fisheries surveillance patrolling. This included patrolling of virtually all of the Internal Waters of Fiordland and nine of the ten Fiordland Marine Reserves.

As well as monitoring commercial CRA8 vessels in Fiordland, other commercial fishing vessels located included pāua/kina divers and blue cod potters.

The aerial surveillance flights provide ground truthing of vessel fishing activity across the commercial fishing sectors, to detect and deter illegal fishing practices. Several offences were detected relating to late reports, failing to report, incorrectly completing reports and failing to operate GPR devices.

Looking ahead

***Undaria* in Fiordland**

Over the coming year, Biosecurity New Zealand will continue working with Environment Southland and DOC on the progressive containment of *Undaria* in Te Puaitaha/Breaksea Sound and Tamatea/Dusky Sound with a particular focus on managing human-mediated spread. The *Undaria* TAG will be used when needed. We will also continue to work with all Fiordland partner agencies to implement the Fiordland Marine Biosecurity Strategy 2024-2034 and its associated operational plan.

Monitoring effectiveness of new fishing rules

Monitoring work is being established based on available data, to assess the effectiveness of the recent recreational fishing rule changes, and to inform potential reviews of management measures in the future.

The Guardians and Fisheries New Zealand are undertaking analysis of available data and feedback received during consultation in 2023 on potential method restrictions and vessel limits. Further discussions are under way with commercial operators and amateur charter vessel operators affected by these proposals, to determine the best approach. Measures, such as the vessel limit, also need further assessment, so they can be implemented in a way that is practical, fair and enforceable. Advice on these proposals will then be provided to the Minister for Oceans and Fisheries.