

Aquaculture Update

Issue 2 – January 2006

Invited Private Plan Change

– how areas will be zoned for marine farms

You may remember that after extensive public consultation, the Northland Regional Council had planned to set up 18 specific Aquaculture Management Areas (AMAs) around Northland.

This was intended to ensure the Council complied with new Government laws - introduced last year - that ban development of new marine farms unless they are in areas formally designated as AMAs.

However, after listening to public concerns, the Council and other concerned agencies managed to convince the Government to allow it to adopt a new option for identifying AMAs – the “Invited Private Plan Change”.

This system - adopted last year - offers benefits including:

- Considerable cost savings to ratepayers
- Ensuring the Council’s role in aquaculture remains regulatory rather than appearing to promote an aquaculture industry perspective
- Ensuring Northland’s AMAs are located in the most suitable places
- Increased certainty about the processes marine farmers will face

Under the Invited Private Plan Change system those wanting to develop marine farms – and not ratepayers - will have to pay the considerable costs of having areas zoned as an AMA.

Applications may cost tens of thousands of dollars each, as the process will involve several stages over a number of months, beginning with the Council inviting applications for Plan change requests. The Council will then consider each request and decide whether to accept or reject it. Those accepted will then be subject to a Ministry of Fisheries administered process called the “undue adverse effects test”.

This is designed to assess whether the proposed area – and type of marine farming – will unduly adversely affect commercial, recreational or cultural fishing.

Those okayed by the Ministry of Fisheries will then be publicly notified by the Regional Council, with a call for public submissions, hearings and a right of appeal to the Environment Court.

Only after an AMA has been established, does the person who requested the AMA have the right to apply for resource consent to develop a marine farm within it. However, there is still no guarantee that application will be successful.

Evaluation Criteria

– your input is needed

The Regional Council has consulted widely on AMAs since 2002 with a number of sources including iwi, resident and ratepayer groups, environmental groups, other local authorities, Central Government agencies, the Department of Conservation and the aquaculture industry.

Information we have already collected from all these sources will be invaluable.

However, we are now seeking more public input – this time on proposed evaluation criteria for whether the Council should accept or reject Plan change requests.

While applications to establish an AMA can now be made anywhere in Northland’s coastal marine area, each will be considered against a number of categories for which criteria are currently being developed.

These categories include whether an application:

- Is frivolous or vexatious
- Meets sound resource management practice
- Meets other legal standards

Policy and Regulation

- in all AMAs

We also want to hear your thoughts on the policies and rules that should govern marine farming in AMAs.

For example, how should applications for resource consents to establish marine farms within AMAs be treated? Options range from the more restrictive (should applications be the subject of a formal public hearing?) to the permissive (simply be allowed as of right?)

The Council is currently preparing to alter its Regional Coastal Plan to provide for the policies and rules that will govern aquaculture and other activities within all AMAs. Meetings will be held in Whangarei, Paparua, Kaitia and Kerikeri in February to explain the Invited Private Plan Change and get your feedback on the proposed evaluation criteria and future AMA rules and policies.

We urge you to attend one or more of these meetings, all of which will start at **6.00pm**.

Meetings will be held at:

- **Whangarei** - Wednesday 15 February
Northland Regional Council, 36 Water St.
- **Paparua** - Thursday, 16 February
War Memorial Hall, State Highway 12.
- **Kaitia** - Tuesday 21 February
REAP Centre, Puckey Ave.
- **Kerikeri** - Wednesday 22 February
St John Ambulance Hall, Kerikeri Rd.

After these meetings, there will be a month for people to send in their written comments. This information and other public feedback gathered during the public consultation will then be distilled into a report to the Council's Planning and Policy Committee meeting in April.

 To find out more about this project, visit the Northland Regional Council website: www.nrc.govt.nz

Further Information

Further information on AMAs will be available soon on the Council's website www.nrc.govt.nz.



If you wish to discuss anything raised in this newsletter, please contact:

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