



# Media Release

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Pan-fried New Zealand orange roughy with citrus cauliflower salad

## **NEW ZEALAND ORANGE ROUGHY GETS TOP INTERNATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY TICK**

New Zealand's three largest orange roughy fisheries have been certified as meeting the international gold standard for sustainable fishing by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) ([MSC release](#)).

This achievement further demonstrates New Zealand's commitment to

sustainable fisheries management, Deepwater Group Chief Executive, George Clement says.

“This milestone achievement validates the seafood industry’s ongoing investment into sound, scientifically grounded fisheries management and our desire to have our main fisheries recognised as meeting the world’s most rigorous sustainability standards,” he says.

George Clement says, that in partnership with the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI), quota owners have invested heavily over the past 20 years to rebuild the orange roughy fisheries after they had declined in the 1980s and 1990s. This investment has included the development of new scientific techniques to measure and assess stock sizes to ensure that these fisheries can be managed sustainably. Catch reductions and very conservative harvest levels have resulted in substantial stock size rebuilds.

These new approaches include working with Australia’s Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIRO) since 1998 to develop a [world-leading multi-frequency Acoustic Optical System](#) (AOS) used to assess the stock sizes in each of New Zealand’s main orange roughy fisheries.

“Not only can we now accurately assess the numbers of orange roughy, we can also see video in real time of what’s going on 1,000 metres below the surface. This enables scientists to estimate the stock sizes of orange roughy with much greater certainty.”

“We now know a lot more about these valuable fish than we did 30 years ago. The science and management is far more advanced – what we are doing is world-leading.”

In the 1980s, management of these fisheries was based on the assumption that orange roughy are fast growing and relatively productive. Since then, they have proven to be slow growing and to have low productivity so these early approaches didn’t work – resulting in catch limits being set too high and their stocks declining in size.

Since 2000, there has been a complete change in the way we scientifically assess and manage these fisheries. Today, underwater cameras and acoustics are used to accurately assess the population sizes. Along with improved stock assessments, these results are used to inform the setting of conservative and sustainable catch limits. Management now ensures plenty of orange roughy are left untouched to continue to reproduce and sustain healthy populations. For every 100 adult orange roughy we count, we now harvest less than 5 each year, leaving at least 95 to continue to breed and to sustain the population. In the early years, we were taking up to 20 out of every 100 orange roughy – too many to be sustainable.

These new management responses have proven to be very successful, with the stock sizes continuing to increase in size and the fisheries in good health. Achievement of MSC certification is independent confirmation of these successes.

“The benefits of improved science, which has provided more conservative fisheries management, are demonstrated in that our three largest orange roughy fisheries have achieved the gold standard for sustainable management, from MSC, the globally recognised world authority on sustainable fishing.

“Having this level of assurance that these valuable fisheries are being sustainably managed is good for the environment, good for consumers and good for New Zealand’s economy. Orange roughy now produce some \$60 million of New Zealand’s \$1.8 billion annual earnings from seafood exports,” George Clement says.

Over 70 per cent of New Zealand’s deep water catch is now certified as sustainable by the MSC, including the fisheries for hake, hoki, ling and southern blue whiting. Quota owners [aim to have all the main deep water fisheries performing at, or above, a level that meets the MSC](#) standard.

“The MSC endorsement gives all New Zealanders, as well as our customers around the world, assurance that our seafood is sustainably harvested. It gives

consumers an environmental assurance when shopping or dining out,” George Clement says.

#### **Q&A:**

##### **Are the MSC certified orange roughy stocks healthy?**

Yes. Peer-reviewed scientific stock assessments show that these three stocks (or populations) are within or above sustainable levels with a high level of certainty. Stock assessments in 2014, estimated two of the three stocks to be within their management target range (i.e. 30% to 50% of the unfished stock size) and the third stock to be around 30%. All three stocks are increasing in size under the current catch limits and the fisheries are supported by healthy productive populations. Regular biomass surveys and stock assessments are being undertaken to ensure orange roughy numbers are maintained at healthy levels. Natural fluctuations in the population sizes will occur and catch reductions will continue to be used when necessary to keep stocks within the optimum size range.

##### **But doesn't one of the fisheries have a condition because of its stock status?**

One fishery, East and South Chatham Rise, has received a condition which requires it to show that the stock is at or fluctuating around its target range before the end of the five-year certification period. This is because the stock size was estimated to be just below the lower bound of the management target range in 2014, whereas the other two fisheries have been within the range for some time. Under the current catch limit this stock is projected to continue to increase in size and to be within the target range by 2016.

##### **Aren't orange roughy fisheries unsustainable? What has changed to now make them sustainable?**

New Zealand orange roughy catches progressively increased during the 1980s as new fishing grounds were discovered, peaking in 1989 when 54,000 tonnes were caught. By the early 1990s it became clear that orange roughy were much less productive than first thought and the stock size estimates were

recalculated – downwards!

In response, the commercial catch limits (Total Allowable Commercial Catches, TACCs) were heavily reduced. By the the mid 1990s the TACCs had been reduced from a high of 65,000 tonnes to 25,000 tonnes. Catch limits for several of the fisheries were reduced to very low levels and for some the fisheries were closed to optimise rebuilding times. By 2000 the TACCs had been reduced to 17,000 tonnes.

Today, the industry accepts that we had to 'learn by doing'. This is a story of two halves. Up to 2000 we used all the tools from the Northern Hemisphere. We used their stock assessments, we used their trawl survey methods, and we used their productivity assumptions. But, we have since learned that these don't work for orange roughy. Because orange roughy are long lived and of very low productivity we needed to find a fresh approach.

Industry, government and scientists have developed more accurate methods to count, assess and manage orange roughy populations. Large amounts of time and money have been invested to bring this about. In addition to the \$100 million that government has levied industry to date for research on orange roughy, quota owners have spent a further \$35 million developing sophisticated acoustic methods and stock assessment models to more robustly measure stock sizes.

Since 2000 the stock sizes have increased to sustainable levels and catches from the fisheries have been set at much more conservative levels than in earlier years. Today, these three fisheries are producing about 6,000 to 7,000 tonnes a year. Fishers now realise the high value that can be obtained from this fishery if managed sustainably - take less but earn more is a win-win for everyone.

**Objectors claim trawling occurs on seamounts that are populated by highly vulnerable corals. Is this the case?**

No seamounts (i.e. underwater mountains over 1,000 m in elevation) are fished within these three certified fisheries. There is only very limited overlap between corals and orange roughy fishing. This means that it is very unlikely to create unacceptable impacts to coral species. All black corals, gorgonian corals, stony corals and hydrocorals are protected by law in New Zealand.

The New Zealand government also closely monitors when and where trawling occurs and assesses the fishing grounds each year. This enables managers to assess the location and the spatial extent of the trawling grounds. Less than 0.03% of New Zealand's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) is trawled for orange roughy each year. The areas that are fished are very localised and fishers return to the same fishing grounds and tow lines each year.

Thirty one percent of New Zealand's EEZ is closed by law to trawling to protect at least 10% of each of the different marine habitat types found within New Zealand waters. These marine protected areas protect:

- 28% of Underwater Topographic Features (i.e. hills, knolls and seamounts)
- 52% of true seamounts (i.e. underwater features that rise more than 1,000 m above the seafloor)
- 88% of active hydrothermal vents.

There is some overlap between orange roughy fisheries and corals. The MSC assessors have looked at the scientific information closely and are satisfied that the impacts these fisheries have on cold water corals, which are widespread within and beyond New Zealand waters, are too small to be causing serious or irreversible harm to these coral populations overall. However, assessors do require the collection of further information to monitor and assess any impacts these fisheries might have with corals to demonstrate these impacts are not adverse to these populations.

### **What impacts do orange roughy fisheries have on other marine species?**

With the exception of one fur seal capture in 1993, there are no interactions with marine mammals (i.e. dolphins, fur seals and sea lions). There are infrequent interactions with seabirds and these are assessed to not have any

adverse effects on these seabird populations (i.e. the numbers of captures are so low they do not impact on the sustainability of the seabird populations).

All of New Zealand's seabirds, marine mammals and several shark species are protected by law. It is an offence to harass, hunt or kill any of these species without lawful authority. Management measures are in place to minimise incidental interactions with these animals including training crews on the risks and how to avoid these. Captures are assessed by government each year to identify whether further management measures might be required.

### **How is MSC credible and why should I rely on this label over other 'ecolabels'?**

The [MSC Fisheries Certification Requirements](#) are widely recognised as the world's most credible and robust standards for sustainable fishing. They reflect world's best practice in fisheries science and management. The MSC requirements are [founded on three principles](#) underpinned by science: a healthy fish stock; protection of the marine ecosystem; and effective fishery management.

The MSC is also the only certification and ecolabelling programme for wild-capture fisheries that meets best practice requirements set by both the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation and ISEAL, the global membership association for sustainability standards. Assessments against the MSC requirements are conducted by accredited, third-party certification bodies, in a robust, scientific, and transparent process. MSC certification, which is provided for a five-year period, requires annual audits by an independent certifier to ensure that each fishery maintains its performance within MSC's requirements and monitors implementation of any required improvements.

### **But, what about the objections to these fisheries being certified? Are these valid?**

Deepwater Group took advice from WWF-US to engage MRAG-Americas to assess these fisheries against MSC's sustainability standards. The MSC process requires these assessments to be in full consultation with all

stakeholders, the findings to be peer-reviewed and to be open to objections. MRAG-America's independent and expert assessment is that these three fisheries meet MSC's criteria for being certified as sustainable. Objections to these findings were received from several stakeholders and MRAG considered these, and subsequently made changes to their findings where they accepted the objections to be valid.

Should the concerns of objectors remain after this step, they may request a review of MRAG's findings by an Independent Adjudicator, an experienced and independent lawyer. More than three dozen grounds for objection were subsequently filed by WWF and the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition group. The Independent Adjudicator convened a meeting of all parties to consider these objections and the responses to these by MRAG and Deepwater Group. He found none of the objections had merit under the MSC objections procedure. In the Independent Adjudicator's expert view, MRAG had properly followed due process and he determined that their assessments are valid.

## **Links**

[Marine Stewardship Council New Zealand orange roughy certification page](#)

[Deepwater Group New Zealand orange roughy certification page](#)

[Marine Stewardship Council certification explained](#)

## **Resources**

You can download the following resources for your own purposes but please acknowledge any credits.

[Videos](#)

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