



Date: 17 August 2018

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Dear Robin

**APPLICATION FROM TE TAHUNA O AOTEA MARINE FARM LTD FOR
RESOURCE CONSENT TO COLLECT/FARM MUSSEL SPAT IN AOTEA
HARBOUR**

Waikato Regional Council has requested Te Tahuna O Aotea Moana Marine Farm Ltd seek the views of the Department of Conservation on its application to harvest mussel spat from Aotea Harbour. The following comments, compiled from several reviewers, constitutes the Departments considerations of the documents provided to it by Te Tahuna O Aotea Moana Marine Farm Ltd.

Assessment approach

The review of actual or potential impacts of the proposed activity, as presented in the ecological report, did not reference any information about the existing spat farm in Aotea Harbour (as the landscape report does), nor about past surveys done within the harbour (e.g. Hillock & Rohan 2011). A lot of knowledge about potential impacts (or absence of impacts) of this application could no doubt be gained by investigating the effects of that existing farm. This information is not held by the Department but may be available from Waikato Regional Council.

Biosecurity

The AEE notes that all equipment will be new, and the vessel will “initially” be the one that services the existing farm. Asian date mussel is already present in the harbour (and the nearby Kawhia Harbour). Transfer of marine farming equipment and vessels from other locations to Aotea Harbour could increase the risk of other biosecurity incursions. Conditions should require new equipment (as stated in the application) and any new vessel used for the farm should come with an acceptable biosecurity plan to minimise or avoid the introduction and spread of marine pests. Conditions should also be applied to any consent to ensure that spat transfers do not unduly increase the risk of transferring marine pests (such as Asian date mussels) from Aotea Harbour to other uninfected localities.

Mussel genetics

The ecological report notes (on p3 with no reference to back-up the statement) that genetic mixing of mussel populations is a beneficial thing, whereas the opposite could be true (i.e. the natural separation of distinct genetic stocks may be a better way to maintain diversity and overall health of the species). Nevertheless, this matter is made

less relevant by the fact that genetic material movements already occur via spat transfers associated with the existing spat farm.

Landscape & natural character impacts

The harbour is reported to be an ONC (area of outstanding natural character), but the AEE states that “the [5ha] scale of the proposed farm is minimal compared to the overall natural character assessment made for the harbour.” I note that the landscape & natural character assessment for this proposal has been done by a qualified landscape architect and concludes that the effects of the farm would be minor. The adjoining spat farm and the developed landscape in the southern harbour area no doubt contributes to this conclusion. The recommendations of the landscape report should be included as conditions to any consent issued.

Site impacts – physical, biological, wildlife

The assessment regarding low ecological impact of spat catching (at site and more broadly) is likely to be correct, especially in a high current location like this. Little “waste” (e.g. shell and biodeposits) would be expected compared to a mussel production farm.

Waste disposal

Waste disposal is addressed in the AEE and provided it is managed well it should not be an issue.

Anchors, decommissioning

The nature of the anchors is not stated in the AEE (although the ecological report notes the use of screw anchors). There may be potential for block anchors (if used) to act as settlement surfaces for marine pests, or navigation hazards at low tide (depending on their position, depth and size). In any case, conditions should be applied to ensure the removal of all structures (including lines & anchors) should the farm be disestablished.

Wildlife entanglement

Provided good farm management practices are adopted (e.g. maintain tight lines with no loose/floating ropes that could form loops that might entangle animals, then entanglement of wildlife such as shags and Maui dolphins is not expected to be an issue. Conditions should be applied to require that (a) the farm is managed in accordance with industry standards, including maintaining all ropes and lines to minimise the risk of wildlife entanglement; (b) all fatal, injury or entanglement interactions with wildlife relating to the farm and operation, along with all Maui dolphin sightings in the vicinity, must be reported to WRC and DOC. The Ecological report notes that there are no records of Maui dolphin in Aotea Harbour, but given the critically endangered status of this subspecies and its known occurrence in this region, a precautionary approach should be taken.

Treaty obligations

The AEE notes that Ngati Te Wehi is the principal iwi within Aotea Harbour, and that the applicant is closely associated to that iwi. It’s also notable that the harbour is a taiapure. It is primarily the role of the consent authority (regional council) to ensure treaty obligations are met.

Public access, occupation & social impacts

Public access is partly addressed by the approval from the harbourmaster regarding navigation. The Department agrees that the impacts of the farm on access will be minor, as the area will still be navigable by vessels. Occupation of space in the coastal marine area is a related issue that should be recognised and provided for in accordance with the NZCPS. As members of the public will still be able to access the proposal site and move through it (while slightly impeded), the proposal is not one of exclusive occupation.

Monitoring

The AEE states that monitoring of the proposed farm/s is not warranted, and so does not state any monitoring that should be done. The Department considers permit conditions should provide for some level of monitoring and reporting, and provision should be made for further monitoring and reporting to be undertaken if issues are identified. This survey may be a baseline (pre-farm) benthic survey (based on assessments that have already been done) followed by repeat surveys perhaps every five or ten years.

Mitigation measures

The mitigation section is small, based on a conclusion that the level of effects will be relatively low. The proposed mitigation does not bind the applicant to any real mitigation. Ideally the applicant will have outstanding concerns and information needs addressed in specific conditions of consent.

Summary

Overall, the reports supporting this proposal give a reasonable assessment of the potential effects. It appears reasonable to assess the proposal as having effects that are minor (or less), provided that reasonable measures are taken. Any permit issued for this proposal should include conditions that provide for:

- Biosecurity planning and management (and review if situations change, e.g. a pest is detected)
- Recommendations given in the landscape report
- Waste management
- Structural security and decommissioning of the farm structure
- Prevention and reporting of negative wildlife interactions
- Occupation of public space
- Monitoring of effects (e.g. occasional benthic surveys, biosecurity/pests, and reporting of wildlife interactions and Maui dolphin sightings).

References

Some relevant references include (this is not comprehensive):

Human-mediated pathways for marine species

<https://www.doc.govt.nz/Documents/science-and-technical/drds266.pdf>

Aotea Harbour benthic habitats, DOC report (Hillock & Rohan 2011)

<https://www.doc.govt.nz/Documents/science-and-technical/drds327highres.pdf>

MPI overview of ecological effects of aquaculture

<https://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/4300/LoggedIn>

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Boffa Miskell Waikato landscape report

<https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/services/publications/technical-reports/tr/tr201605/>

Aotea Estuary (ONC map #44)

https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/assets/PageFiles/46145/T14142A_Waikato_Regional%20Coastal_Environment_section_E.2.pdf

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Andrew Styche".

Andrew Styche

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