



2026 Election Manifesto

Working Together
for Sustainable Seafood



Overview

This manifesto sets out Seafood New Zealand's priorities for the next Government, along with the wild caught finfish sector's commitments to working collaboratively to secure a sustainable, resilient and high-value future for the New Zealand seafood sector.

Our sector is built on a renewable resource, property rights and the Fisheries Settlement which support food production, exports, jobs, coastal communities, and cultural connections.

However, the environment in which the sector operates is changing. Climate change, shifting marine ecosystems, evolving global markets, increasing environmental expectations and changing social values are creating new challenges and opportunities.

For a wild and renewable resource, adaptability is the foundation for stability.

The following four pillars set out the priorities for a sustainable and high-value seafood sector:

Pillar One - Modernise fisheries management

Pillar Two - Protect access to wild-caught seafood

Pillar Three - Grow the value of the seafood sector

Pillar Four - Plan for the future

“

For a wild and renewable resource, adaptability is the foundation for stability.

2026 Election Manifesto – our priorities for the next Government

Four pillars for sustainable, resilient and high-value seafood

Pillar One - Modernise fisheries management

- 1. Expand the use of management procedures**
Enable agile, transparent catch-limit tools using the latest data.
- 1. Better recognise fisheries management tools**
Provide clear guidance on the full range of fisheries management tools and their application.
- 2. Adopt an issue-based management approach**
Shift management toward addressing fisheries issues and outcomes rather than individual stocks.
- 3. Enable monitored return of unwanted catch**
Allow reported and accounted-for returns where electronic monitoring or observers are present.
- 4. Enable non-regulatory sustainability measures**
Give industry-led measures clearer recognition and policy guidance.

Pillar Two - Protect access to wild-caught seafood

- 1. Plan marine space nationally**
Use inclusive spatial planning, cumulative-impact assessment and principled compensation.
- 2. Modernise marine protection legislation**
Create clear objectives, transparent processes and consistent decision criteria.
- 3. Recognise quota as a property right**
Reflect quota rights across legislation that can affect access to fisheries resources.
- 4. Address land-based marine impacts**
Build marine effects, accountability and coordination into catchment and coastal planning.
- 5. Support lower-impact fishing innovation**
Advance technologies that reduce environmental effects while retaining sustainable production.

Pillar Three - Grow the value of New Zealand seafood

- 1. Strengthen international trade and market access**
Grow agreements, reduce non-tariff barriers and support exporters facing increasing overseas requirements.
- 2. Invest in science, food safety and innovation**
Provide long-term applied investment supporting assurance, resilience, product innovation, and premium reputation.
- 3. Build a skilled, sustainable workforce**
Strengthen attraction and retention, supported by fit-for-purpose immigration and fishing-crew visa settings.

Pillar Four - Plan for the future

- 1. Develop a National Seafood Strategy**
Set a shared long-term vision and clear short-, medium- and long-term priorities.
- 2. Establish long-term investment pathways**
Plan for science, monitoring, infrastructure, workforce capability and innovation.
- 3. Build resilience to change**
Embed climate, ecosystem, food-security and global-market trends in decision-making.
- 4. Strengthen partnership-based stewardship**
Create enduring mechanisms for Government, Treaty partners and industry to work together.
- 5. Support social sustainability**
Address emerging issues so the system remains fair, inclusive and beneficial to New Zealand.

2026 Election Manifesto – our commitments

Four commitments from the wild-caught seafood sector

Commitment One - Innovation for a sustainable future

Our sector commits to a bold, coordinated programme of innovation – including bottom trawling – in partnership with Government to strengthen environmental performance, enhance productivity, and secure long term sustainability for New Zealand's seafood industry and the ecosystems that support our fisheries.

Commitment Two - Restoring the Hauraki Gulf / Tikapa Moana

Our sector commits to working with government and Treaty partners to determine the long-term cost of sustained kina removal to restore kelp forests. We are prepared to assist with resourcing ongoing kina removal and kelp restoration as part of a coordinated, science-driven programme.

Commitment Three - Strengthening community wellbeing through kaimoana

Our sector commits to exploring how seafood can more consistently be available to New Zealanders who need it most, including understanding how the industry can better support New Zealand's national food relief infrastructure.

Commitment Four - A fresh era of collaboration across our oceans

Our sector is committed to constructive collaboration with all ocean users and calls on the Minister to bring together all parties in a structured forum to focus on solutions, mutual respect, and evidence-based management.



Pillar One

Modernise Fisheries Management

The opportunity

Under the Quota Management System (QMS), New Zealand's fisheries have delivered sustainable seafood for decades. The QMS remains a strong and internationally recognised foundation for the sustainable management of wild-caught seafood. While the core framework remains fit for purpose, advances in science, technology and data collection provide opportunities to further improve how the system operates.

Effective fisheries management relies on more than catch limits alone. Sustainability outcomes are supported through a range of complementary tools, including operational controls, spatial management, gear requirements and measures to address environmental effects. A modern fisheries management system should be able to apply the right management tools to the right issue at the right time.

Significant investment in electronic reporting, vessel tracking and onboard cameras has created access to more timely and detailed information than ever before. Making full use of these investments will support a more adaptive, risk-based and transparent approach to fisheries management, providing greater confidence for seafood consumers, fishers, quota owners, Māori as Treaty partner and fisheries rights holders, coastal communities and businesses.

To deliver a fisheries management system that provides sustainability, certainty and confidence, the next government should focus on the following priorities:

1. Expand the use of management procedures

Embed management procedures in legislation to enable more agile catch limit adjustments through the use of multi-year decision making tools that use the latest real-time data to guide safe change. This would reduce administrative burden for government and increase certainty and transparency for the people, businesses and communities who rely on seafood.

2. Better recognise the full range of fisheries management tools

Develop fisheries plans and review the Harvest Strategy Standard to provide clear policy guidance on the use of the full range of fisheries management tools beyond Total Allowable Catch settings, ensuring management responses are tailored to the risks facing individual fisheries and applied consistently and transparently.

3. Adopt a more integrated and issue-based management approach

Progressively shift fisheries management toward an issue-based framework that addresses the full range of environmental and utilisation outcomes across fisheries, supporting more targeted, efficient and effective management.

4. Enable monitored return of unwanted catch

Allow fishers operating with government cameras or observers to return unwanted catch to the sea, provided it is reported and subject to the same quota obligations as landed catch, removing unnecessary waste without removing accountability.

5. Recognise and enable non-regulatory sustainability measures

Recognise non-regulatory measures as legitimate tools within the fisheries management framework and provide clearer policy guidance on their use to enable industry leadership and achieve sustainability outcomes.



“
A modern fisheries management system should be able to apply the right management tools to the right issue at the right time.



Pillar Two

Protect Access to Wild-caught Seafood

The opportunity

Our sector depends on having access to healthy and productive marine ecosystems. This includes ensuring fishers can continue to access traditional fishing grounds. These areas have supported seafood harvesting for generations because they are places where fish are consistently found in commercially viable quantities. Fishing in productive and well-understood areas improves efficiency, reduces unnecessary fishing effort, and helps minimise the environmental footprint associated with harvesting seafood.

Seafood production is increasingly affected by growing regulatory and spatial constraints across multiple legislative frameworks, often with limited coordination or consideration of the cumulative effects on seafood production, coastal communities, customary interests and regional economies.

At the same time, marine ecosystems face pressures from a wide range of sources, including sedimentation, nutrient runoff, pollution, climate change and coastal development. These pressures can degrade habitats, reduce marine productivity and affect the abundance and distribution of fish stocks.

Effective marine management must address the full range of pressures affecting marine ecosystems. Managing the effects of fishing remains important, but restricting access to fishing grounds alone will not restore ecosystem health if other significant stressors remain unaddressed.

New Zealand needs a more integrated approach to marine management that achieves conservation objectives while maintaining sustainable seafood production. Māori have enduring cultural, customary and commercial interests in the marine environment, and effective management must support the exercise of these interests alongside other legitimate uses of marine space.

To protect productive marine ecosystems while maintaining sustainable wild caught seafood supply, the next Government should focus on the following priorities:

1. Establish a national marine spatial planning framework involving all key stakeholders, requiring cumulative impact assessments for decisions affecting marine space, and including clear principled mechanisms for negotiation, resolution and compensation.

2. Modernise marine protection legislation

Replace the current fragmented and not-fit-for-purpose marine protection framework with modern legislation that provides clear objectives, transparent processes and consistent decision-making criteria.

3. Recognise quota as a property right across all relevant legislation

Amend legislation containing powers to affect access to fisheries resources to clearly recognise quota as a property right, providing greater certainty for quota owners, fishers and investors, and protecting the integrity and value of the Māori Fisheries Settlement.

4. Address land-based impacts on marine ecosystems

Require marine impacts to be considered in catchment and coastal planning decisions, recognising the connection between land use, marine ecosystem health and flow the effects on property rights. Including through improved monitoring, accountability and coordination between central and local government.

5. Support innovation to reduce the environmental effects of fishing

Support the development and adoption of innovative fishing practices, technology and mitigation tools that reduce environmental effects while maintaining sustainable seafood production.



“Protecting marine ecosystems and maintaining sustainable seafood production must go hand in hand.”

Grow the Value of New Zealand Seafood

The opportunity

Seafood is part of New Zealand's identity, culture and economy. Three out of four New Zealanders eat seafood every week, yet fewer than 9% catch their own fish, making our sector an important part of New Zealand's food system.

New Zealand seafood is a premium product with a strong international reputation, underpinned by a healthy marine environment, sustainable fisheries management and world-class food safety standards. However, increasing global competition, changing consumer expectations and growing regulatory requirements mean maintaining that position cannot be taken for granted.

Because wild seafood is harvested from a finite natural resource, future success depends on creating more value from every fish harvested. Continued investment in product innovation, market access, science, food safety and workforce capability will be essential to ensuring New Zealand seafood continues to generate economic, social and cultural benefits for future generations.

Realising this potential requires a coordinated focus on value creation, trade, innovation and people.

To grow the value of New Zealand seafood, the next Government should focus on the following priorities:

1. Strengthen international market access and trade capability

Maintain and grow access to international markets by strengthening New Zealand's trade agreements, reducing non-tariff barriers to trade, promoting international rules-based trading and ensuring exporters have the technical support needed to respond to increasing international regulatory requirements.

2. Invest in seafood science, food safety and innovation

Establish long-term investment in applied seafood science that supports stock sustainability, food safety, market assurance, climate resilience, product innovation and the continued reputation of New Zealand seafood as a premium nutritious food.

3. Build a skilled and sustainable seafood workforce

Develop a workforce strategy that focusses on attraction and retention of New Zealanders across our sector, supported by fit-for-purpose immigration policy that enables productivity growth. Specifically, a review of the fishing crew visa settings is necessary to drive efficiencies for both the sector and Immigration New Zealand.



***New Zealand seafood is
a premium product with
a strong international
reputation.***

A photograph of a sunset over the ocean. The sun is a bright orange circle on the horizon, with its light reflecting as a shimmering path on the dark, rippling water. The sky is a gradient of orange and yellow.

Pillar Four

Plan for the Future

The opportunity

Our sector operates on timeframes that extend well beyond a single electoral cycle. Sustainable wild caught seafood depends on healthy ecosystems, long-term investment and responsible stewardship over generations.

At the same time, climate change, changing marine ecosystems, evolving consumer expectations and shifting global markets are reshaping the operating environment. Building resilience requires more than responding to individual issues. It requires a clear and enduring strategic direction for the future of our sector and New Zealand's seafood.

Long-term success depends on both biological and economic stability. Businesses, Māori as Treaty partner and fisheries rights holder, communities and investors need confidence in the policy environment to make long-term decisions and investments.

New Zealand currently lacks a shared long-term pathway that brings together Government, Māori and industry around common objectives. A national seafood strategy would provide that direction, connecting fisheries management, marine health, science, workforce development, market access and value creation within a single long-term framework.

This would provide a foundation for collaboration, accountability and investment, ensuring all partners can work together towards shared outcomes.

To provide long-term confidence and resilience for New Zealand seafood, the next Government should focus on the following priorities:

1. Develop a National Seafood Strategy

Establish a long-term National Seafood Strategy, jointly developed by Government, Māori and industry, that sets a shared vision and clear short-, medium- and long-term priorities for the future of New Zealand's seafood.

2. Establish long-term investment pathways for seafood

Develop long-term investment plans for the science, monitoring, infrastructure, workforce capability and innovation needed to support a resilient seafood sector.

3. Build resilience to environmental and market change

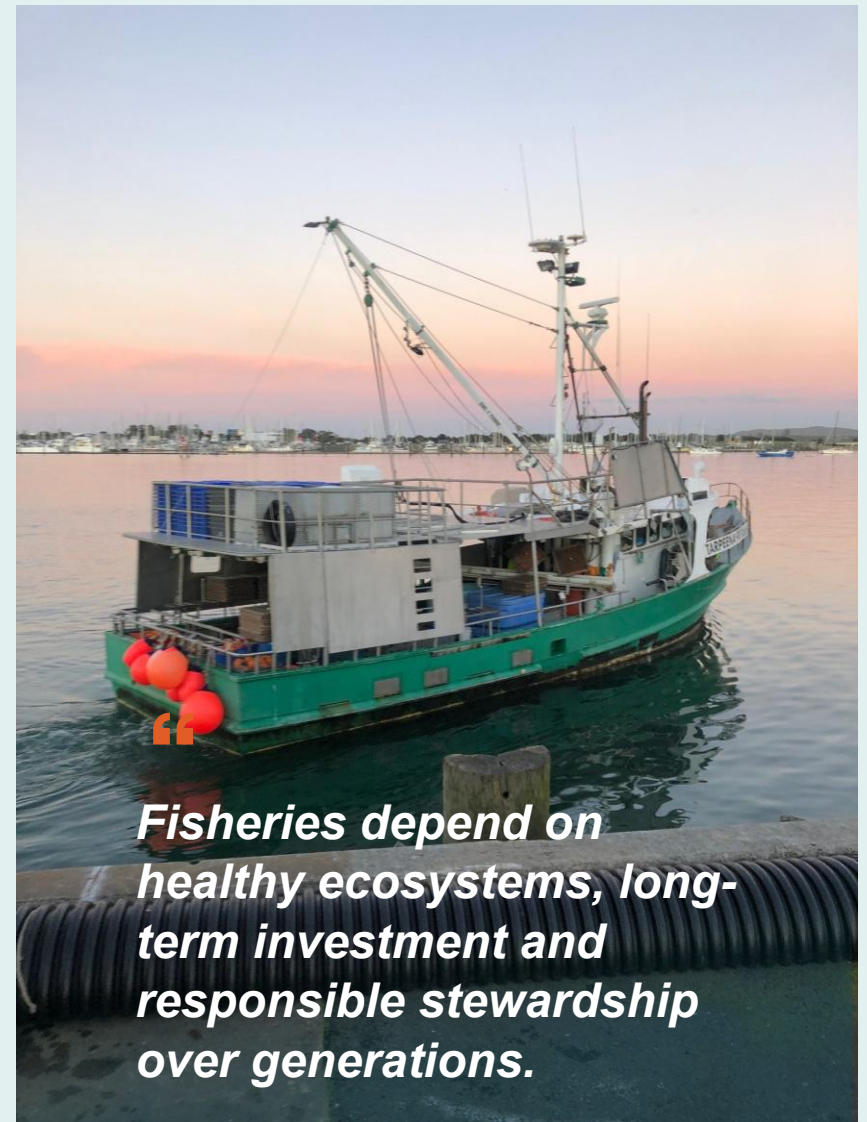
Embed climate change, ecosystem change, food security and global market trends into long-term seafood planning and decision-making.

4. Strengthen partnership-based stewardship

Create enduring mechanisms for Government, Māori as Treaty partner and fisheries rights holder and industry to work together on long-term seafood outcomes and respond to emerging challenges.

5. Support the social sustainability of the seafood sector

Identify and address emerging social sustainability issues, maintaining confidence that the fisheries management system is fair, inclusive and delivering lasting benefits to New Zealand.



A large albatross is captured in mid-flight, its white head and neck contrasting with its dark wings. It is positioned in the center-right of the frame, flying towards the left. The background features a vast, deep blue ocean with small whitecaps. In the distance, a range of rugged mountains is visible, their peaks partially covered in snow and bathed in the warm, golden light of a low sun. Several other albatrosses are seen in flight, appearing as smaller white shapes against the blue sky and ocean. The overall scene conveys a sense of freedom and natural beauty.

Our Commitments



Innovation for a Sustainable Future

Our sector commits to a bold, coordinated programme of innovation in partnership with Government to strengthen environmental performance, enhance productivity, and secure long term sustainability for our sector and the ecosystems that support our fisheries.

Seafood New Zealand has established a dedicated Innovation Steering Committee to drive this work, with three core streams of activity:

Bottom Trawling Innovation: accelerating the development and adoption of new technologies and practices that reduce seabed impacts and improve selectivity.

New Gear and Fishing Methods: supporting innovation across all other fishing techniques to lift environmental performance and operational efficiency.

Documenting Innovation and Outcomes: compiling a comprehensive record of innovations already implemented across the fleet and demonstrating their measurable effects.

The Steering Committee is working to assemble a portfolio of high impact projects and progress them for investment through MPI's Primary Sector Growth Fund. It is expected that this will be a multi-million, multi-year investment

This represents a clear and practical commitment to continuous improvement, science-based innovation, and partnership with Government to deliver better outcomes for our oceans and our coastal communities.

Restoring the Hauraki Gulf / Tikapa Moana

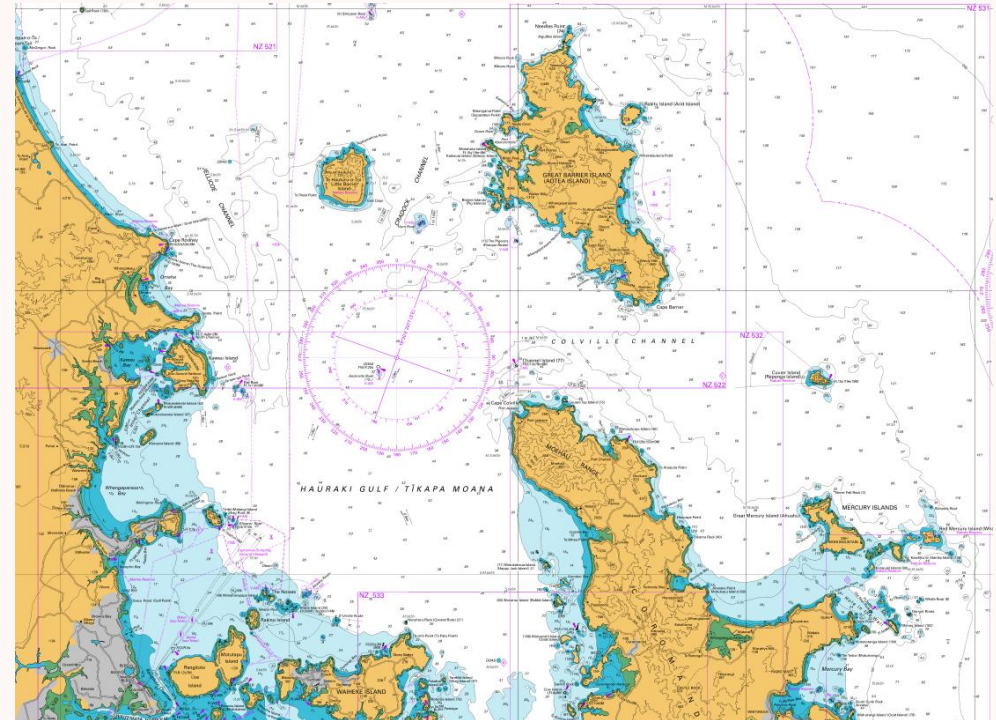
Our sector is committed to playing its part in restoring the health of the Hauraki Gulf / Tikapa Moana, recognising that the pressures on the Gulf are complex and cumulative. Sedimentation, urban run-off, invasive species, climate driven changes, recreational fishing pressure, coastal development, and broader ecosystem shifts all contribute to the Gulf's decline. Meaningful recovery requires coordinated action.

A key priority is the restoration of degraded reef systems. The industry strongly supports kina removal and kelp forest restoration.

We commit to working with government, Treaty partners and others to determine the long-term cost of sustained kina removal to restore kelp forests and are prepared to assist with resourcing ongoing kina removal and kelp restoration as part of a coordinated, science-driven programme.

This commitment reflects our belief that environmental sustainability and the catching sector can work hand in hand, and that a healthy Gulf is essential for the wellbeing of coastal communities, marine biodiversity, and future generations.

We acknowledge the significant work already undertaken to restore the Gulf. This includes decades of effort by iwi, environmental organisations, science agencies, community groups, industry and recreational participants. Initiatives such as marine restoration pilots, kina barren research, habitat mapping, and multi stakeholder forums have all contributed valuable knowledge and momentum.



Strengthening Community Wellbeing Through Kaimoana

The commercial fishing industry recognises the important role nutritious, high-quality kaimoana can play in supporting community wellbeing across Aotearoa New Zealand. In recognition of this, industry provides the bulk of fish for the highly valued Kai Ika network (though this is seldom acknowledged).

As part of our social responsibility agenda, our sector commits to exploring how seafood can more consistently be available to New Zealanders who need it most.

This will include understanding how the industry can better support New Zealand's national food relief infrastructure.

This commitment reflects our belief that the seafood sector has a responsibility to contribute directly to community resilience and food security.



A Fresh Era of Collaboration Across Our Oceans

The commercial fishing industry is committed to constructive collaboration with all ocean users. We recognise that the long-term health of our marine environment – and the social licence of every sector operating within it – depends on open dialogue, shared responsibility, and practical cooperation.

To support this, we call on the Minister to bring together all parties – commercial, charter, recreational, and customary – in a structured forum that focuses on identification of issues, mutual respect, and evidence-based management. A Minister led process ensures clear leadership, accountability, and momentum, enabling the sector to move beyond historic tensions and toward a genuinely collaborative future.

As part of this commitment, the seafood sector is open to new conversations with the recreational community on seasonal flexibility and localised arrangements. The Springs Box model in Hawke's Bay – a cooperative agreement between commercial and recreational fishers – demonstrates that tailored, place-based solutions can work when parties engage in good faith. We are prepared to explore similar approaches elsewhere, guided by science, local knowledge, and shared objectives for healthy fisheries.

The industry encourages the Government to improve the quality, accuracy, and transparency of information on fishing activity across all sectors. Effective fisheries management depends on a clear picture of what is happening on the water – better data leads to better decisions.

This initiative reflects our belief that collaboration and recreational partnerships are essential to delivering sustainable fisheries and thriving coastal communities.





Seafood New Zealand Ltd
Level 12, 7 Waterloo Quay
Wellington
seafood.org.nz
04 385 4005