

Te Pānui Kaitiaki o Ata Whenua

There are signs that Fiordland's marine area is straining under the pressure brought by its increasing popularity. We are seeing this play out in several interrelated ways.

The Guardians carry the responsibility entrusted to us by the community in the 1990s. We do our best to achieve their vision that *'the quality of Fiordland's marine environment and fisheries, and the wider fishery experience, be maintained or improved for future generations to use and enjoy.'* To achieve this vision, the entire community needs to lift beyond immediate self-interest and consider the collective impact of our actions and behaviour on Fiordland's marine environment.

In this issue we focus on two areas that are really feeling the pinch: fisheries sustainability and popular anchorages. We profile Guardian Gavin Tayles and we learn about the marine mammals that visit and live in the area.

As always, we welcome your thoughts and feedback. Wishing you a safe and relaxing holiday season.

Who are the ‘Guardians’?

The Fiordland Marine Guardians are an advisory committee that works with government agencies and their Ministers to manage the Fiordland Marine Area (FMA). Gavin Tayles has spent much of his adult life exploring Fiordland. He joined the Guardians during our review of amateur fisheries sustainability and has brought his experience and perspective as a recreational fisher.

I began by asking Gavin about his connection to the sea.

I have very vivid memories of my early trips to the coast. We used to go down to Riverton and would spend hours exploring the shoreline. I remember being amazed by how much life there was in each rockpool.

When did you first visit Fiordland?

I was one of those lucky Southland kids who got to go on camp to Deep Cove. In my early twenties a couple of mates and I got a ride into Supper Cove. We took a rubber duckie and spent a week hunting, fishing, and having the time of our lives.

Do you recall your first impressions of the place?

I'd spent a lot of time in Te Anau, and the landscape of Doubtful Sound just felt like that place on steroids. I also remember this feeling of abundance. Even dropping a handline in Deep Cove, there were so many fish. The same feeling was there years later in Supper Cove. We took in way too much food as we weren't expecting how easy it was going to be to gather kai.

Has your attitude to fishing changed over the years?

Yeah, I guess it has. You hear this talk about the different life phases of being a fisher: starting with learning how to fish, followed by catching as much as you can. I reckon I'm at the third stage now – I've realised I don't need to catch so much, that fishing can have an impact,

and I get a lot of satisfaction from watching others experience fishing.

What made you put your hand up to be a Guardian?

I knew the Guardians were there to ensure the place was looked after, and I felt that I had had so much enjoyment from Fiordland that I wanted to give something back.

Before you joined the Guardians you would have had a perception of what it is that we do? How has that compared to the reality of being a Guardian?

I probably didn't have a full understanding of the wide scope of the role, and just how much there was to it. The reality is there is a massive challenge for the Guardians and the agencies to get everything done that needs to be done when we have limited resources. We need to figure out how to work smarter for the benefit of Fiordland.

What parts of the Guardians work do you put particular focus on?

I have a lot to do with the fisheries work that is in progress as I am motivated to improve the key fisheries. I also spend a lot of time focusing on how we can achieve the right balance between access for everyone who wants to visit the place, and ensuring the increased visitation doesn't detract from the values and experience that is so special to Fiordland. It's a real quandary. At the end of the day, it's a challenge that has people at the heart of it. So, I am involved in work regarding how we engage the Fiordland community and take them along with us.

What changes have you noticed in the many years you've been visiting the place?

It's the increasing amount of human activity that is most noticeable – in every aspect: in the National Park, on the water, and in the air. That said there has also been a noticeable shift in the marine ecosystem driven by fishing



pressure and warming seas. I hope that the fisheries changes we have instigated will help to make the system more resilient.

What do you see as the biggest challenge facing the Fiordland Marine Area?

I think it's trying to achieve that balance of growth in visitors against the impacts of that. It's complicated because people have a different idea of what the place should or could be like. Those who have been visiting for 20 or 30 years have a different perspective of what the baseline is compared to those who have only been visiting for a few years.

What's one thing about the Guardians that you'd like people to know?

The Guardians have a long-term focus. They've always been very future-focused. Some of the advice we give and decisions we support are more about emerging issues than immediate ones. The thing is, in many ways we are trying to arrest declines and turn the place around so that it is in a healthier state in 10- or 20-years' time.

Finally – what's your favourite kai moana?

Pāua chips. Slithered, fried in a pan with butter, salt, and pepper. No question.

Fiordland: A special place for marine mammals

Blue whale

Most regular visitors to Fiordland will be aware of the small vulnerable populations of bottlenose dolphins that are often seen in Doubtful Sound/Patea, Milford Sound/Piopiotaahi and Tamatea/Dusky Sound. Humpback whales, southern right whales, and Dusky dolphins are occasionally seen on the coast by a lucky few. When it comes to the wide diversity of marine mammals in Fiordland it's a case of the more we look, the more we find, and the more we learn, the greater the responsibility to care for these special animals becomes.

Over the years DOC, with the help of Fiordland's tourism operators and visitors, have been keeping track of the different species encountered on the coast. The list has grown to include species such as blue whales, sei whales, orca, southern right whale dolphins, Hector's dolphins, and Arnoux's beaked whales. Even one of the world's rarest whales – the Shepherd's beaked whale – has been sighted in Fiordland. There have been only 34 recorded sightings of this species in New Zealand waters.

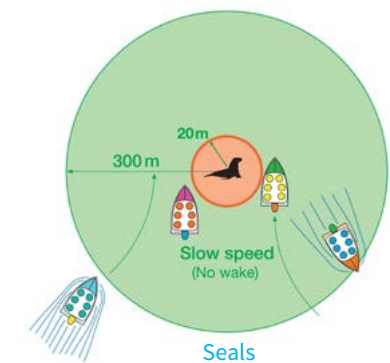
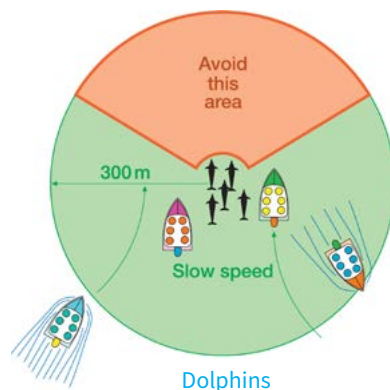
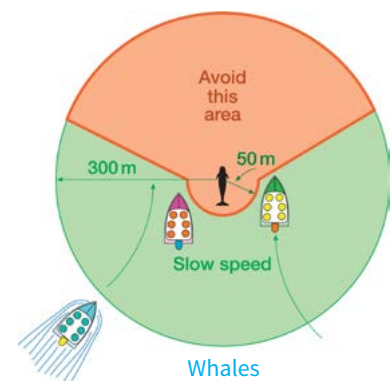
As many of these species recover from the decimation of the whaling and sealing days, we can expect their visits to Fiordland to become more frequent. Visitors to Fiordland have a responsibility to look after the wellbeing of marine mammals, including seals, sealions, dolphins and whales. It is well documented that dolphins and whales are affected by vessels and a poor interaction can not only injure them physically, but also provide them a level of stress that can build up over time, especially with mothers and calves.

As a boater or user of the area it is your responsibility to understand and follow the marine mammal protection regulations, which are designed to give marine mammals space and time. Often, the best option is to turn off the engine, sit back and let them come to you.



Bottlenose dolphin

If you are lucky enough to see something wonderful and you'd like to know more, please don't hesitate to [contact DOC](#) to report your sighting.



Update: Changes to Fiordland's Recreational Fishing Rules



The process to review the sustainability of recreational fisheries in the Fiordland Marine Area began back in 2019. Rob Win, a Senior Fisheries Analyst from Fisheries New Zealand (FNZ) who has been involved in the process, explains that we are almost at the finish line.

This has been a significant process, and we thank everyone for their input so far. FNZ received a proposal from the Guardians for changes to recreational fishing rules in the Fiordland Marine Area and gained permission to consult from the Minister for Oceans and Fisheries. A six-week public consultation was undertaken, including five public meetings across Otago and Southland, as well as a written submission process. This feedback was incorporated into the Guardians' final recommendations to the Minister, along with FNZ's analysis of submissions and recommendations to the Minister. In June, a decision was received from the Minister agreeing to the proposal.

FNZ is now working on a regulation change to the [Fisheries \(Amateur Fishing\) Regulations 2013](#) to define a

new fishing area called 'the fiords' that is inside the Fishing Line, and setting new species and combined bag limits through the [Fisheries \(Recreational Management Controls\) Notice](#). These changes have their own process in which papers are presented to Ministers and Cabinet for final decisions.

What is the new Fishing Line? The line, based on the fiord headlands, demarcates the boundary of different combined bag and species limits for

finfish and shellfish for the Fiordland Marine Area. The new line and limits are to address fisheries sustainability concerns within the fiords due to concentrated fishing effort in the calmer waters of the fiords between the headlands and the existing Habitat Line. Combined bag and individual species limits will be greater outside the fiords which has higher fisheries productivity than within the fiords.

The new regulations and bag limits are expected to be in place in January 2024.



New rules for bulk harvesting and boat limits?

The formal consultation on proposed further amendments to fishing regulations in the Fiordland Marine Area closed on 28 August. We explain where we are at in the process.

During the initial consultation on changes of fishing rules submitters raised some ideas that we thought had merit. Fisheries New Zealand agreed, and advised the Minister for Oceans and Fisheries that they consult further on prohibiting most bulk harvesting methods inside the new Fishing Lines, and introducing a boat limit to restrict the total amount of amateur take per vessel.

Despite these proposals being initially raised by members of the fishing community, they have proven to be rather contentious. The proposed changes would have implications for all fishers – including recreational fishers aboard private or charter vessels and commercial fishers. Arguably those that would be most affected are commercial fishers that cod pot, set net and long line in the entrances to the fiords, and those aboard charter vessels that may be affected by the introduction of boat limits.

The Guardians and Fisheries New Zealand received feedback at several hui and through written submissions and this information is now being considered. In the new year, we will provide advice and recommendations to Fisheries NZ and the Minister on what decisions we think should be made to change the fishing rules, if any. Fisheries New Zealand officials will consider the Guardians' recommendations and provide a separate briefing paper to the Minister, requesting a decision on how to proceed.

It's time to start reporting your catch

A message we have received loud and clear from the recreational fishing community is that you want to start contributing your fishing data so we can manage the fisheries in a more informed and responsive way. With the imminent change to Fiordland's amateur fishing rules, and the development of the reporting app [Mainland Catch](#), it is time to act.

With data comes power, and that couldn't be more relevant than with fisheries management. The Guardians and Fisheries New Zealand are making management decisions in an environment of some uncertainty. By reporting your fishing effort and catch, we will be in a stronger position to assess which direction stocks are heading in, and this will be able to be tuned to different parts of Fiordland. Also, for the first time we will all be able to get a sense of the collective fishing effort by all fishers, across all sectors. This information will support recreational fishers when they are consulted on any future management proposals.

As [Fish Mainland](#) say, *"The benefit for fishers is that better data informs management decision-making. In other words, the benefit is in providing a basis for action or a recommendation to improve fisheries that are important to recreational fishers."*

One feature of the new rules is the introduction of tiered daily species limits and total bag limits according to which side of the Fishing Line you are on. This is a move to protect more vulnerable stocks and to encourage fishing effort on the most productive grounds that exist on the open coastline. This presents a challenge from a compliance perspective, because fishers will need to be able to provide information to support their claims of where fish were caught. This is where Mainland Catch can help. The app automatically records where each fish was caught, providing a straightforward means of demonstrating you are fishing within the rules.

You can download Mainland Catch for free at www.fishmainland.nz or from your usual app store.





Death by a thousand cuts – *two fillets at a time*

Fisheries compliance officers recently reported a disappointingly high rate of offending against the amateur fishing rules in Fiordland. To the individual it may feel like “just a couple over the limit” or one or two that “almost stretch” to the size limit...but collectively, non-compliance risks the efforts taken by the Guardians, Fisheries New Zealand, and Fiordland’s fishing community to turn these vulnerable fisheries around. Longstanding Fiordland representative, Stephen Logie, District Team Leader of the Fisheries Compliance Team Southland, describes recent events.

It is galling that against the backdrop of [Fisheries New Zealand’s public consultation](#) and extensive Guardians engagement work to improve fisheries sustainability in Fiordland waters, a select group of recreational fishers have chosen to ignore some longstanding basic 101 fisheries conservation measures. During a six-day multi-agency compliance seaborne patrol of the Fiordland Marine Area in late October, agency officers were in contact with 76 persons, primarily engaged in a mix of fishing, diving, deer stalking and cruising.

There was a disappointingly high level of recreational fisheries non-compliance detected during inspections of seven separate vessel parties. Collectively, they were in breach of [amateur fisheries regulations](#), including:

- taking and joint possession of excess rock lobster beyond each person’s six lobster daily limit and maximum 15 lobster accumulation limit
- possessing accumulated rock lobster in excess of daily six lobster possession limit that was not held in separate labelled containers to distinguish the respective fisher’s name, date caught and number of lobster
- taking and joint possession of an unlawful state full berried female rock lobster
- taking and joint possession of an undersized rock lobster
- possessing unmeasurable blue cod/rāwaru (fillets) other than for immediate consumption aboard the vessel

- possessing unmeasurable cooked pāua that was being used for bait
- possessing pāua and underwater breathing apparatus together on a vessel
- amateur-fishing charter vessels found to have incomplete activity catch returns
- two cases of amateur-fishing charter vessel operator crews serving cooked crayfish meals for charter guests that had allegedly not been caught by the actual charter party members in breach of the Fisheries Act 1996.

The Guardians’ review of fisheries sustainability has revealed that inside the fiords, stocks of species including blue cod/rāwaru, pāua and groper/hapuku are not only declining, but require a total rebuild. A future of abundant fisheries for generations to come requires every member of the fishing community to think beyond their own immediate interests.

Conducting compliance over such a vast and remote area has its challenges, making individual responsibility increasingly important. With the support of the Fiordland Marine Guardians, the Ministry of Primary Industries is committed to focusing on education and compliance, particularly with the impending rule changes. We hope that by exposing this recent non-compliance, fishers think twice about breaching the rules in the future, and even if they are familiar with the area take time to ensure they fully understand the rules that are there to manage our fishery.

Moorings in the Fiordland Marine Area

Anyone who has spent time in Fiordland lately will have noticed the increased numbers of moorings in bays and inlets. The Guardians are concerned about the implications of this pattern for the navigational safety of visiting vessels. There are a limited number of anchorages where vessels can seek haven and the increasing number of moorings being installed in these anchorages effectively decreases the space where anchoring can occur. All the while, the numbers of vessels visiting the FMA continues to grow.

It's not simply a matter of visitors tying off to a mooring instead, as skippers have no idea what lies below the buoy and whether it will safely hold their boat.

The current Coastal Plan is relatively permissive for areas beyond the main ports of Milford Sound/Piopiotahi and Taipaririki/Deep Cove in Doubtful Sound/Patea. Beyond these ports, people are permitted to install moorings provided information is shown on any buoy, pole or device marking a mooring showing the owner of the mooring and the maximum designed ship tonnage of the mooring. They must also register the details with [Environment Southland](#).

The Guardians are providing local knowledge and advice to the Council about anchorages and moorings as they revise the Southland Regional Coastal Plan. We expect the revised Coastal Plan will be more restrictive with respect to moorings in the Fiordland Marine Area.

With the scarcity of safe havens in the FMA, and an increase in vessel activity, the Guardians as an affected party under the Resource Management Act, will be opposing any new applications for moorings with exclusive use status beyond the main ports. Given the limited space available, and the current assessment of that space by the Council during their review of the Coastal Plan, we consider allowing exclusive occupation of moorings to be unwise. We intend to take this position until the revised Coastal Plan is operative, as this process will determine better ways of managing areas for mooring and safe anchorage.

Those who have recently installed or are considering installing new moorings in the FMA should be aware that the Resource Management Act provides an opportunity for consent conditions to be reviewed and amended by the Council when a new Coastal Plan becomes operative, to give effect to the provisions of the new plan. Once the new Coastal Plan is in place, the Council will have powers to apply new rules to existing moorings. The cost of complying with those rules could feasibly fall on the owner of each mooring.

SAVE THE DATE: Fiordland Marine Research Symposium Tuesday 5 March 2024, Te Anau

This public event is being held by the Department of Conservation and the Fiordland Marine Guardians during Seaweek. Join us to learn from scientists about how climate change is affecting marine life and fisheries, the incredible properties of the fiords to permanently bury carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, novel ways to monitor key fish stocks, the latest findings about Fiordland's marine mammals and tāwaki/crested penguins, and so much more.



Fiordland user's guide

Have you got your copy of the 2022 edition of Beneath the Reflections – A user's guide to the Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) Marine Area? Our guide is packed with information, stunning images, and essential updates. If you operate a vessel within the FMA you can request a free copy of the latest guide when you renew your clean vessel pass.

The guide is also available online at www.fmg.org.nz, or you can purchase a hard copy from DOC's Fiordland National Park Visitor Centre: Lakefront Drive, Te Anau 9600, Phone: +64 03 249 7924, Email: fiordlandvc@doc.govt.nz. Printed copies cost \$25.00 if collected from the visitor centre. Inquire about postage rates within New Zealand and overseas.



Keeping in touch

As always, the Guardians work hard to facilitate community-led, proactive approaches that are informed by the best scientific information and knowledge available. We place a high value on the experiences and understanding of the Fiordland community and encourage you to share your thoughts with us. For more information visit the 'news' section at fmg.org.nz or email info@fmg.org.nz

FMG-AGENCY MEETINGS 2024

NEXT MEETING

**Wednesday 6 March 2024,
Kingsgate Hotel,
20 Lakefront Drive, Te Anau**

For more information visit
www.fmg.org.nz

All welcome

Our quarterly FMG agency meetings are open to the public and agenda items for discussion at these meetings can be sent to the Guardians. The agenda is set three weeks in advance of a meeting.

Te Pānui Kaitiaki o Ata Whenua is available online at fmg.org.nz or via email.

In the interest of sustainability, we encourage people to opt for an electronic copy. Please email info@fmg.org.nz to update your contact details or to switch to electronic communication with the Guardians.



Thank you!

Thanks to the following individuals and organisations for the photographs used in this issue: Department of Conservation, Rebecca McLeod, Seacology NZ and the Southern Fiordland Initiative, Sonja Bohn, Toby Dickson, Tom Brough.

Do you have a current Clean Vessel Pass?

Every vessel on the water in the Fiordland Marine Area is required to have a Clean Vessel Pass. Applying for a clean vessel pass is a simple process that can be completed online at www.es.govt.nz/fmpp or by calling Environment Southland on 0800 76 88 45 to receive a hard copy form.