



**Fiordland
Marine Guardians**
Beneath the Reflections

Annual Report **2024/25**

Thank you to the following for providing photos in this year's report: Department of Conservation, Environment Southland, Ministry for Primary Industries, Peter Young, Richard Kinsey and Severin Korfhage.

This year's cover image is provided by Richard Kinsey, Department of Conservation.

The Fiordland Marine Guardians welcome feedback on our work. We invite you to contact us directly with questions or concerns about the Fiordland Marine Area. Our quarterly meetings are open to the public and provide a forum for the community to engage with the Guardians. Meeting information is available on our website.

Fiordland Marine Guardians
PO Box 213
Te Anau 9640

info@fmg.org.nz
www.fmg.org.nz

Publication number: ME 1925
ISBN: 978-1-991404-13-8
Published in November 2025

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Vision and purpose

The Fiordland Marine Guardians (the Guardians) were formally recognised in the Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) Marine Management Act 2005.

Our focus is the Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) Marine Area, which extends from Awarua Point on the West Coast to Sandhill Point, Te Waewae Bay, and to 12 nautical miles offshore. However, we frequently address issues at a regional and national level, if we believe they will affect the Fiordland Marine Area.

We are responsible for providing advice and making recommendations to the relevant management agencies and ministers on matters relating to the management of the Fiordland Marine Area. We work closely with the management agencies that have an interest in the Fiordland Marine Area, to enhance collaboration in the region and ensure our strategy is aligned. We also engage with the wider community to ensure our focus remains relevant and directed towards the future.

Our challenge is ensuring the values of Fiordland are protected because the area faces increasing pressure from competing interests and a changing physical environment.

Statement of responsibility

The Fiordland Marine Guardians are proud to present, in compliance with section 20(1) of the Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) Marine Management Act 2005, the annual report for the Fiordland Marine Guardians for the year ended 30 June 2025.



Dr Rebecca McLeod
Chairperson
Fiordland Marine Guardians

Chairperson's report

Tēnā koutou katoa

This year marks a milestone for the Fiordland Marine Area (FMA). It is 20 years since the Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) Marine Management Act 2005 was passed, and therefore 20 years that the Guardians have been working hard to promote collaborative and integrated management of one of Aotearoa New Zealand's most pristine marine areas.



We have spent time reflecting that the job will never be finished. Fiordland's marine environment is a dynamic place, both environmentally and socially. We will always face challenges, but we are confident we can make a positive impact as we continue to strive for the vision that was set by the Guardians' predecessors back in the 1990s: that Fiordland's fisheries and the wider fishery experience be maintained or improved for future generations to use and enjoy.

The past year has seen a groundswell of science and discovery that is identifying emerging risks and informing management decisions. Scientists have been drawn to the area from across New Zealand and the world, supported by Fiordland's operators, the management agencies and the Guardians. A highlight was the German research ship *RV Sonne* visiting the fiords in January and live-streaming their exploration of the depths using a remote-operated vehicle. The voyage drew international attention to this incredible place and how much it deserves special protection. Advancements in technology are enabling monitoring and data gathering that can inform management decisions, for example:

- with the support of the Department of Conservation and Fisheries New Zealand (a Business Unit of Ministry for Primary Industries), scientists are developing a baited underwater video approach to monitor fisheries and marine reserves
- eCatch and Fisheries New Zealand have digitised the required reporting from charter operators, to increase accuracy, ease and timeliness
- Environment Southland has joined the Marine Vessel Portal, meaning the council can more quickly identify private vessels and assess their risk of carrying marine pests.

All this technology helps us connect. Thanks to clever folks at Victoria University of Wellington and underwater 360-degree video cameras, students on camp at Deep Cove will soon be able to go for a virtual dive in the fiords. You can't do many activities in Fiordland without getting wet, but now scuba diving is an option.

The Guardians have marked the 20-year anniversary by working with agency partners to develop strategic priorities for the next three years. Through these, we signal priority work areas, set clear targets for measuring progress, and clarify work that will require collaboration among agencies. We are confident this direction will ensure ongoing support for integrated management of the FMA.

I would like to acknowledge outgoing Guardian Dr Simon Childerhouse, the many representatives from the management agencies and my fellow Guardians for your dedication and hard work.

I invite you to read more about our work and achievements over the past year in this report.

Ngā mihi nui

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'R. McLeod', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dr Rebecca McLeod
Chairperson

Working together for the good of Fiordland

The Fiordland Marine Guardians (the Guardians) are responsible for providing advice and making recommendations to the relevant management agencies and ministers on matters relating to the Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) Marine Area (FMA). The Guardians work closely with management agencies to enhance collaboration in the region and align focus and strategy. Representatives from these agencies attend our meetings to report on progress and engage on matters of concern.

Subcommittees made up of Guardians and representatives from our partner agencies focus specifically on biosecurity, monitoring, compliance, communication and engagement with users, and progress matters outside the Guardians' main meetings.

The working relationship between the Guardians, the Ministry for the Environment, Department of Conservation (DOC), Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) and Environment Southland is outlined in a protocol. The purpose of the protocol is to facilitate and promote cooperation between the Guardians and agencies to manage the FMA in an integrated way.

The Guardians acknowledge the relationship between Ngāi Tahu Whānui, as tangata whenua, and Te Moana o Atawhenua. An expression of this special relationship is a requirement under section 15 of the Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) Marine Management Act 2005 (FMM Act) that one member of the Guardians is nominated by Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu.

The Ministry for the Environment administers the Guardians and provides a budget to support our functions. Each of the other agencies contributes funding and resources to enable our vision to be realised.



The 'Protect our Paradise' campaign in Piopiotahi/Milford Sound.

Fiordland Marine Guardians



Dr Rebecca McLeod (Chairperson)

Guardian since 2012

Rebecca has chaired the Guardians since 2015. She was working on her marine science PhD when the FMM Act was established. Her research informed the Fiordland Marine Conservation Strategy, and she feels very honoured to be able to ensure the Guardians' vision for the area is realised. She has enjoyed a diverse career grounded in science, ranging from research and science advisory in Antarctica, to forensic science, to climate research. Currently, Rebecca is a strategic advisor at Otago Regional Council, where she leads the Otago Climate Strategy. Rebecca is a keen diver and boatie and enjoys getting out on the water with her family.



Ali Ballantine

Guardian since 2018

Ali's passion for and interest in Fiordland began when she moved to the area in the early 1980s. During her tenure as Environment Southland Chairperson and councillor, she advocated for the formation of the Guardians and for the ongoing support and assistance the council provides for them. Under her watch as Chairperson, biosecurity threats in Fiordland were prioritised, which resulted in the initiation of the Fiordland Marine Pathways Plan. Ali has been involved in wilding conifer issues in Southland and nationally for over 20 years, chairing the Mid Dome Wilding Trees Charitable Trust since its formation in 2007.



Stewart Bull

Guardian since 1995

Stewart has extensive knowledge of the customary uses of Fiordland, particularly customary fishing. He is the former Chair of the Ōraka-Aparima Rūnaka and the former Ōraka-Aparima Rūnaka representative on the Board of Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu. Stewart is a Tangata Tiaki, appointed by the Minister of Fisheries, in recognition of his expertise in local customary fishing management and resource issues. He is the Ōraka-Aparima Rūnaka representative on the Customary Fisheries Advisory Group. Stewart has been a member of the Guardians of Fiordland since the group's inception and, in 2018, was awarded a Queen's Service Medal for his services to conservation and Māori.



John Cushen

Guardian since 2021

John has a passion for Fiordland and has worked there as a tourism business advisor, nature guide and boat skipper. He is involved in several community conservation projects, including Rakiura Marine Guardians, the Rakiura/Stewart Island Community and Environment Trust, the Whakatipu Wildlife Trust and the Tucker Beach Wildlife Reserve group. When not working as a tourism advisor, John likes nothing better than being out on his launch, cruising and fishing in southern waters.



Mark Peychers

Guardian since 1996

Mark was a commercial fisher for almost 30 years, working throughout the Fiordland area. When he stopped fishing, Mark worked as a relieving skipper on the DOC vessel in Fiordland. He is a shareholding director of the Fiordland Lobster Company. Mark was part of the original group that developed the strategy that became the basis for the FMM Act in 2005. He has been a Guardian since just after the group began in 1996 and was involved in setting up Fiordland's first two marine reserves. Mark has built strong relationships with our partner agencies (DOC, Fisheries New Zealand, and Environment Southland). He is actively involved with fisheries management in Fiordland and other parts of New Zealand. Mark is also a trustee of the Southern Coastal Charitable Trust, which manages the coastal clean ups of Fiordland and Rakiura/Stewart Island.



Gavin Tayles

Guardian since 2021

Gavin's heritage is in Southland, and he resides in rural Northern Southland. He has had a lifelong association with recreation in the Fiordland National Park and has been a recreational fisher and diver in the FMA for more than 20 years. Gavin has a deep connection to the area and a strong desire to preserve it for future generations to enjoy. He works as a senior executive with FarmRight Limited and has extensive networks in the recreational fishing sector.



Peter Young

Guardian since 2018

Pete has worked on boats since he was 15 years old. He lives in Te Anau and works in the fiords as a commercial fisher and skipper for charter vessels. He is also a very keen recreational fisher and hunter. For more than a decade, he crewed and subsequently skippered the DOC vessel *GV Southern Winds*, where he was involved in marine research and monitoring programmes conducted throughout the FMA. Pete was an original 'Guardian of Fiordland', contributing to the development of the Fiordland Marine Conservation Strategy. In 2003, he was also one of the original instigators of the Fiordland Coastal Clean Up. Pete is a trustee of the Southern Coastal Charitable Trust, which manages regular coastal clean ups of Fiordland and Rakiura/Stewart Island.



Dr Simon Childerhouse

Guardian 2023-2024

Simon is a marine scientist, specialising in marine mammals, with more than 25 years' experience undertaking applied science in and out of government. His experience includes working for Fisheries New Zealand, DOC, the Australian Antarctic Division and independent research organisations. His work focuses on both conservation and sustainable use. He has a love of remote places, especially Fiordland, with experience in both Antarctica and the New Zealand subantarctic region. Simon is based in Nelson and works as a Principal Scientist at Blue Planet Marine.

Agency representatives

The Guardians acknowledge the dedication of our partner agencies to achieving our vision for the FMA, particularly the efforts contributed by these representatives who regularly attend our meetings.

Ali Meade (outgoing)	Biosecurity and Biodiversity Operations Manager <i>Environment Southland</i>
Andrea Faris	Marine Biosecurity and Dive Safety Officer <i>Environment Southland</i>
Ash Rabel	Team Leader Aquatic Ecosystems <i>Environment Southland</i>
Dean Lowry (outgoing)	Policy Planner <i>Environment Southland</i>
Hayley Fitchett	General Manager Strategy and Regulation <i>Environment Southland</i>
Helen Brown	Senior Policy Planner <i>Environment Southland</i>
Kathryn McLachlan	Team Leader Marine <i>Environment Southland</i>
Lacey Bragg	Consents Manager <i>Environment Southland</i>
Liz Devery	Regional Planning Manager <i>Environment Southland</i>
Lucy Hicks	General Manager Integrated Catchment Management <i>Environment Southland</i>
Lyndon Cleaver	Maritime Manager – Regional Harbourmaster <i>Environment Southland</i>
Michael Sarfaiti	Consents Officer <i>Environment Southland</i>
Nick Perham (outgoing)	Partnerships Manager – Integrated Catchment Management <i>Environment Southland</i>
Rachael Millar	Chief Advisor <i>Environment Southland</i>
Ryan Hodgson	Senior Consents Officer <i>Environment Southland</i>
Zak Smith (outgoing)	Deputy Harbourmaster – Maritime Officer <i>Environment Southland</i>
David Falconer	Principal Advisor, Mauri Moana – Marine Policy <i>Ministry for the Environment</i>
Fiona Newlove	Manager, Mauri Moana – Marine Policy <i>Ministry for the Environment</i>
Matthew Barbati-Ross	Acting Manager, Mauri Moana – Marine Policy <i>Ministry for the Environment</i>

Kate Brooking	Fiordland Marine Guardians Secretariat <i>Ministry for the Environment</i>
Chloe Corne (outgoing)	Technical Advisor Marine – Marine Species Team <i>Department of Conservation</i>
Dulkara Martig	Principal Ranger Biodiversity <i>Department of Conservation</i>
John Lucas	Te Anau Operations Manager <i>Department of Conservation</i>
Millie Mannering (outgoing)	Project Lead – Marine/Freshwater <i>Department of Conservation</i>
Richard Kinsey	Senior Ranger – Marine and Freshwater <i>Department of Conservation</i>
Gavin Miller	Manager – Aquatic Pest Management <i>Biosecurity New Zealand, Ministry for Primary Industries</i>
Jen Geange	Senior Adviser – Pest Management Programmes – Aquatic <i>Biosecurity New Zealand, Ministry for Primary Industries</i>
Mark Geytenbeek	Principal Advisor – Sector Support and Innovation <i>Fisheries New Zealand, Ministry for Primary Industries</i>
Samuel Heenan	Fisheries Analyst – Inshore Fisheries South <i>Fisheries New Zealand, Ministry for Primary Industries</i>
Greg Forbes	District Manager Fisheries Compliance Southland <i>Ministry for Primary Industries</i>

Our year in review

July 2024

The Guardians released a new version of the must-have practical user guide for the FMA: *Fiordland by Sea*. Boat owners and operators receive free copies when they get their Clean Vessel Pass. The guide can also be purchased from the DOC Visitor Centre in Te Anau or downloaded from the Guardians' website.

August 2024

A scientific paper published on the mass sponge bleaching event in 2022 drew international media attention to the FMA. Lead author Dr James Bell called it the world's largest sponge mortality event and linked it to marine heat waves.

The Guardians spent time with the Hon Jenny Marcroft, Parliamentary Under-Secretary to the Minister for Oceans and Fisheries, during her South Island tour. It was an excellent opportunity to discuss the complex issues regarding fisheries management in Fiordland.

September 2024

The Fiordland Marine Guardians meeting focused on gaining a better knowledge of Fiordland's fisheries and marine ecosystems. We received briefings on the Tindale Inshore Tagging Programme and the application of baited remote underwater video (Dr Adam Smith) as ways to monitor the state of fish stocks and effectiveness of marine protection. Dr James Bell (Victoria University of Wellington) updated the Guardians on his research, which is focusing on sponges and corals in the fiords.

The Guardians met with the Hon Penny Simmonds, Minister for the Environment. We reflected on the progress made in Fiordland over the past 20 years and discussed current challenges.



RV Sonne in Patea/Doubtful Sound.

October 2024

Fisheries New Zealand, MPI began a pilot of an electronic fisheries reporting system for amateur fishing charter vessels. Operators have been calling for some time for the paper-based system to be moved into electronic reporting, and many Fiordland operators provided support to MPI and the app developer, eCatch, by testing the new system on the water.

November 2024

Kerry Walker (Southern Discoveries) briefed the Guardians on the recovery of the Piopiotahi/Milford Sound Underwater Observatory, which was destroyed during a storm in September 2024. We were joined by scientists Dr Alice Rogers and Eva Ramey from Victoria University of Wellington, who presented fascinating findings about the movement of broadnose sevengill sharks in the fiords, which were determined using acoustic tagging.

January 2025

The Guardians partnered with the Deep Cove Outdoor Education Trust to develop a marine education module for the school camps in Deep Cove. The programme will comprise a range of engaging and novel approaches to give students a better sense of the underwater environment in Fiordland; the people who study, work in and care for it; and how they can protect it. The programme will be offered to participating schools towards the end of 2025.

The Guardians spent a few days glued to their screens watching the live-stream from the remotely operated vessel that was exploring the depths of Fiordland from the *RV Sonne*. Scientists explored deep reef and seafloor habitats in Tamatea/Dusky Sound, Patea/Doubtful Sound and offshore from Piopiotahi/Milford Sound.

February 2025

Dr Chris Moy and Dr Gary Wilson updated the Guardians on the Fiordland Carbon Sink Programme, which is finding that the fiords play a large and important role in permanently removing atmospheric carbon dioxide. We heard from Dr Paul Viskovic from GNS Science (now Earth Sciences New Zealand) about his interest in the natural hydrogen seeps in Poison Bay. The focus then turned to marine biosecurity, and the importance of accessible vessel haul-out facilities and new marine pest treatment tools in keeping marine pests out of Fiordland.

March 2025

The New Zealand Planning Institute Conference was held in Invercargill, and attendees were treated to a Fiordland field trip. While not quite making it over the mountains, they spent time in Te Anau hearing from central and local government agencies and from the Guardians about how sound planning and community engagement can ensure the special nature of Fiordland is maintained.

April 2025

The Guardians met with the Hon Tama Potaka, Minister of Conservation, to explain the roles of the FMM Act and the Guardians in promoting collaborative management to ensure excellent environmental outcomes.

We also met with Bobbi Brown from Great South to discuss the Southland Aquaculture Strategy, which is in development. We identified concerns around marine biosecurity, but also noted the opportunity the strategy presented for developing fit-for-purpose vessel-cleaning facilities in Bluff.

May 2025

Engineers and mooring installers Richard McLean and Gary Teear joined the Guardians to discuss advancements in mooring design and how these could inform future management of mooring installations in Fiordland. Dr Kareen Schnabel and Jay Hepi joined the Guardians to discuss the successful expedition of the German research ship *RV Sonne* into Fiordland, and the incredible discoveries scientists on the voyage made.

The Environmental Defence Society's Ocean Symposium in Auckland invited the Guardians to speak about how marine management is done in Fiordland, and what the Guardians have learned in the 20 years since the FMM Act was passed.

June 2025

The Guardians travelled to Wellington to meet with government ministers and senior agency executives. We discussed the development of our strategic priorities for the next three years, and the role each agency can play in productive integrated management of the FMA.

The legislation turns 20

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the FMM Act, a landmark achievement in Aotearoa New Zealand's environmental history.

When it was passed in April 2005, the FMM Act was hailed as a national first, a unique, locally driven management regime befitting such a unique coastal marine area. Born from consensus, the legislation reflected years of careful dialogue among those who knew Fiordland best, transforming community vision into national law. This community – fishers, mana whenua, scientists, tour operators and conservationists – came together in the 1990s to create practical, enduring solutions to emerging issues.

At the time, the spirit of this achievement was captured by then Environment Minister Marian Hobbs, who said:¹

The bill has its genesis in Fiordland amongst ... people who care deeply about the health and well-being of the area's marine environment.

...

Of all the legislation I have ever worked on ... I have enormous pride in this bill ... this is real people power.



The Guardians in 2007. L-R Professor Sir Alan Mark, Anne McDermott, Malcolm Lawson, John Steffens, Mark Peychers, Alan Key, Dr Ken Grange, Stewart Bull.

¹ Hon Marian Hobbs. 14 December 2004. *Fiordland Marine Management Bill – First Reading*. Hansard Reports, Vol 622, p 18116. Wellington: New Zealand Parliament.

That unity was widely recognised as extraordinary. At the Bill's third reading, Hon Marian Hobbs recognised that the Guardians securing "the support of recreational fishers, commercial fishers, and iwi for the marine reserves was a remarkable achievement".² Then Fisheries Minister Peter Hodgson was quoted in the House as saying, "What the locals have gone and done is what central government ... failed to do ... it's entirely possible as a community to get it done".³ The FMM Act passed with unanimous support, proving what can be accomplished when shared purpose outweighs individual interests.

In July 2005, the first eight Fiordland Marine Guardians were appointed: Ian Buick, Stewart Bull, Dr Ken Grange, Alan Key, Malcolm Lawson, Professor Sir Alan Mark, John Steffens, and Laurel Teirney. They had already served in the original Guardians of Fiordland's Fisheries and Marine Environment, ensuring the new statutory body began with deep experience and strong relationships. It took time to implement the FMM Act. It took careful planning and coordination to establish new marine reserves, introduce revised fishing rules and enact changes to coastal resource management.

Today, the Guardians remain focused on the vision set in the 1990s. They continue to respond to the challenges posed by Fiordland's dynamic environment and human activities in the region. They maintain oversight of effective, integrated management across the multiple central and local government agencies with responsibilities in the area. Twenty years on, the legacy continues. It is a testament to the vision, trust and determination that shaped the FMM Act, and to the enduring commitment to safeguard the FMA for generations to come.

² Hon Marian Hobbs. 12 April 2005. *Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) Marine Management Bill – In Committee, Third Reading*. Hansard Reports, Vol 625, p 19886. Wellington: New Zealand Parliament

³ Gerrard Eckhoff. 14 December 2004. *Fiordland Marine Management Bill – First Reading*. Hansard Reports, Vol 622, p 18116. Wellington: New Zealand Parliament.

Strategic priorities for 2025–28

The 20-year anniversary offers a timely opportunity to reflect on the Guardians' role and the broader management approach over the past two decades, and to set a course for the future. We have worked with our agency partners to define strategic priorities for the next three years.

The Guardians and agencies take an adaptive management approach to evolving challenges, including marine biosecurity, fisheries sustainability and coastal resource use.

Despite a lot of hard work and innovative thinking, the FMA faces challenges. Currently, several fish stocks are depleted, the invasive Asian kelp *Undaria pinnatifida* (*Undaria*) is spreading throughout Tamatea/Dusky Sound and Te Puaatanga/Breaksea Sound, and moorings continue to increase in number to a point that may compromise equitable access for all users.

He tāngata

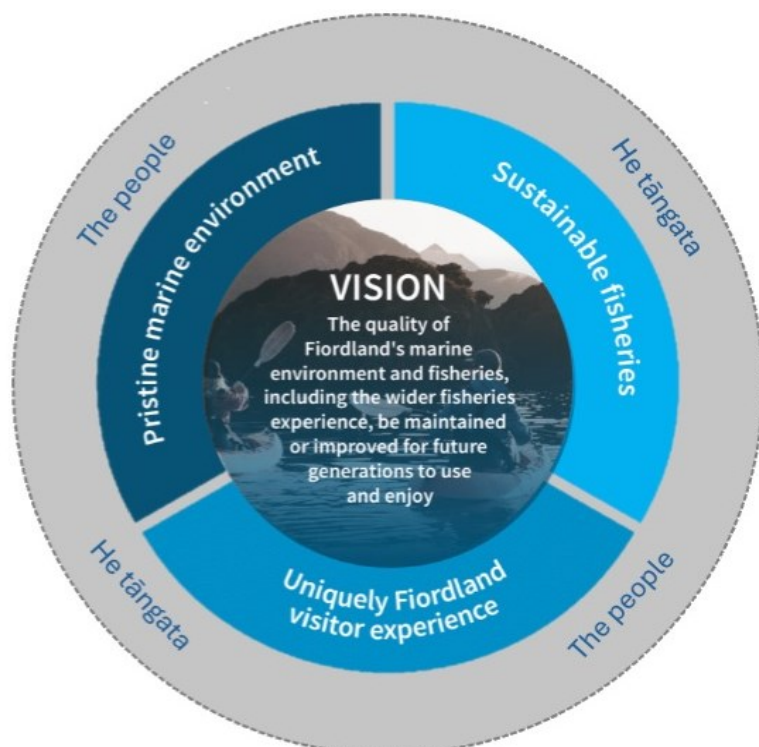
The Guardians foster a knowledgeable, engaged community ready to express kaitiakitanga and protect this place for future generations. We promote collaboration and integrated management among government agencies that have responsibilities in the area: DOC, Ministry for the Environment, Fisheries New Zealand, Biosecurity New Zealand (a Business Unit of MPI) and Environment Southland.

In partnership with the management agencies, we have identified priorities to guide our work for the near future. Clear priorities will support better planning and resourcing and help achieve the outcomes needed to address the challenges facing the FMA.

Vision

The Guardians are guided by a vision that was formalised in the FMM Act, with a focus on three areas: a pristine marine environment, sustainable fisheries, and a uniquely Fiordland visitor experience.

We have determined a priority in each of the focal areas, as outlined in the table below.



Area of focus	Strategic priority
Pristine marine environment	No new marine invasive species are established, and <i>Undaria</i> is contained within Tamatea/Dusky Sound and Te Puaiahua/Breaksea Sound
Sustainable fisheries	Robust monitoring and reporting data enable measurement of the rebuild of key fish stocks
Uniquely Fiordland visitor experience	The amount of human activity is kept within the carrying capacity of the Fiordland Marine Area

Over the next three years, we will be working with the management agencies to promote actions that will support these priority areas. Each management agency, and the Guardians themselves, has a wide range of responsibilities in the FMA that are not captured in these priorities, and that mahi will continue. If other matters arise that demand urgent attention, they will also be taken into consideration.

Meetings

Fiordland Marine Guardians general meetings

Four meetings involving the Guardians and management agencies were held during the year.

Date	Meeting location
5 September 2024	Invercargill
26 November 2024	Invercargill
25 February 2025	Invercargill
22 May 2025	Invercargill

Subcommittee meetings

We operate four subcommittees that include representatives from the Guardians and management agencies. Each subcommittee works to a plan, which is typically reviewed every four to five years.

The subcommittees align with the requirements of the FMM Act, to develop plans and disseminate information on monitoring, biosecurity, communications and engagement, and compliance.

Convenor	Subcommittee
Richard Kinsey, Department of Conservation	Monitoring
Jen Geange, Biosecurity New Zealand	Biosecurity
Gavin Tayles, Fiordland Marine Guardians	Communications and Engagement
John Cushen, Fiordland Marine Guardians	Compliance

The Guardians have an internal working group that provides advice on resource consent applications in the FMA, which are processed by Environment Southland.

The Guardians' subcommittee and working group members are as follows.

Member	Subcommittee
Dr Rebecca McLeod (Chair)	Oversight of all subcommittees
Gavin Tayles	Biosecurity, Communications and Engagement
Mark Peychers	Monitoring, Resource Consents
Stewart Bull	Biosecurity, Compliance
John Cushen	Biosecurity, Compliance
Peter Young	Monitoring, Compliance
Ali Ballantine	Biosecurity, Resource Consents

The following subcommittee meetings were held during the past year.

Subcommittee	Date	Meeting location
Biosecurity	24 May 2024	Online
Communications and Engagement	29 July 2024	Online
	24 Sept 2024	Online
	3 March 2025	Online
	8 May 2025	Online
Compliance	21 May 2025	Invercargill
Monitoring	6 September 2024	Invercargill



Agency Reports

Role

The Ministry for the Environment | Manatū mō te Taiao (the Ministry) administers the Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) Marine Management Act 2005 (FMM Act). In this capacity, we provide secretariat support to the Fiordland Marine Guardians (the Guardians) and support the Minister for the Environment in fulfilling their obligations under the FMM Act.

The Ministry is one of the management agencies legislated to work alongside the Guardians, as provided in the FMM Act and subsequent protocol. The Ministry's work includes:

- being involved in the quarterly Guardians' meetings and the Communications and Engagement subcommittee
- providing and managing a budget for the Guardians
- providing the SharePoint facility for the Guardians and facilitating its use by the Guardians and representatives from management agencies
- providing and managing the email account for the Guardians and administering their website.

The Ministry is also the administering agency for the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA). Although the Ministry does not have a direct role in local implementation, the RMA does provide the legislative framework for implementation of the planning and consenting system. The Government has announced that the RMA will be replaced by a new planning and environmental management system.

Achievements

Fiordland Marine Guardians appointments

The terms of five Guardians expired in June 2025. The Ministry progressed a recruitment process (including a call for public nominations) to make appointments in mid-2025.

Looking ahead

Revision of the Fiordland Marine Guardians and management agencies protocol

The protocol between the Guardians and the management agencies lays out how we all work together to support the Guardians in practice. [Section 27](#) of the FMM Act requires the chief executives of management agencies to enter into such an agreement with the Guardians.

The protocol was last reviewed in 2019 and now needs to be revised, which the Ministry will facilitate as the administering agency.

Twenty-year celebration of the Act

In 2025 – the 20-year anniversary of the FMM Act – the Guardians intend to mark the occasion by acknowledging those who have been instrumental in the Act’s creation and success, and reflecting on how the FMM Act is enabling adaptive integrated management of the Fiordland Marine Area.

As part of the communications and engagement approach this year, the Ministry is supporting the Guardians to organise an event in November 2025 celebrating the 20-year anniversary of the FMM Act.

Further Fiordland Marine Guardians appointments

The appointment term for Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu representative Stewart Bull will expire on 30 June 2026. In early 2026, the Ministry will begin work on the appointment process, on behalf of the Minister for the Environment.

Role

The Department of Conservation | Te Papa Atawhai (DOC) is one of the management agencies legislated to work alongside the Fiordland Marine Guardians (the Guardians) as per the Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) Marine Management Act 2005 (FMM Act) and subsequent protocol.

DOC is involved in all of the Guardians' meetings and subcommittees, but its main responsibility arising from the FMM Act and protocol is to lead the biological monitoring plan for the Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) Marine Area (FMA). The monitoring plan covers how we will monitor the state of the marine environment and its biological diversity. The plan also includes aspects such as fisheries and social monitoring.

In addition to DOC's role under the FMM Act, it is responsible for managing its legislative responsibilities within the FMA and the wider Fiordland National Park, as provided in the:

- [Marine Reserves Act 1971](#) (Fiordland has 10 marine reserves)
- [Marine Mammals Protection Act 1978](#) and [Marine Mammals Protection Regulations 1992](#)
- [Wildlife Act 1953](#)
- [National Parks Act 1980](#) (for the Fiordland National Park).

Achievements

The 2024/25 year has seen the continuation of several long-term projects that will help inform the Guardians and management agencies on how best to manage the FMA in the future.

We have also been able to continue to facilitate the work of some amazing, dedicated researchers and institutions that are providing both DOC and the Guardians with a wealth of knowledge to improve our understanding of the marine environment.



DOC and Victoria University of Wellington tagging broadnose sevengill sharks with acoustic tags to better understand how they use the fiords.

DOC remains committed to the Guardians and its responsibilities under the protocol. It is a pleasure to work with them and the wider agency group to help realise the goals of the FMM Act.

Highlights of the work DOC and other researchers have carried out in 2024/25 are as follows.

Baited remote underwater video

A joint priority for DOC, Fisheries New Zealand and the Guardians in recent years has been how to best understand the impact of fishing on the wider fiord environment, and how marine reserves compare as no-take areas. We currently monitor most fish species by diver transects, which has limitations for understanding fish assemblages and abundance. For blue cod abundance, Fisheries New Zealand conducts potting surveys, but these are expensive so cannot be performed on a regular basis.

In February 2025, DOC contracted Dr Adam Smith to pick up a second set of baited remote underwater video (BRUV) samples, after the success of the 2024 survey. BRUV is a non-lethal, remote way of counting fish in situ, which could prove useful for understanding stocks of recreational fish such as blue cod and hāpuku/groper.

In February 2025, 209 BRUV drops were undertaken throughout the Tamatea/Dusky Sound and Te Puaiahua/Breaksea Sound complex, to complement the 2024 surveys. This included several drops within the Taumoana/Five Finger Peninsula Marine Reserve and the Moana Uta/Wet Jacket Arm Marine Reserve ([figure 1](#)).

Good water visibility enabled the collection of amazing videos, with a diverse number of species encountered throughout the area. This included a visit from a white pointer shark on one drop, which caused quite a stir topside.

Now that the videos have been collected, the next step is to annotate them (count and measure the fish) so we can crunch the numbers and create a better understanding of fish abundance and distribution in Tamatea/Dusky Sound.



The team were amazed to find a white pointer shark investigating one of the BRUV frames during a drop in Tamatea/Dusky Sound.

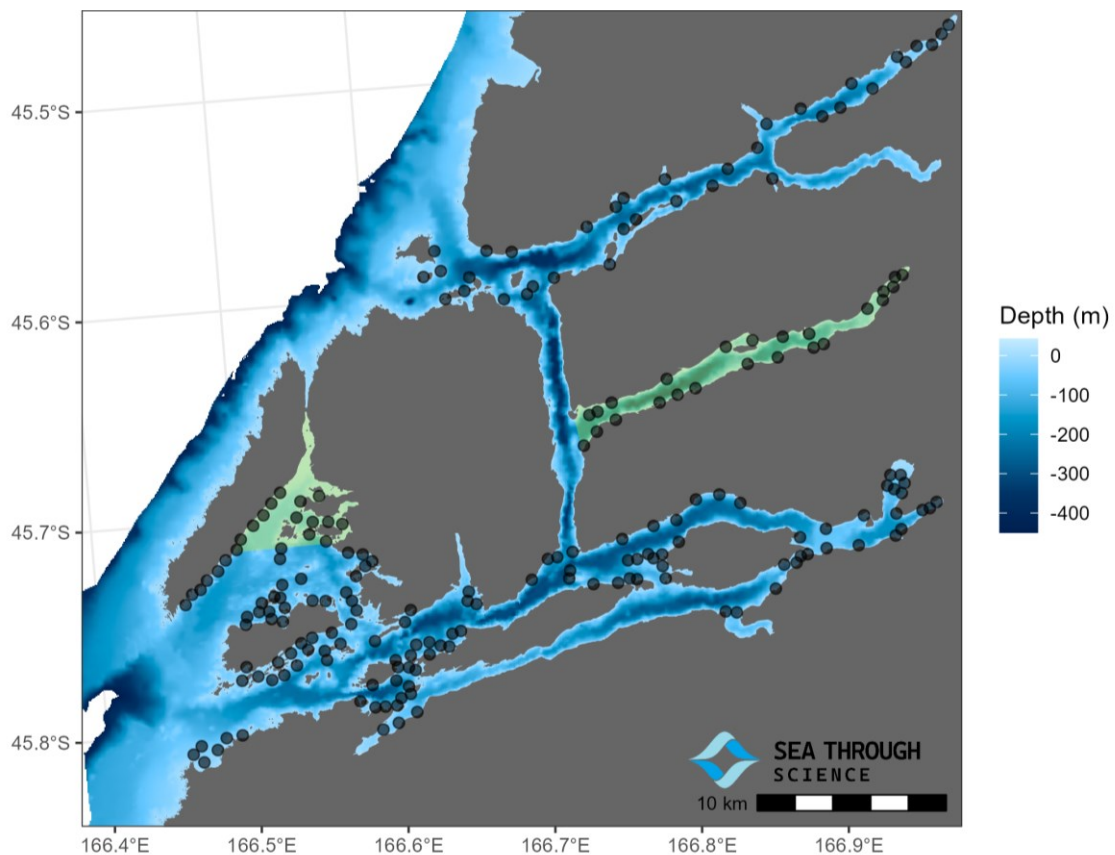


Figure 1: Baited remote underwater video deployments within the Tamatea/Dusky Sound and Te Puaiahua/Breaksea Sound complex in February 2025

Lobster monitoring – Piopiotahi/Milford Sound Marine Reserve

The Piopiotahi/Milford Sound Marine Reserve is one of Fiordland's two original marine reserves, first gazetted in 1993, over 30 years ago.

In 1999, as part of a programme to monitor changes to the reserve over time, a lobster monitoring survey was initiated. The last repeat of the survey in Piopiotahi/Milford Sound was done over 20 years ago in 2002, so it was important to gather more data.

In April 2025, the four sites (two inside the reserve and two outside) were resurveyed by divers on board the DOC vessel *GV Southern Winds*. The sheer rock walls in Piopiotahi/Milford Sound are always a spectacular place to dive and not often surveyed by DOC.

We have not yet compiled and analysed the data, so we cannot yet compare lobster numbers with previous years. However, collecting a long-term data set is important to show how the reserve functions over time.

***Undaria pinnatifida* control**

DOC continued working with Environment Southland and MPI's Biosecurity New Zealand on control of *Undaria pinnatifida* (*Undaria*) within Te Puitaha/Breaksea Sound and Tamatea/Dusky Sound. Although *Undaria* has spread further around those specific fiords, the aim is to keep it contained and stop it from spreading north or south.

DOC, Environment Southland and Biosecurity New Zealand were also able to carry out more biosecurity surveillance across Fiordland, with the aim of picking up any incursions as soon as possible.

For more information, see the Environment Southland agency report section on the [Fiordland *Undaria* control programme](#).

Fiordland marine mammal programme

Other important marine environment legislation provides for DOC to manage interactions with marine mammals. In 2024/25, we were able to run Sustainable Marine Mammal Actions in Recreation and Tourism (SMART) courses for the vessel operators in both Piopiotahi/Milford Sound and Patea/Doubtful Sound. DOC has run these courses for several years, helping people to understand the best way to interact with marine mammals.

This year, DOC, the University of Otago and the New Zealand Whale and Dolphin Trust continued with trips to monitor bottlenose dolphin populations in Patea/Doubtful Sound and Tamatea/Dusky Sound.

Three monitoring trips were run into each fiord complex, and both populations seem stable at the moment, which is good news. The current population in Patea/Doubtful Sound is 64 individuals (with 1 calf born over the 2024/25 summer), and the population in Tamatea/Dusky Sound is 109 individuals (with 5 calves born over the 2024/25 summer).

Other activities

DOC has been involved in various other work over the past year, including:

- taking part in a series of workshops for the coastal plan review with Environment Southland
- assessing resource consent applications, marine mammal viewing permits, collection permits and marine reserve permits
- developing a new kiosk for both Piopiotahi/Milford Sound and Patea/Doubtful Sound, along with bespoke signage to help FMA users before they enter the area
- creating advocacy material to support work in schools by the Guardians and the Deep Cove Outdoor Education Trust
- taking part in joint agency compliance trips throughout the FMA on board the *GV Southern Winds*.

Working with others

One of the most important things for DOC in recent years has been to facilitate other institutions to work on their own exciting projects within the fiords, especially ones that are integral to future management. By working closely with others, we are able to understand so much more about the FMA.

For DOC, the relationship with these researchers is a fantastic way to generate more research in the fiords and foster a greater understanding of the significant species and environments. DOC would like to pass on its thanks to the people it works with in the FMA. A synopsis of the major projects is detailed below.

Victoria University of Wellington (Dr James Bell and Dr Alice Rogers)

DOC has been working with the Victoria University Coastal Ecology Group for several years, providing the logistical support for them to achieve important science within the fiords. We have developed a great relationship, which DOC hopes will carry on into the future.

Projects and research undertaken in 2024/25 are outlined below.

- Understanding how the impact of climate change will affect broadnose sevengill sharks in Fiordland. Dr Alice Rogers and PhD student Eva Ramey have tagged several sharks within Te Puaiahua/Breaksea Sound and Tamatea/Dusky Sound. They are using acoustic recorders to track the sharks over time. Better understanding their movements and ecology will allow us to predict changing patterns if the fiords change over time.

In addition to sevengill sharks, this year, the team tagged some school sharks to understand their ecology within the fiords.

If anyone ever catches a tagged shark in the fiords, please try to release it unharmed and let the team know its location (either by emailing alice.rogers@vuw.ac.nz or passing on a message via VHF to the *MV Pembroke*).

- Understanding the temporal variation in subtidal and mesophotic communities within Patea/Doubtful Sound. The team has been sampling three sites (inner, mid and outer fiords) since 2018.
- Understanding marine heatwave impacts on Fiordland sponges. Since the major heatwave in 2022/23, when an estimated 30 million sponges were bleached, Dr James Bell has been experimenting with how susceptible sponges are to heat stress in the fiords and what it might mean for the future.

- Understanding detritus production by Fiordland sponges to look at how sponges recycle phytoplankton and bacteria to the sea floor.
- Understanding marine heatwave impacts on Fiordland black coral. How will a warming ocean affect black coral communities in the fiords?
- Understanding population connectivity, demographics and fisheries impacts on black coral. Dr James Bell and his students have sequenced a whole genome of black coral and are working to understand how corals are related throughout the fiords.
- Developing a habitat-mapping programme in Fiordland.
- Contributing to the education programme in Deep Cove with the Deep Cove Outdoor Education Trust (virtual reality experience).

University of Otago

DOC has been helping Jack Beagley, from the University of Otago, to collect temperature and dissolved oxygen concentrations in the deep basins of Patea/Doubtful Sound. He is working on fine-scale movements and changes to water currents at depth and finding out amazing things about how the fiord oceanography functions.

GNS Science (now Earth Sciences New Zealand)

DOC helped to collect information about a series of methane seeps in Poison Bay (Northern Fiordland) so GNS scientists could map them across Fiordland. We hope to help with further research over the next year.

RV Sonne voyage

DOC was excited to be involved in the German research trip that spent time within the fiords over the summer. The remotely operated vehicle footage and collections provided a rare opportunity to get to the bottom of the fiords with such high-tech gear.

Looking ahead

DOC has plenty planned for 2025/26. In particular, we hope to:

- analyse the data collected from the lobster monitoring surveys in the Te Awaatu Channel (The Gut) Marine Reserve (April 2024) and the Piopiotahi/Milford Sound Marine Reserve (April 2025)
- continue monitoring marine mammals in Fiordland, working with the University of Otago and the local operators
- run SMART courses to upskill the local operators on how to behave around marine mammals
- work with Fisheries New Zealand to annotate and analyse the data from the BRUV trips in February 2024/25
- continue to work with Dr James Bell and Dr Alice Rogers from Victoria University of Wellington on studying black coral, sponges, sharks and climate change
- continue to work with Jenni Stanley from the University of Waikato on understanding the soundscape of the fiords; in 2025, we hope to look at different fiords (Patea/Doubtful Sound and Piopiotahi/Milford Sound)

- keep working on controlling *Undaria* within the fiords to contain it to the Tamatea/Dusky Sound complex
- finalise a clear plan for future monitoring of the FMA that will help to guide our priorities
- work with Environment Southland, the Guardians and iwi to support coastal planning, as required
- install new kiosks with updated signage in Deepwater Basin, Piopiotahi/Milford Sound and Deep Cove, Patea/Doubtful Sound.

It is an ongoing privilege to work with the Guardians and management agencies in Fiordland on realising the vision for the FMA and to help protect such an amazing piece of New Zealand.

Role

As a regional council, Environment Southland | Te Taiao Tonga is responsible for the sustainable management of Southland's natural resources (land, water, air and coast), in partnership with iwi and the community. Environment Southland plays an important role in managing Southland's coastal marine area, including in marine biosecurity, navigational safety and consents (and their compliance) within the Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) Marine Area (FMA). We are most successful in this role when we work in collaboration with other relevant agencies and organisations.

Achievements

Marine biosecurity

Environment Southland, the Department of Conservation (DOC) and Biosecurity New Zealand (a Business Unit of Ministry for Primary Industries) have continued to collaborate on marine biosecurity in Fiordland this year. The agencies renewed their commitment to the partnership approach this season, with a refreshed collaboration agreement and Fiordland biosecurity strategy. Alongside this, the partnership continued the important marine pest surveillance and work to control *Undaria pinnatifida* (*Undaria*).

Fiordland *Undaria* control programme

In the past year, the *GV Southern Winds* completed seven surveillance and control trips, and the *MV Pembroke* completed four. Although no new marine pests were found, and the *Undaria* population remained contained in the Te Puaiahua/Breaksea Sound and Tamatea/Dusky Sound complex, several range expansions were identified. These expansions make it very challenging to progressively contain this pest with existing budgets and resources.



Compliance inspection.

As such, progressive containment is no longer considered feasible, and significant operational changes were introduced. Large-scale biomass removal ceased, and the strategy is now focused on increased surveillance throughout the wider fiords to identify and control new range expansions quickly. The strategy also includes small-scale *Undaria* biomass removal at high-risk anchorages and moorings, to reduce the likelihood of anthropogenic spread to neighbouring fiords. Important work was undertaken to capture and reflect on the lessons learned during the delivery of the programme to date. This will be used to inform future biosecurity programmes and incursion responses in Fiordland.

Clean Vessel Passes

Clean Vessel Pass (CVP) applications continue to increase, with 513 applications this year, compared with 491 the previous year (figure 2). We completed more face-to-face inspections, an important pathway for educating marine users. Environment Southland also joined the nationwide ‘Protect our Paradise’ campaign, which aims to standardise messaging and educate boaties about marine pests.

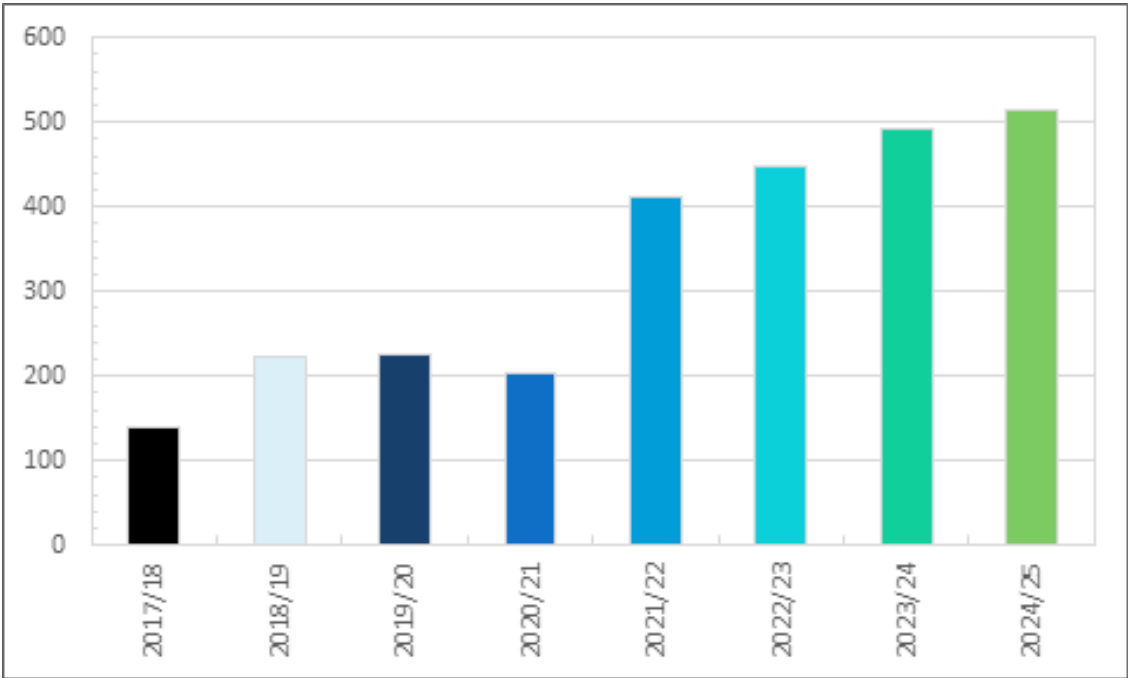


Figure 2: Annual Clean Vessel Pass applications

Marine biosecurity compliance and surveillance

Four compliance trips were completed in Fiordland this year: three joint-agency trips on the *GV Southern Winds* in the northern and southern fiords, and an additional trip to Piopiotahi/Milford Sound. During the trips, the team interacted with 156 vessels, and 111 hull inspections were completed. These inspections found no new marine pests on any vessels, structures or natural substrate. CVP compliance remains an issue: 22 per cent of the vessels did not have a current CVP at the time of inspection.

Fiordland-bound vessel inspections continued in Bluff Harbour and Rakiura/Stewart Island this season. These checks remain an effective way to identify dirty vessels and ensure they are appropriately cleaned before heading to pristine waters like Fiordland. Overall, 822

vessel inspections were completed this season, which is a significant increase from 2023/24. Additional checks were introduced in Riverton, and the programme also now inspects vessels that are known to travel to southern Rakiura.

The Marine Vessel Portal was introduced this season to better track marine pest and vessel surveillance in Southland. This tool, developed by the Top of the North Marine Biosecurity Partnership, is intended to be rolled out nationwide. It allows councils to view vessels and inspections from other regions and track potential marine pests and risk pathways.

Harbourmaster

The 2024/25 cruise ship season saw only 85 Fiordland bookings, compared with 135 bookings for the previous season. The 2025/26 season bookings were at 61 at the time of writing.

Environment Southland's maritime team undertook compliance monitoring and marine biosecurity support in Piopiotahi/Milford Sound during 2024/25 and participated in a multi-agency patrol through Fiordland.

Resource consents

Under the Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) Marine Management Act 2005 (the FMM Act), the Fiordland Marine Guardians (the Guardians) provide advice on resource consents to Environment Southland, which it then considers during the decision-making process.

For 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025, Environment Southland sought advice from and/or notified the Guardians of the following applications.

- **APP-20242724 – Fiordland Discovery Limited**

To preferentially occupy three existing moorings in the FMA at Isthmus Sound, Sportsman Cove and Beach Harbour.

- **APP-20242682 – Mitre Peak Cruises Limited**

To carry out commercial surface water activities in Piopiotahi/Milford Sound, namely the operation of the vessel *MV Mitre Peak II*.

- **APP-20242604 – Southern Lakes Helicopters Limited**

To exclusively occupy the coastal marine area with a replacement barge (Uni II) secured by a mooring and up to three mooring lines, and to use the barge as a fuel storage facility, for accommodation, to discharge treated sewage and greywater into the coastal marine area, and to take off and land helicopters at Sunday Cove, Te Puitaha/Breaksea Sound.

- **APP-20252001 – Department of Conservation**

To occupy the coastal marine area with a boat ramp and to disturb the coastal marine area for the purpose of replacing the existing concrete boat ramp with a new concrete boat ramp at Deepwater Basin, Piopiotahi/Milford Sound.

- **APP-20252018 – Dive Otago Limited**

To undertake commercial surface water activities using a vessel, *Seahorse*, for scuba diving and snorkelling in the coastal marine area of Piopiotahi/Milford Sound.

- **APP-20252127 – Cruise Milford New Zealand Limited**

To occupy the coastal marine area with a mooring, and preferential occupation of the mooring, at the southern end of Deepwater Basin, Piopiotahi/Milford Sound.

Consent compliance

Environment Southland's resource management team:

- undertakes desktop assessments of reports and activity logs from consent holders
- inspects wastewater discharges and structures
- responds to reports of non-compliance from the public.

In 2024/25, monitoring of activities included 29 structure inspections in Piopiotahi/Milford Sound and inspections of wastewater discharges in Piopiotahi/Milford Sound and Deep Cove.

Looking ahead

Marine biosecurity

In the coming year, the biosecurity focus will be on improving outreach about CVPs with boat owners outside of Southland and increasing our marine biosecurity education in schools. We will continue the review of the Fiordland Marine Regional Pathway Management Plan, and we aim to engage with marine users about their values and views on future management options. This will consider a potential expansion of pathway management to other parts of the Southland marine area. Key workstreams will continue in Fiordland, such as compliance, surveillance and the revised *Undaria* control programme. Fiordland-bound vessel inspections in Bluff Harbour and Rakiura/Stewart Island will continue as important work to ensure vessels are free from marine pests before entering the FMA.

Regional Coastal Plan review

Significant Resource Management Act reform signalled by Central Government, including the Resource Management (Consenting and Other System Changes) Amendment Act 2025 meant work slowed on the regional coastal plan review process underway. This approach was adopted to allow for the transition while the Resource Management Act is replaced by a new planning and environmental management system.

However, we are continuing work on the development of a future coastal planning framework, to enable timely implementation when the new system is in place.

The Fiordland workstream remained a significant focus, providing a valuable opportunity to deepen our understanding of the area's unique environmental and operational dynamics. The Fiordland Working Group met several times this year in valuable information gathering sessions, to further the work on carrying capacity and safe anchorages and moorings.

The work programme ahead includes community engagement via a Fiordland Users survey, to build on previous surveys undertaken by FMG. Stakeholder engagement will continue with the Fiordland Working Group including presentation for discussion and feedback of draft chapters of the proposed regulatory framework for Fiordland.

Harbourmaster

Identifying and tracking ships' positions and other navigational information related to individual vessels is done with an automatic identification system. This system will be installed on the Environment Southland very high frequency sites (Resolution and Secretary islands) during 2025/26, to monitor Fiordland cruise ship activities. The intent is to also install cameras at each site, which will enable helicopter companies to identify favourable weather windows for contractors to carry out site maintenance.

Ministry for Primary Industries

The Ministry for Primary Industries | Manatū Ahu Matua (MPI) and its five branded business units – Biosecurity New Zealand, Fisheries New Zealand, Food Safety New Zealand, Agriculture and Investment Services, and Forestry New Zealand – help to grow and protect New Zealand’s primary industries. Our role is to maximise export opportunities and improve sector productivity, increase sustainable resource use, and protect New Zealand from biological risk.

For the Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) Marine Area (FMA), we:

- provide policy advice and programmes that support the sustainable development of New Zealand’s primary industries, including in fisheries and aquaculture management
- provide whole-of-system leadership of New Zealand’s biosecurity system
- purchase science services to maintain the effective management of New Zealand’s fisheries.

We work to ensure fisheries and other resources are managed sustainably, using a ‘voluntary, assisted, directed, enforced’ approach to compliance. Providing education and information to the public and stakeholders is essential to ensuring effective voluntary compliance.

Biosecurity



Biosecurity New Zealand
Ministry for Primary Industries
Manatū Ahu Matua

Role

Biosecurity New Zealand plays a critical role in preventing harmful organisms from crossing New Zealand’s borders. We manage border and compliance activities as well as preparing for, and responding to, any biosecurity incursions that may occur. Biosecurity New Zealand also manages MPI’s centralised intelligence, planning and coordination group, which was established to manage food, biosecurity and animal welfare responses consistently and effectively. The Pest Management Directorate leads the work related to the FMA.



Diver with *Undaria*.

Achievements

Biosecurity New Zealand has once again enjoyed working with the Fiordland Marine Guardians (the Guardians) and partner agencies on marine biosecurity issues relating to the FMA. This year involved mainly working collaboratively on the kelp *Undaria pinnatifida* (*Undaria*) in Tamatea/Dusky Sound and Te Pūaitaha/Breaksea Sound, participating in joint agency compliance trips, and formal endorsement of the revised Fiordland Marine Biosecurity Strategy.

Undaria in Te Pūaitaha/Breaksea Sound and Tamatea/Dusky Sound

Since 2010, Biosecurity New Zealand has been working with partner agencies Environment Southland and the Department of Conservation (DOC) to manage *Undaria* in Te Pūaitaha/Breaksea Sound. In November 2022, *Undaria* was unfortunately discovered in Tamatea/Dusky Sound. We remain committed to the long-term management of *Undaria* in both areas. When needed, we seek advice from the *Undaria* Technical Advisory Group to help determine the most realistic and effective management options for Te Pūaitaha/Breaksea Sound and Tamatea/Dusky Sound. For more information on the management of *Undaria* in the FMA, see the agency report above from [Environment Southland](#).

Complementing this work, we have also played an integral role in joint-agency compliance patrols by providing a free diver (alongside an Environment Southland diver) to carry out in--water inspections of vessel hulls, moorings and barges.

Fiordland Marine Biosecurity Strategy 2024

Biosecurity New Zealand has continued to lead the implementation of the recently revised Fiordland Marine Biosecurity Strategy 2024 (the Strategy), in collaboration with partner agencies and the Guardians. The Strategy outlines nine goals to guide the efforts of the Guardians, partner agencies and stakeholders over the next 10 years, with the aim of reducing the risk of marine pests affecting Fiordland's unique marine environment. A -two-year operational plan, developed alongside the Strategy, identifies and prioritises important activities to support the delivery of these goals. In early 2024, the Strategy was formally endorsed by all partner agencies and the Guardians.

Fiordland messaging on paid media

From November 2024 to June 2025, messaging about the Fiordland Clean Vessel Pass was promoted on the MetService website's marine pages and app, as part of the national 'Protect Our Paradise' marine biosecurity campaign for recreational boaties. The digital advertising from December to May reached 189,000 people who might visit Fiordland an average of 2.3 times each, and 1,700 of these clicked for further information.

Targeted marine pest surveillance

As part of the National Marine High-risk Site Surveillance programme, Biosecurity New Zealand funds Earth Sciences New Zealand (formerly NIWA) to undertake biannual surveys (winter and summer) in 12 locations around New Zealand (including the South Island ports of Bluff, Dunedin, Lyttelton, Waikawa/Picton and Nelson). This programme aims to achieve early detection of new unwanted marine pests in some of New Zealand's busiest (and therefore highest-risk) locations, namely, ports and marinas of first arrival for international vessels.

Undertaking surveillance in the port of Bluff can benefit the FMA, such as through the early detection of new and emerging marine pests that may pose a threat to this region.

Over the past year, one new-to-New Zealand and seven non-indigenous species were detected as range extensions by this programme.⁴

Species new to New Zealand

- Nelson – alga *Pterothamnion yezoense*

Range extensions

- Ōpua – alga *Bonnemaisonia hamifera*
- Tauranga – ascidian *Styela canopus*
- Napier – gastropod *Tritia burchardi*
- Wellington – ascidian *Lissoclinum perforatum*
- Nelson – gastropod *Tritia burchardi*
- Lyttleton – bryozoan *Nevianipora pulcherrima*
- Bluff – alga *Striaria attenuata*

Other significant marine pest species, such as the Mediterranean fanworm *Sabella spallanzanii*, Asian kelp *Undaria pinnatifida* and the clubbed tunicate *Styela clava*, continue to be detected at South Island ports. Vessels arriving to Fiordland from ports where these pests are found, including those in the North Island, are at risk of transporting these and other marine pests to the FMA.

To map the current nationwide distribution of any marine species mentioned, see the [Marine Biosecurity website](#).

Revised Craft Risk Management Standard for Vessels

The revised Craft Risk Management Standard for Vessels (CRMS-Vessels) was published in October 2023. MPI has continued to ensure the requirements and how to comply are clear to stakeholders and internal parties within MPI. One of the main changes in the CRMS-Vessels is the addition of new minimum evidence requirements (Schedule 2 and Schedule 3). Evidence quality has been one of the main issues, because MPI receives a broad variation in the quality of reports. Creating a standard for reporting is expected to reduce inconsistencies, which will lower marine biosecurity risks.

Although the rest of the CRMS-Vessels was enforced at the time of issue, the minimum evidence requirements were released with an 18-month lead-in period to allow service providers and industry to adapt, giving the shipping industry enough time to reach compliance. The minimum evidence requirements for vessel biofouling inspection came into effect in April 2025.

⁴ Two samples are pending identification: an algal sample collected from Dunedin and a hydroid sample collected during Auckland summer surveys. Molecular analysis is being undertaken for both.

Enforcement of the Craft Risk Management Standard on international arrivals

Between 1 January 2024 and 31 December 2024, 2,369 commercial vessel voyages arrived in New Zealand. Of these voyages, 203 (8.6%) arrived directly to Southland, and a further 148 (6.2%) visited the region during their time in New Zealand.

Most vessels (96.4% of voyages) were compliant with the requirements under the CRMS-Vessels. Biosecurity New Zealand issued 86 Notices of Directions (NODs) for non-compliant vessels (3.6% of voyages). Non-compliance mainly included a combination of insufficient documents and biofouling over the allowable thresholds (47 NODs). A further 9 NODs were issued to vessels that were compliant on arrival but exceeded short-stay requirements (that is, they remained in New Zealand for 29 days or more).

The 2024/25 summer cruise season finished in May 2025, with 149 voyages to New Zealand. Of these voyages, 47 (31.5%) arrived directly to Southland, and 43 (28.9%) arrived directly to Fiordland. This was the second season since the revised CRMS-Vessels included a specific section for cruise vessels. Cruise vessels have the option to operate under an MPI-approved system, which includes measures for managing topside risk and biofouling risk. Along with the revised standard, Biosecurity New Zealand has introduced new legislation that requires commercial craft (carrying 20 or more passengers, excluding crew) to actively present audio or audiovisual biosecurity information to their passengers during port disembarkation while in New Zealand.

Most cruise vessels arrived compliant with the CRMS-Vessels requirements. Of the 45 cruise vessels that arrived in New Zealand this season, 42 entered compliant with the requirements and only 3 faced biofouling non-compliance issues. Biofouling-related non-compliance is decreasing season on season (3 non-compliant vessels in the 2024/25 season, compared with 5 non-compliant vessels in the 2023/24 season and 11 in the 2022/23 cruise season).

Fisheries management



Fisheries New Zealand

Tini a Tangaroa

Role

Fisheries New Zealand works to ensure that fisheries resources are managed to provide the greatest overall benefit to New Zealanders. Our focus is the sustainability of New Zealand's wild fish stocks, aquaculture and the wider aquatic environment, now and for future generations. In line with this goal, the Guardians are charged with providing advice and recommendations to ministers and management agencies for the FMA.

Achievements

In 2024, comprehensive changes were introduced to rules for recreational fishing in the FMA, to ensure sustainability of fish stocks facing increasing fishing pressure, particularly within the less productive fiord entrances. A mandatory app-based electronic reporting system was implemented for amateur charter vessels in December 2024 to replace the previous paper-based system and provide timely, accurate data on catch at fine spatial scales.



Te Maree rock lobster potting off Fiordland.

MPI Fisheries compliance

Ministry for Primary Industries
Manatū Ahu Matua



Role

The MPI Fisheries Compliance Directorate is responsible for delivering compliance inspection services and investigations across all three fisheries sectors – commercial, recreational and customary – to support the sustainable management of New Zealand’s wild fish stocks, aquaculture and marine systems.

A team of seven fishery officers, a compliance support officer and a district manager enforce the [Fisheries Act 1996](#) and the suite of fisheries regulations. The team conducts routine surveillance and inspections, as well as undertaking investigations and intelligence analysis across the fishing sectors.

A team representative regularly attends scheduled Guardian and partner agency meetings, providing updates on all relevant fisheries compliance matters, including detected non-compliance and any emerging risks.

Achievements

Multi-agency patrolling

Over the past year, fishery officers supported three multi-day, multi-agency patrols covering most of the fiords and outer coast in the FMA. During the patrols, inspections were completed of recreational, customary and commercial fishers to check compliance with the various fishing regulations.

Recreational inspections

Sea and land patrols resulted in inspections conducted in Fiordland or of fishers returning from Fiordland. Inspections detected a range of offences, including possession of:

- unmeasurable blue cod
- undersize kōura/rock lobster
- undersize finfish
- kōura/rock lobster carrying external eggs
- kōura/rock lobster in excess of the daily limit without meeting the defence provisions ('bagging and tagging')
- unmeasurable pāua
- underwater breathing apparatus and pāua
- excess pāua
- hāpuku/groper taken from a closed area
- blue cod take from a closed area
- fishing gear in excess of the gear limits.

Commercial inspections

The team also carried out inspections of both commercial fishing vessels and licensed fish receivers who have taken or received fish from Fiordland through greater Southland. These routine inspections provide a deterrent to offending by commercial entities. They also provide an opportunity to ensure all commercial fish coming out of the FMA are being accounted for within the Quota Management System.

Offences detected in the commercial space included:

- permit holders failing to correctly operate geospatial position reporting (GPR) devices
- incorrect reporting of effort data
- failing to meet the reporting requirements, by either completing or providing reports late
- failing to mark fishing gear appropriately.

Looking ahead

Undaria in Fiordland

Over the coming year, Biosecurity New Zealand will continue working alongside Environment Southland and the Department of Conservation to contain *Undaria* within Te Puitaha/ Breaksea Sound and Tamatea/Dusky Sound, with a particular focus on keeping important anchorages free from the pest. The Fiordland *Undaria* Technical Advisory Group will be consulted as needed.

We will also continue to collaborate with all Fiordland partner agencies to implement the Fiordland Marine Biosecurity Strategy and its associated operational plan, and to participate in inter-agency activities, such as the joint-agency compliance patrols.

Recreational fishing rule changes

The Minister for Oceans and Fisheries is considering advice proposed by the Guardians on further management measures for vessel limits and gear restrictions in the FMA. Fisheries New Zealand is developing advice and considering options for implementing the proposed further management measures.

The focus is now on developing a robust monitoring programme to assess the effectiveness of these rule changes. Traditional survey methods are often logistically challenging in Fiordland, with little data available on stock status or catch for most species within the fiords.

The waters within the fiords are mostly a recreational fishery due to the prohibition on commercial fishing within the internal waters of Fiordland. Recreational catch estimates for Fiordland lack accuracy, with an insufficient resident population base to participate in the national panel surveys. To bridge these data gaps:

- Fisheries New Zealand (working with the Guardians and the Department of Conservation) has supported trialling baited underwater video survey techniques to explore their utility in monitoring the relative abundance of fish species within the fiords
- electronic reporting data from amateur charter vessels will now provide timely data on fine spatial scales
- Fisheries New Zealand is exploring options with the Guardians for supporting a trial of recreational self-reporting to capture fine-scale recreational catch data in Fiordland.

In response to interactions that fishery officers have had with recreational fishers, the Guardians will work with Fisheries New Zealand on communication of the new amateur fishing rules for Fiordland. Coupled with updates to MPI's Fishing Rules app, the communications are intended to improve the understanding of the fishing rules, which should lead to improved fisheries compliance in the region.