



2 June 2021

Kia ora,

The Minister of Conservation is making an announcement today about whitebaiting, and how we can work towards ensuring that our whitebait fishery is fair and sustainable.

Whitebait are a taonga that requires care and appropriate management to ensure that our current generation and our mokopuna can keep this tradition alive. This taonga currently faces a range of threats and pressures, including habitat loss and degradation, poor water quality, impeded fish passage within river systems, predation and fishing pressure. As a result, four of our six whitebait species are considered threatened or at risk.

On behalf of Te Papa Atawhai, I want to draw your attention to changes in whitebait regulations and invite your participation in a wider programme of information gathering to better understand whitebait, whitebaiting, and what we can do to improve whitebait fishery management.

Throughout 2018 and early 2020 Te Papa Atawhai engaged with tangata whenua and the public on existing whitebait fishing regulations, which had not been reviewed in 25 years. The main objective of that process was to start updating the regulations and make them more consistent across New Zealand. Hui with tangata whenua were undertaken around the country as well as consultation with other interests. Over 11,000 submissions were received. As a result of this engagement, regulation changes are now made to improve the fishery sustainability and equity between fishers.

For this season (starting 15<sup>th</sup> August for the country, except for the West Coast which starts on 1 September), changes have been made to the use of whitebaiting gear and spacing of whitebaiters along the lower reaches of rivers. From next year, the season will be shortened to 1<sup>st</sup> September – 30<sup>th</sup> October for all.

Customary fishing is not affected by the changes in these regulations.

These changes are part of a broader and ongoing process of improvement in whitebait fishery management and we are planning to engage with tangata whenua and other relevant stakeholders in this. Our goal is to continue to improve whitebait management over the long term. Partnering with mana whenua, whitebaiters, conservation groups, and others with an interest in whitebait will first help us build up our data on whitebait and measure the effectiveness of our whitebait management regime.

We, therefore, plan to start engagement early in this process to determine information needs and methods and are expecting more comprehensive information gathering engagement during the 2022 fishing season. For further information on this next phase, you can contact acting Aquatic Director Elizabeth Heeg (027 801 8956).

We have updated the DOC website on whitebaiting with the regulation changes should you wish to find out more detail, and we look forward to engaging with you over the coming year as we develop our programme to ensure the health of whitebait into the future.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'K O'Connor'.

Kevin O'Connor  
Deputy Director General Biodiversity (Acting)