

NZ First Responses – Questions by WWF

Please note as a disclaimer that for a lot of areas, the party has yet to finalize its policies. The questions answered draw inspiration from publicly announced policies for the upcoming elections, party principles and past party policies - which may or may not be part of NZ First Election Manifesto for 2026.

1. Increase marine protection

Commit to protecting at least 30% of Aotearoa New Zealand's ocean in high-quality, Tiriti-consistent marine protection.

NZ First advocates for protecting endangered species and marine reserves by restricting certain fishing activities in determined areas. The party also supports a "third tier" of marine reserves that allows for recreational and customary fishing while excluding commercial activities

2. Reform outdated marine protection laws

Commit to modernising marine protection legislation to ensure it is fit-for-purpose and enables Tiriti-consistent and tikanga-led tools and approaches to improve ocean health.

The party commits to managing all fishing activity under the Fisheries Act and removing the overlap in jurisdiction with the Resource Management Act (RMA).

Any reform should be evidence-based, workable for communities and industry, and provide appropriate recognition of customary interests within a framework that protects access and rights for all New Zealanders

3. Support marine protection across the Pacific and in the High Seas

Support high seas MPA proposals under the UN High Seas Treaty, including in the Lord Howe Rise/South Tasman Sea region.

NZ First's policies state that New Zealand's fishing interests in distant and international waters must be recognised and safeguarded for economic development.

Decisions on marine protected areas should be guided by robust science, New Zealand's national interests and the need to protect the legitimate interests of our fishing industry in international waters.

4. Phase out damaging fishing methods

Commit to phasing out destructive fishing practices like bottom-trawling in vulnerable marine ecosystems such as seamounts, and in the Hauraki Gulf/Tikapa Moana.

NZ First recognises concerns about bottom trawling in vulnerable marine ecosystems and supports phasing out damaging practices only where clear scientific evidence demonstrates unacceptable harm to biodiversity or critical habitats.

At the same time, NZ First acknowledges that around 70% of New Zealand's commercial fish harvest currently comes from trawl fisheries, a method used by more than 100 countries including Australia,

Canada, the US, and Japan. Any regulatory changes must therefore be practical, economically rational, and evidence-based.

Fisheries officials closely monitor the trawl footprint and work with industry to reduce environmental impacts. This includes developing innovative gear modifications and trialling alternative methods such as potting and lining for species traditionally caught by trawl.

NZ First also notes that the New Zealand fishing industry invests heavily in technology and innovation, making modern trawl methods more precise, efficient, and targeted than in the past. These improvements continue to evolve alongside consumer expectations and environmental standards.

5. Review New Zealand's fisheries management system

Commit to withdrawing the Fisheries Amendment Bill and reviewing the Quota Management System to prioritise ecosystem health, abundance, and long-term resilience.

New Zealand First considers the Quota Management System an important tool that provides long-term incentives for sustainable fisheries and the ecosystems on which they depend. We support reviewing and improving aspects of fisheries management, including bycatch systems, but would not support abandoning the QMS without clear evidence that an alternative would deliver better environmental and economic outcomes.

6. Increase transparency in commercial fishing

Commit to extending onboard camera coverage to the entire deepwater fleet.

NZ First supports the use of fit-for-purpose cameras on boats and would consider short-term loans to reduce the initial cost of this programme on the industry. Additionally, they advocate for augmenting observers on large fishing vessels with video surveillance and GPS monitoring on all commercial fishing vessels to ensure compliance.

7. Support iwi and hāpu-led marine management

Commit to supporting iwi and hapū-led marine management through resourcing for local marine management planning, strengthening customary management tools, and ensuring Mātauranga Māori is well integrated in research and management.

New Zealand First supports iwi, community and conservation groups participating in environmental and conservation projects, alongside effective local engagement. Marine management should draw on local knowledge and science while operating within a consistent national framework that protects the rights and access of all New Zealanders.

8. Strengthen protections for marine mammals

Commit to reviewing Aotearoa's network of Marine Mammal Sanctuaries and introducing fishing restrictions in areas where marine wildlife is being harmed.

New Zealand First supports protecting threatened species and their natural habitats through proactive, evidence-based conservation. Where credible evidence identifies particular fisheries or activities as causing harm to marine mammals, targeted management measures should be considered to protect vulnerable populations while remaining proportionate and practical.

9. Safeguard Aotearoa's threatened seabirds

Commit to extending mandatory seabird bycatch mitigation measures to all commercial fisheries, aligned with international best practice.

The party proposes reviewing the suitability of systems dealing with by-catch, subject to available resources.

We would support effective, scientifically proven seabird bycatch mitigation measures, particularly where evidence demonstrates significant risk, while ensuring requirements are practical, proportionate and developed in consultation with the fishing sector.

10. Prevent extractive industries damaging the ocean

Commit to opposing seabed mining applications in New Zealand waters and reinstating the ban on offshore oil and gas exploration.

New Zealand First does not support a blanket opposition to offshore resource development or reinstating the ban on offshore oil and gas exploration. Our policy supports responsible development of New Zealand's natural resources, including offshore energy potential, subject to appropriate environmental safeguards, scientific assessment and national benefit.