

Opportunity Party response to WWF's '10 Actions for a Healthy Ocean'

1. Increase marine protection

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

Opportunity strongly supports this ask. Our [Healthy Oceans](#) policy commits to expanding marine protection from less than 0.5% of Aotearoa New Zealand's ocean territory to 20% by 2030 and to 30% by 2035. This will be delivered through science-based, systematic conservation planning and in partnership with iwi and hapū, fishing communities, scientists, conservation groups and local communities.

Importantly, Opportunity does not see marine protection as simply creating more no-take reserves. We will replace the outdated Marine Reserves Act 1971 to create a suite of flexible, fit-for-purpose tools including: high-protection areas, multiple-use MPAs, species management areas, seafloor protection zones, emergency closures and sustainable-use zones. These tools will be designed around ecological needs and local circumstances.

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 Reform outdated marine protection laws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.

Opportunity strongly supports this ask. Our [Healthy Oceans](#) policy commits to replacing the 54-year-old Marine Reserves Act 1971 with modern, fit-for-purpose legislation. The current Act essentially provides one blunt tool – a complete no-take marine reserve – which can make marine protection unnecessarily cumbersome and adversarial.

Our proposed framework would recognise a broader range of protection approaches, including multiple-use areas, species protection, seafloor protection and customary tools such as rāhui. It would also embed genuine community partnership, with mātauranga Māori and local knowledge considered alongside Western science.

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.

Opportunity supports this ask. Our policy commits to ratifying the UN High Seas Treaty and actively participating in the establishment of marine protected areas and sustainable management in international waters.

We also support the creation of blue corridors across the Pacific – coordinated networks of protected areas that reflect the reality that whales, seabirds, tuna, turtles and other highly migratory species move across national boundaries. As a Pacific nation with extensive fishing interests and strong marine science capability,

Opportunity believes New Zealand should be a leader in international ocean governance.

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.

Opportunity supports this ask. We will phase out destructive bottom-contact fishing methods including bottom trawling, dredging and Danish seining.

Our proposed timeframe is:

- Immediate closures in the Hauraki Gulf/Tikapa Moana and other inshore areas facing critical ecosystem decline;
- a three-year phase-out on seamounts; and
- a five-year phase-out on other deep-sea features, including cold-water coral habitats and vulnerable benthic ecosystems.

Opportunity would provide transition assistance to affected fishing operators, including retraining, support to adopt alternative methods, or assistance to leave the industry with dignity.

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.

Opportunity strongly supports this ask. We believe the current Quota Management System is not delivering the abundant, resilient fisheries New Zealand needs. Our policy commits to a comprehensive review of fisheries management, shifting from single-species quota management to ecosystem-based fisheries management.

The reformed system would retain the economic benefits of secure catch entitlements while adding ecosystem-health requirements, bycatch limits, habitat protection and adaptive management.

We would also lift sustainability baselines substantially: management targets would rise from 40% to 50% of virgin biomass, soft limits from 20% to 40%, and hard limits from 10% to 20%.

Opportunity does not support the substance of the Fisheries Amendment Bill or the process by which it was developed, and we have proposed it should be scrapped.

6. Increase transparency in commercial fishing

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

Opportunity fully supports this ask. Our policy commits to installing cameras on all commercial fishing vessels over 8 metres, including deep-sea trawlers and scampi boats that are currently exempt.

Camera footage would be independently reviewed to verify catch reporting, monitor protected-species bycatch, ensure compliance and provide data for fisheries science. Cameras would be complemented – not replaced – by independent observers, recognising that observers provide information and scientific data that cameras cannot capture.

In short: 100% coverage, independent monitoring and genuine transparency.

7. Support iwi and hapū-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.

Opportunity strongly supports this ask. Our policy recognises Māori authority and leadership in marine management as both a Te Tiriti obligation and an opportunity to build healthier relationships with the ocean.

We will resource iwi and hapū to develop and implement marine management plans in their rohe moana; support customary tools including rāhui, mātaihai reserves and taiāpure; fund hapū-led coastal restoration; and ensure marine and fisheries reforms properly reflect Te Ao Māori and mātauranga Māori.

More broadly, iwi and hapū should be partners in marine protection planning, rather than having protection imposed through a purely central government-directed process.

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.

Opportunity supports stronger protection for marine mammals, including through our wider commitments to expand marine protected areas, phase out destructive fishing practices and introduce flexible species-management areas as part of a new marine protection toolbox for Aotearoa.

Our [Healthy Oceans](#) policy commits to targeted recovery programmes for marine mammals including New Zealand sea lions, southern right whales, and Māui and Hector's dolphins. These programmes would combine spatial protection, bycatch reduction, habitat restoration, food-source management and, where necessary, direct population management.

9. Safeguard Aotearoa's threatened seabirds

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

Opportunity supports stronger seabird protection. Our policy identifies seabirds – including albatross, petrels and penguins – as priority threatened species requiring dedicated conservation investment.

We would combine spatial protection with bycatch reduction, habitat restoration, predator control and food-source management to address the multiple pressures driving seabird decline.

Our Healthy Oceans policy also commits to cameras across all commercial fishing vessels, with footage independently reviewed to monitor protected-species bycatch.

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.

Opportunity supports this ask. Our [Healthy Oceans](#) policy commits to opposing all seabed mining applications in New Zealand's territorial sea and EEZ because the ecological risks are profound, the economic benefits speculative, and damage to deep marine ecosystems may be impossible to reverse. Indeed, the headline commitments of our Healthy Oceans policy go further - by committing to permanently ban seabed mining in New Zealand waters.

Given the rapid expansion of cheap renewable energy and increasing pressure to transition away from fossil fuel extraction globally, prospective investments in new offshore oil and gas developments are now so unattractive that few institutional investors are willing to countenance them. Noting this, we consider a reinstatement of the ban on offshore oil and gas exploration is probably unnecessary. However, for the purpose of clarity, Opportunity would not oppose a reinstatement of the ban on offshore oil and gas exploration should a future governing party seek to progress it.