

AQUACULTURE AND TOURISM IN THE COASTAL ZONE: CONFLICT AND INNOVATION IN NEW ZEALAND

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Throughout the world tourism and seafood industries are increasingly competing for coastal space. Offshore aquaculture creates additional challenges for zoning of coastal waters frequented by tourists. However, the co-location of aquaculture production with tourist venues can also provide social and economic opportunities.

Over the last 30 years, New Zealand has undergone simultaneous exponential growth of aquaculture and tourism that has intensified conflict in coastal communities. The Nelson/Marlborough region on the North end of the South Island is an attractive destination for international and domestic visitors. It is a famous wine region, and the Marlborough Sounds and Golden Bay (Able Tasman National Park) are popular among marine ecotourists seeking pristine coastal landscape and beautiful views. The Sounds also provide enclosed and sheltered waters that are ideal for both sea kayaking and marine farming.

Approximately 80% of New Zealand's aquaculture exports (primarily GreenshellTM mussels) are now grown in the region. The rapid growth of marine farms during the 1980s and 1990s resulted in a 1996 government moratorium on new permits. Later, the 2002 Resource Management Amendment required District Councils to establish Aquaculture Management Areas (AMA's) prior to granting new permits. Local residents and lucrative ecotourism business believe the mussel farms, which are multiple rows of black buoys, are unattractive. In Golden Bay, the resident supported proposal to move aquaculture management areas further offshore is causing conflict with commercial scallop fisheries.

In 2005, the New Zealand Marine Farming Association (MFA), representing 160 marine farmers from the area, developed the Top of the South Aquaculture and Seafood Trail. This 350km driving route links 21 businesses including seafood restaurants and retailers, accommodations, local tour providers, and seafood processing and marketing businesses. The goal was to encourage positive community attitudes about aquaculture.

To evaluate this strategy, we conducted field observations and interviews (June 2008) with 22 local stakeholders (District Councils, Tourism organizations, Ministry of Fisheries, Aquaculture NZ, Ministry of Tourism, and Tourism NZ) and 24 local businesses (seafood processing and marketing companies, seafood retailers, tour providers, restaurants, and accommodations). Interviews focused on the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities associated with the Trail, characteristics of local coastal tourism, and innovative and collaborative development strategies. The majority of participants (87%) also answered a paper survey regarding attitudes and perspectives about tourism and seafood in the region.

Analysis demonstrated potential for the Trail to serve as a driver for regional networking and public outreach. Capacity building was recommended to strengthen linkages between sectors. Subsequent collaboration among local fisheries and tourism agencies and businesses to support a tourist consumer survey and develop a Trail website is a good first step.

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