

Six-site Marlborough aquaculture plan accepted for Fast-track

Media release, Marine Farming Association
2 June 2026

A climate change adaptation initiative designed to future-proof Marlborough's shellfish farming industry against warming oceans has been accepted for referral under the Fast-track Approvals Act. The project could unlock up to \$589 million in annual mussel exports and create as many as 983 jobs.

The *Fit for a Changing World – Marlborough Fast-track Aquaculture Projects* application is a collaborative undertaking by a group of Marlborough's mussel and oyster operators. It is now progressing toward a substantive application before an expert panel.

The package covers six new aquaculture sites comprising three dedicated mussel nurseries, two new mussel farms and a new mussel, seaweed and flat oyster farm across the outer Marlborough Sounds, Te Hoiere Pelorus Sound and Queen Charlotte Sound. The nursery sites are designed to adapt the industry to a changing climate by securing access to cooler, nutrient-rich waters.

Marine Farming Association President Jonathan Large says the application is fundamentally a climate change adaptation initiative that will future-proof one of Marlborough's most important industries.

"Marlborough produces the lion's share of New Zealand's Greenshell mussels, but our industry is at an impasse. It's not that we're short of farming space, but we're short of nursery space," Large says.

"Warming oceans mean that during summer we're losing too many baby mussels before they reach the size where they can be transferred onto our main farms. This application is about ensuring our industry has access to enough cool, nutrient-rich waters to keep producing the healthy spat we need to future-proof aquaculture in our region."

"Access to these new spaces will do more than just protect what we've got, it will open the door to significant growth in production, exports and jobs for the top of the South."

An analysis by Aquaculture Direct found that the six sites combined could generate mussel export revenue of up to \$589 million annually, and result in an estimated \$9.8 million a year in flat oyster exports. Across farming, processing and associated services, the projects could create up to 983 full-time-equivalent jobs.

"Aquaculture is already one of Marlborough's biggest employers, and this application will create hundreds of new jobs. Every additional tonne of mussels and oysters we can grow will support jobs well beyond the water, with benefits flowing onto local engineers, transport operators, equipment suppliers and other small businesses," Large says.

Beyond the economic returns, the applicants have committed to sharing the benefits with iwi and the wider community. The Marine Farming Association has committed to making 20 percent of the nursery lines it is granted available for lease to Te Tau Ihu iwi, and will direct \$40k from its site into a contestable fund supporting community and environment projects across the region.

The six sites have been deliberately spread across three different water bodies – the outer Marlborough Sounds, Te Hoiere Pelorus Sound and Queen Charlotte Sound.

Sam Godsiff, Chief Operating Officer at Clearwater Mussels, who would operate the proposed Hapuku Rock nursery and Okuri Bay farm, says the geographic spread of the sites combined with the inherently low-impact nature of aquaculture means the environmental impact will be small.

"Shellfish farming is one of the lowest-impact ways to produce animal protein. In fact, the carbon footprint of New Zealand mussels is right down there with plant-based proteins like tofu. As filter

feeders, mussels and oysters can actually improve the water around them, pulling out excess nutrients and particles as they grow”.

The project supports the Government’s Aquaculture Development Plan goal of lifting national aquaculture sales revenue from \$650 million to \$3 billion by 2035.

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About the Marine Farming Association

The Marine Farming Association Incorporated is the member organisation representing mussel, salmon and oyster farmers across Marlborough and Tasman. It operates and licenses a network of nursery sites that supply juvenile mussels to its members, and advocates for the sustainable growth of marine farming in the top of the South.

About the project

Fit for a Changing World – Marlborough Fast-track Aquaculture Projects is a coordinated package of six coastal-permit applications under the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024, lodged jointly by the Marine Farming Association, Apex Marine Farm Limited, Clearwater Mussels Limited, P H Redwood & Co Limited and Talley’s Limited.

The six proposed sites are Papatua Bay (Port Gore), Guards Bay, Hapuku Rock and Okuri Bay in the outer Marlborough Sounds; Richmond Bay in Te Hoiere Pelorus Sound; and Onapua Bay in Queen Charlotte Sound. Three of the sites, Papatua Bay, Guards Bay and Hapuku Rock, are proposed as dedicated nurseries for Greenshell mussel spat and seed. Okuri Bay and Richmond Bay are proposed as new mussel farms (usable for spat, seed and crop), while Onapua Bay is proposed as a new mussel, flat oyster and seaweed farm.

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