

WWF Short Briefing: the ever increasing destruction of the sea floor in New Zealand/ Aotearoa

MPI reports that the annual area trawled has declined over time.¹ However, the annual area trawled is not the same as the **overall impact**. This is because benthic habitats and species can take many decades to recover, after fishing has ceased, if they recover at all². The overall impact should be considered as the **cumulative trawl footprint - which increases every year**.

While the **newly trawled areas** are small in the vast scale of Aotearoa’s oceans, by drawing a comparison on land – we can better see significance of the growing impact. Statistics gathered from Fisheries New Zealand (FNZ) are presented in Table 1.

Key findings:

- Over the ten years from 2009-2019, **3279.7 km²** of virgin sea floor was trawled for the first time. To be clear, this is not just filling-in-the-gaps of previously trawled areas, but new areas being explored/ fished.
- This is equivalent to **320,000 rugby fields** (around 1 hectare in size) or more than **3 times the size of Auckland** (1,086 km).
- Most of this new bottom trawling (around 75%) was in the inshore fisheries. Further information is required to build understanding about where and for what target species the expansion is taking place in the inshore.

Table 1: Areas trawled (km²) for the first time for Deepwater Tier 1 and 2 fishstocks, using a baseline trawl footprint from 1990–94.³

Fishing year	Area trawled for the first time	Main target/area
2009	96.6 km ²	

¹ <https://www.mfe.govt.nz/publications/marine/issue-3-our-activities-sea-are-affecting-marine-environment>

² Clark M. R., Bowden, D. A., Rowden A. A., Stewart R. 2019. Little Evidence of Benthic Community Resilience to Bottom Trawling on Seamounts After 15 Years. *Frontiers in Marine Science* **6**.

³ Data source: <https://fs.fish.govt.nz/Doc/24889/AEBR-260-Extent-Of-Commercial-Trawl-And-Dredge-Bottom-Contact-1990-2019-4152.pdf.ashx>

2010	59.9 km ²	
2011	58.7 km ²	
2012	36.7 km ²	Most new cell area was from the southern Chatham Rise in Statistical Areas 409 and 410 for HOK; off the southern west coast South Island in Statistical Areas 032–034 for BAR; off northwest South Island (Statistical Area 036) and off North-eastern North Island in Statistical Area 004 for SCI; and to the north of Campbell Rise in Statistical Areas 607 and 618 for SBW
2013	35 km ²	Most new cell area was from the southern Chatham Rise in Statistical Areas 408 and 409 for HOK; off the northwest South Island in Statistical Area 036 for JMA; off south-western South Island in Statistical Area 031 for LIN; and on features off the east coast North Island in Statistical Areas 045-047 for ORH
2014	34.2 km ²	Most new cell area was from the Challenger Plateau for ORH off the west coast South Island in Statistical Areas 702 and 703
2015	157.7 km ²	Most of this new cell area was trawled for orange roughy across the north-eastern Challenger Plateau in Statistical Area 701
2016	104.5 km ²	Most of this new cell area was trawled for orange roughy across the West Coast South Island in the Challenger Plateau, Statistical Area 702 - 704
2017	59.4 km ² ⁴	Hoki tows and orange roughy tows accounted for about one-third each of this new cell footprint, with the hoki tows largely relating to extensions of the main fishery areas whereas the orange roughy tows were mainly on the Challenger Plateau off the west coast of the South Island, with further extension of the 2016 footprint representing new exploration for orange roughy.
2018	32.8km ²	
2019	85.7km ²	
TOTAL expansion of the trawl footprint for deep-water tier 1 and 2 fish stocks over 10 years from 2009-2019 = 760.8 km²		

⁴ <https://fs.fish.govt.nz/Doc/24749/AEBR-2019-229-bottom-contact-trawl-fishing.pdf.ashx>

Table 2: Areas trawled (km²) for the first time for inshore fishstocks, using a baseline trawl footprint from 2008.⁵

Fishing year	Area trawled for the first time	Main target/area
2009	775.9 km ²	
2010	576.4 km ²	
2011	296.9 km ²	
2012	148.3 km ²	
2013	142.4 km ²	
2014	161 km ²	
2015	130.2 km ²	
2016	79.1 km ²	
2017	80.5 km ² ⁶	
2018	65.9 km ²	
2019	62.3 km ²	
TOTAL expansion of the trawl footprint for inshore 2 fish stocks over 10 years from 2009-2019 = 2518.9 km²		

⁵ Data source: <https://fs.fish.govt.nz/Doc/24889/AEBR-260-Extent-Of-Commercial-Trawl-And-Dredge-Bottom-Contact-1990-2019-4152.pdf.ashx>

⁶ <https://fs.fish.govt.nz/Doc/24749/AEBR-2019-229-bottom-contact-trawl-fishing.pdf.ashx>