

SUMMARY OF FISHING REGULATIONS

The Department of Conservation is responsible for managing New Zealand’s whitebait fisheries. This can be done more efficiently and effectively with the help and support of whitebait fishers. This is a summary of the whitebaiting regulations highlighting the main points, and some of the issues affecting the fishery.

Note 1: This pamphlet relates only to the West Coast of the South Island. There are separate whitebait fishing regulations for the rest of New Zealand for which a separate pamphlet is available.

Note 2: This information is a guide only, it has no legal standing, nor does it contain all the rules. Please familiarise yourself with the Whitebait Fishing (West Coast) Regulations 1994, Amendment No. 2 and Amendment Regulations 2000. Copies of the regulations can be purchased from the conservation office at Hokitika.

Fishing Season

The whitebait season for the West Coast of the South Island is 1 September to 14 November inclusive. The taking of whitebait at other times is prohibited. Fishing is only permitted between 5am and 8pm OR between 6am and 9pm when New Zealand “Daylight Saving” is being observed.

Fishing Gear

“Fishing gear” includes all nets, screens, lines, devices or things that are used to take whitebait or are capable of being used to take whitebait. Whitebait nets should not have a mouth larger than 4.5metres measured on the inside of the net frame: have framing material that is wider than 120mm: or be longer than 3.5m in length. No person can set or use more than one whitebait net at a time. Only one net per whitebait stand or licensed structure.

No fishing gear should:

- Exceed more than one third of the water channel width;
- Be used in conjunction with another person to exceed more than one third of the channel width;
- Screens should not exceed three metres in length.



Find out the regulations first

Stay on established tracks and use existing facilities

Take care of your gear

Remove rubbish

Dispose of toilet waste properly

Be careful with chemicals

Respect our cultural heritage

Take only the food you need

Consider plants and animals

Consider other people

Every person who sets or uses a whitebait net must remain within 10 metres of the net or of a licensed structure on which a net is set. Fishing gear (other than a licensed structure) must be removed from the water at the end of fishing or the end of the day, whichever is the earlier.

General

No person shall (among other things):

- Fish from any bridge;
- Fish within 40m of a licensed structure that is being fished;
- Possess whitebait in conjunction with any whitebait net that is not permitted to be used under the whitebait regulations whether or not that net is being used in fishing at the time;
- Discard or dump on shore any fish taken when fishing for whitebait;
- Fish for or take whitebait from any area that is not tidal, or that is upstream of any back peg by the side of the rivers specified in the third schedule of the regulations. Rivers that have back pegs are: Awarua, Hollyford, Smoothwater, Cascade, Arawhata, Waiatoto, Okuru, Turnbull, Haast, Waita, Moeraki, Paringa, Mahitahi, Jacobs, Manakaiaua, Hunts, Karangarua, Omoeroa, Waitangitaona, Whataroa, Poerua, Wanganui, Waitaha, Mikonui, Totara, Hokitika, Arahura, Houhou, Waimea, Serpentine, Taramakau, New River, Grey, Punakaiki, Pororari, Fox, Okari, Nile, Buller, Orowaiti, Mokihinui, Little Wanganui, Granite Creek, Karamea, Oparara, Kohaihai and Heaphy Rivers.

Unlawfully taken fish shall be immediately and carefully returned to the waters from which they were taken.

Nothing in these regulations permits any person fishing for whitebait to interfere with, alter or modify the natural bed or banks of any river, stream, estuary or channel.



Protect plants and animals

Remove rubbish

Bury toilet waste

Keep streams and lakes clean

Take care with fires

Camp carefully

Keep to the track

Consider others

Respect our cultural heritage

Enjoy your visit

Toitu te whenua (Leave the land undisturbed)

Closed Areas

No person shall fish or take whitebait from:

- The area of about 2.5 acres known as Kongahu Swamp located north of Granite Creek to the east of the main road approximately 6.5km south of Karamea.
- Mahinapua Creek to the south side of the Hokitika River; any tributary of Mahinapua Creek; Lake Mahinapua and any stream running into the lake.
- The south bank of the Hokitika River from a point 500m downstream from the state highway bridge to the sea.
- The area known as the Hapuka River (including any tributary stream of the Hapuka River) that extends to the sea on the south bank and to the Okuru Lagoon on the north bank.
- Any tributary stream of the Waiatoto River and the waters of the Waiatoto River above the mean high water mark.
- The north bank of the Cascade River between a point 20m upstream from Old Man Creek to the sea.
- Old Man Creek
- Barn Creek that enters the Cascade River and any tributary stream of Barn Creek.
- The Awarua River above the Department of Conservation swing bridge.
- All rivers, streams and tributaries in Fiordland between Yates Point in the north and Puysegur Point in the south.
- Baker Creek (a tributary of the Karamea River estuary)
- Blackwater Creek (to within 200m of the tide gate at Kongahu Swamp).
- Bradshaws (Martins) Creek (a tributary of the Buller River)
- Bullock Creek (a tributary of the Pororari River)
- All tributaries of the Punakaiki River
- Ounatai Lagoon (a tributary of the Waitaha River)
- Oneone Creek (a tributary of the Wanganui River)
- Hikimutu Lagoon (a tributary of the Poerua River)

- Crikey Creek (a tributary of the Haast River)
- Nolans Creek (a tributary of the Okuru River)
- Collyer Creek (a tributary of the Turnbull River)

Penalties

Persons offending against these regulations may be fined up to \$5000.

Whitebait Stands

The licensing and administration of whitebait stands is the responsibility of the West Coast Regional Council (PO Box 66, Greymouth).

The Department of Conservation retains responsibility for ensuring compliance to the whitebait regulations as they pertain to the use of stands.

WHITEBAIT BIOLOGY

Whitebait catch consists primarily of the young of three species: inanga (*Galaxias maculatus*), koaro (*G. brevipinnis*) and banded kokopu (*G. fasciatus*); inanga is by far the most commonly caught species.

Giant kokopu (*G. argenteus*), short jawed kokopu (*G. postvectis*) and smelt (*Retropinna retropinna*) are also occasionally present along with the young of many other fish such as eels, bullies and trout.

All whitebait species spend part of their life cycle in fresh water and part in the sea. Tiny fish hatch in late autumn and are carried along rivers out to sea where they live and grow over the winter.

In late winter and early spring whitebait migrate back up rivers and streams, finally settling and growing in bush covered streams and swamps. The start of the migration is thought to be influenced by river flows (i.e. shortly after floods) and phases of the moon.

Mature inanga adults migrate downstream to lower river sections and estuaries to spawn in grasses covered by water during spring tides. The eggs remain in the grass until the next spring tide covers them again when the young hatch and are carried out to sea. The spawning habits of other whitebait species are not well known.

PHYSICAL HABITATS

The five galaxiid species are found in many different habitats from lowland swamps to rocky streams. Their presence appears to be closely tied to overhead cover and waterside vegetation.

Shortjawed kokopu and giant kokopu live in swampy and heavily vegetated streams, often in pools over a mud bottom. Banded kokopu and koaro prefer fast flowing rocky bottomed streams with forest cover. Inanga are less “fussy” but are generally found in lower catchment waters.

One of the major problems affecting the whitebait fishery is the destruction of habitat for egg laying or adult fish. As whitebait adults tend to live in natural swamps and bush covered streams it is in the best interest of whitebaiters to ensure that adequate areas of these habitats remain. The Department of Conservation has been active in identifying whitebait spawning habitat and arranging for its protection. Protection has involved seeking the co-operation of landowners to have spawning areas fenced off from stock. The department sees the protection of whitebait spawning and habitat as playing a major role in enhancing the viability of the fishery.

Another major problem is barriers that stop young fish from getting to adult habitat.

Please note that whitebait are native fish and the giant and short jawed kokopu are under threat in many areas. Your assistance in keeping the whitebait fishery healthy not only benefits you, but the health of New Zealand’s natural living systems. Don’t take more than you need.

Further Reading

You find more information about whitebait in the following publications:
 McDowall R.M. (1990): *New Zealand Freshwater Fishes - A natural history and guide.* Heinemann Reed, Auckland.
 McDowall R.M. (1984): *The New Zealand Whitebait Book.* Reed Wellington (reprinted 1992).

Illustrations

Cover illustrations of various whitebait species are reproduced courtesy of Dr R.M. McDowall.

WEST COAST TAI POUTINI CONSERVANCY CONTACTS

Buller *Kawatiri* Area
 Russell Street
 Westport
 Ph 03 788 8008

Karamea Field Centre
 Main Road
 Karamea
 Ph 03 782 6852

Punakaiki Visitor Centre
 Main Road
 Punakaiki
 Ph 03 731 1893

Greymouth *Mawberanui* Area
 23 High Street
 Greymouth
 Ph 03 768 0427

Reefton Field Centre
 67 Broadway Street
 Reefton
 Ph 03 732 8391

Hokitika Area &
 West Coast Conservancy
 Sewell Street
 Hokitika
 Ph 03 755 8301

Franz Josef *Waiatu* Area
 Main Road
 Franz Josef
 Ph 03 752 0796

South Westland *Weheka* Area
 Main Road
 Fox Glacier
 Ph 03 751 0807

Haast Visitor Centre
 SH 6
 Haast
 Ph 03 750 0809

DO YOU KNOW YOUR WHITEBAIT SPECIES? WHITEBAIT OF FIVE GALAXIID SPECIES CANNOT BE RECOGNISED WITH EASE BUT DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS CAN BE SUMMARISED AS FOLLOWS:

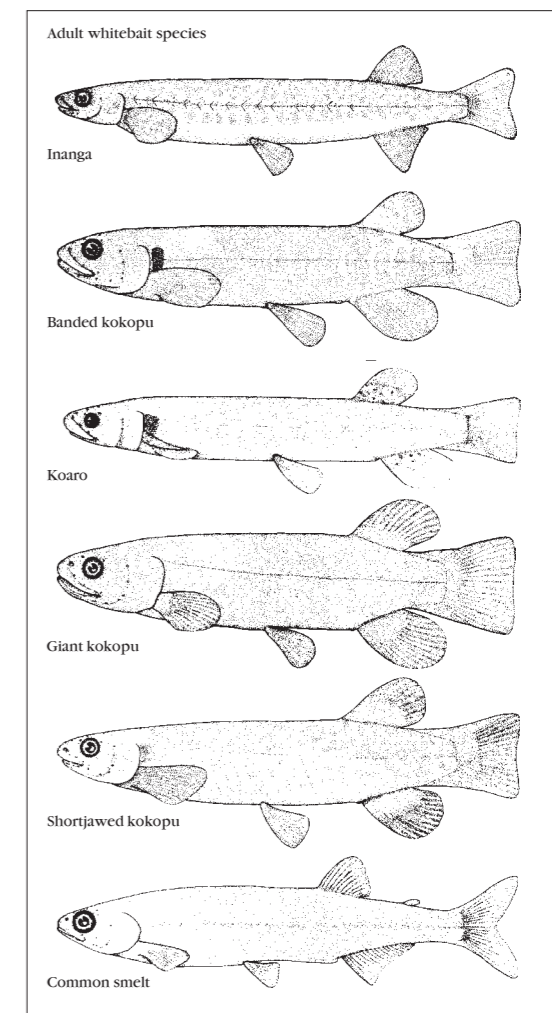
SPECIES	COMMON	JAWS	FINS	PIGMENTS	COLOUR	SIZE
<i>Galaxias maculatus</i>	Inanga	small mouth with lower and upper jaws even	dorsal fin directly above anal fin	large black spots ahead of dorsal fin sometimes right forward and along the sides	translucent, blue-green when fresh; glassy clear	50-65mm
<i>Galaxias brevipinnis</i>	Koaro	shorter lower jaw	anal fin starts below the middle of dorsal fin; large prominent pectoral fins	very small pigments in front of dorsal fin and along the lateral line	sometime opaque milky white when fresh	45-55mm
<i>Galaxias fasciatus</i>	Banded kokopu	lower jaw a little shorter than the upper jaw; mouth reaching to about the anterior eye margin	dorsal fin directly above anal fin and prominent pectoral fins	very small pigments in front of dorsal fin and along the lateral line	golden, pale amber when fresh	30-45mm
<i>Galaxias argenteus</i>	Giant kokopu	large mouth extending below the eye	dorsal fin not directly above anal fin	very small pigments in front of dorsal fin and along the lateral line	golden	45-50mm
<i>Galaxias postvectis</i>	Short-jawed kokopu	much shorter lower jaw	dorsal fin not directly above anal fin	very small pigments in front of dorsal fin and along the lateral line	little coloration	50-55mm

NB: the above species are ranked by abundance (although koaro and banded kokopu sometimes swap in abundance). Primary criteria are in bold. Size can vary and banded kokopu only can be distinguished by its small size. Koaro and shortjawed kokopu are very difficult to distinguish. The Department of Conservation has an interest in all species but information on the kokopu species is of particular interest and would be welcomed.

Whitebait

Information and fishing regulations

FOR THE WEST COAST OF THE SOUTH ISLAND ONLY



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