

**Sport Fishing Council Annual General Meeting**

**Paihia, 24-25 September 2010**

**Speech by Hon Phil Heatley, Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture**

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to address your conference – the first time under your new name.

I understand you have received recognition from the Sport and Recreation Council (SPARC) for the work you're doing with them to "make New Zealand the world's most active nation" which is great.

Your structure, governance and international affiliation have been recognised as features SPARC is looking for in developing partnerships with a wide variety of sports organisations.

The fact you represent 32,000 passionate fishers and 57 clubs throughout New Zealand speaks volumes for your work promoting fisheries management, sustainability and education - in fact every aspect of one of New Zealand's most popular recreational pastimes.

I'd also like to acknowledge Sport Fishing's contribution to research, an area of increasing emphasis for the Government and the Ministry as we look to enhance our fisheries management. It's also to see Hiwi the Kiwi delivering the 'Fishing for the Future' message to children everywhere.

Your vision statement talks about ‘Pathways to Sustainable Marine Fishing for all New Zealanders’.

There’s plenty in common with the goal of Fisheries 2030, the Government’s plan of action for New Zealand’s fisheries.

The goal of Fisheries 2030 is: “New Zealanders maximising benefits from the use of fisheries within environmental limits”.

The Government’s goals for economic growth in the fishing sector need to be achieved while ensuring enjoyment for amateur and customary fishers.

These two aims aren’t mutually exclusive. A healthy marine environment is vital for all users.

We need to keep building our understanding, and how we can best balance the various uses of our fisheries resource, recognising the level of use that resource can support in a sustainable way.

I know there are some differences of opinion on some aspects of Fisheries 2030. With a number of different groups who all value our fisheries highly, some different views are to be expected.

I think Fisheries 2030 strikes a good balance and gives us a pathway forward.

## **Participation**

Before I talk about fisheries management and engagement with that, I'd like to acknowledge the contribution of your Patron, John Chibnall.

John's work was deservedly recognised in this year's Queens Birthday Honours list.

John is the epitome of the professional volunteer without whose efforts our fisheries management would be much the poorer.

I particularly want to acknowledge John's valuable input to the Ministry's Northern Recreational Fishers Forum representing Northland fishers of which I'm a very keen member.

He was also a member of the Fisheries Plan Advisory Group for the Northland scallop plan, the fruits of which are now being delivered a month into the new scallop season.

Turning to fisheries management, a topic which I believe will generate much discussion over the next two days of your AGM. There's now a new engagement model. I encourage you to use it effectively; to take part and have your say.

I can assure you that the Government and the Ministry will work constructively to accommodate and support the sector as much as we practically can.

We'll do this in the context of Fisheries 2030 with a 'better and less' approach.

By that I mean especially 'better and less' demands on your time as committed volunteers, as well as 'better and less' regulation.

## **Engagement**

I have a personal view about recreational engagement. I've been engaging with the recreational sector in quite a different way from the way previous Ministers have done it. Not necessarily better, just differently – and I've found this approach very helpful.

I find the new approach, which involves bringing together groups of experts to consider particular issues, quite informative for me.

### **Engagement example number 1 - Recreational Charter Vessel Reporting Group**

This is a good one to start with, because your President, Richard Baker, was a member of that group.

One of National's fishing policies was to support charter vessel operations to develop a catch reporting system, to improve our overall knowledge of recreational catches.

I received a briefing from the Ministry of Fisheries outlining options for amateur catch reporting in early 2009.

To help me assess the proposal I decided to convene an expert group from the recreational sector. I discussed potential members with the Ministry and then contacted the group.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June we flew them to Wellington for what turned out to be a free, frank and very valuable meeting.

As well as Richard Baker, the group consisted of:

- Barry Bird – Seabird Charters (Nelson)
- Keith Ingram – fishing editor, recreational representative
- Brett Rathe – Assassin Fishing Charters (Warkworth)
- Peter Saul – Lady Jess Charters (Whangarei).

The result was constructive feedback on the options originally given to me in the Final Advice Paper provided by the Ministry.

The Ministry changed several of the proposals, including reducing the cost of registration. I made it clear to the Ministry that simple operation of the scheme is crucial, and that any information received (including the location of favourite fishing spots) would be strictly confidential.

The Ministry has worked hard to make sure fishers are well informed for the start of implementation in a few days, on the first of October.

I encourage you to spread the word and send any questions you might have into the Ministry if you can't find the answer on their website.

## **Engagement example number 2 – research to improve amateur catch estimation (RIACE)**

Another government priority is well resourced survey and monitoring work to better quantify the total extent and location of amateur fishing catches.

In late 2009 the Ministry briefed me on three options for the delivery of improved amateur estimates.

Again, I asked the Ministry to give me the names of experts from the amateur / recreational sector to form a group to test the Ministry proposals.

This group flew to Wellington in February this year:

- Eric Jorgensen – Blue Cod Management Group
- Alan Key – Guardians of Fiordland
- Derrick Paul – NZ Recreational Fishing Council
- Trish Rea – Option 4
- Geoff Rowling – NZ Recreational Fishing Council
- Kim Walshe – Amateur Fisheries Management Advisory Committee (AFMAC).

I asked this group to give me their comments on three options for the Ministry to consider in providing me with its final advice.

The three options were:

- Develop and implement a large-scale multi-species (LSMS) survey from October 2010 to 2012 as part of an integrated harvest estimation system
- Deliver additional local and regional targeted research on priority species and areas, and use external sources for national level in future
- Develop and implement a LSMS survey project from 1 October 2010 to 1 October 2011, independent from other research on amateur fisheries.

There was broad agreement for a comprehensive, multi-species survey, supporting the Ministry's preferred approach.

The upshot is that the largest study of recreational fishing in a decade will start before the end of this year.

The Government has budgeted \$5 million over the next four years to get the information we need to greatly improve our understanding of how many people fish, dive and gather shellfish, where they fish and how much they catch.

We want to get as many of you involved as possible. The results will give me confidence to set catch limits that meet your needs.

This is on top of the national Ministry of Fisheries and SPARC surveys and effective research and management work that is going on locally, such as in the Marlborough Sounds with blue cod.

These projects will combine to give us the most comprehensive picture of recreational fishing - and the state of our fisheries in general - that we've ever had.

Work on designing the projects is well under way, with research due to start in time for the 2011-2012 summer fishing season.

### **Engagement example 3 – Blue Cod in the Marlborough Sounds**

In July 2008 my predecessor, Hon Jim Anderton, decided to implement a four-year temporary closure for recreational fishing for blue cod in the inner Marlborough Sounds.

In March 2009 I announced the formation of the Blue Cod Management Group (BCMG) with a brief to develop a sustainable management plan for the fishery so it could be opened within the four years.

The BCMG members are:

- Beryl Archer, scenic charter vessel operator, committee member of the Tennyson Inlet Boat club and a member of the Penzance, Tuna Bays Property Owners Association
- Martin Barlow – President TasFish, member ToS Rec Fishing Forum
- Mark Baxter, MRFA representative and recreational charter boat operator
- John Duncan, Challenger Inshore Fin Fish (Cliff) Fish Plan Advisory Group (FPAG) member, Pelorus Boat Club and ToS Rec Forum member



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- Michael Hill, CIFF FPAG member, SoundFish representative, and Kenepuru and Pelorus Sound Community Board
- Eric Jorgensen, President Port Underwood Association, local residents representative on Picton Ward Forum (the advisory group to MDC), SoundFish representative, ToS Rec Forum member, MRFA member, Honorary Fisheries Officer.

The BCMG has completed its draft plan and the Ministry is now consulting on proposals for reopening the Marlborough Sounds blue cod fishery. Submissions close next week and I encourage you to have your say.

In summary, I appreciate the way these groups went about their tasks and prepared well informed expert advice on specialist topics.

Their contribution gives me confidence that my decision making will be based on the best available information.

You can expect me to use the same process when we consider issues such as recreation-only areas.

You might have some other topics or issues that you believe would be appropriate for me to call on expert advice. I invite you to consider those.

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## **Changes to consultation**

The former Minister of Fisheries, Hon David Benson-Pope, formed the Amateur Fishing Ministerial Advisory Committee (AFMAC) in July 2005 to give him independent advice on strategic recreational fishing matters.

I am thinking about changing AFMAC to formalise the ability to call in specialist groups to address specific but far-reaching recreational fishing issues.

I think this will work better for me - and for the sector - than having general conversations without specific objectives or outcomes.

## **Ministry of Fisheries engagement**

Obviously I can't meet everyone so the Ministry has changed the way it works and engages to better reflect the government's priorities.

There's a new approach to regional forums designed to make the best use of your time in a focused and cost effective way.

There are six new recreational forums aligned with Fisheries Management Areas. These forums meet three times a year. There's also a national meeting.

All six forums were due to have met for the first time by now. I encourage you to use them as a means of establishing your regional and national priorities, and helping us work towards implementing them.

Streamlining of the engagement process needs to go hand in hand with good access to and input into decision-making processes – and I am sure that's what you will experience.

## **Fisheries plans**

Fisheries management and fisheries plans are central to Fisheries 2030, which is why they'll also take centre stage at your forum meetings.

In short, fisheries plans describe what we want our fisheries to look like and how we want them to be managed.

A new approach to fisheries plans is already up and running in Deepwater fisheries and will be across all fisheries by the middle of next year.

The old approach to fisheries plans was too resource-intensive and was taking too long to deliver. Faster results and fewer demands on stakeholders are what we're looking for.

The new approach will set up just five national fisheries plans – there were about 27 in the past – one each for Deepwater and Middle-depth Fisheries, Highly Migratory Species, Inshore Finfish, Inshore Shellfish and Seaweeds, and Freshwater fisheries.

The biggest change from the previous approach to fisheries plans will be in inshore fisheries.

I have recently met with the Ministry on Deepwater and Middle-depth and Highly Migratory Species plans. The Ministry is about to consult on fishery-specific chapters for albacore, skipjack and large pelagic species in support of the plan.

Do take the opportunities to have your say. Your contribution to fisheries plans via the new regional forum process will also be very welcome.

## **Regulation**

Regulatory reform is an important priority for the Government. Regulatory certainty is essential for all fisheries stakeholders.

We will introduce new regulation only when we're satisfied that it is required, reasonable and robust. We'll also be getting rid of unnecessary regulations.

We're aiming to make the regulatory framework more streamlined, fit-for-purpose, user-friendly and easy to understand.

In the process, we can't - and won't - compromise environmental protection and the gathering of crucial information.

Across government, we're looking for an appropriate balance between less red tape, cost savings and sustainable management of all our natural resources.

### **Recreation-only areas**

The Government remains committed to recreational, customary and commercial agreement on the location of significant recreation-only fishing reserves as one way to meet the needs of recreational fishers. This is one of my priorities for the Fisheries and Aquaculture portfolio.

It isn't about forcing anyone out; it's about making sure there is good access for all sectors at minimum cost and disruption.

After discussions with a number of recreational fishing leaders and hearing their views, as a first step I asked the leadership of the commercial fishing industry to identify potential areas where constraints on commercial fishing activity might enhance the recreational fishing experience.

Once I have received the industry's proposals and reviewed them, I'll be able to decide on the most appropriate next steps, naturally involving recreational fishing advocates as well as customary fishers – probably as an expert group to start with depending on the region or fishery involved.

## **Aquaculture**

I can't miss this opportunity to mention aquaculture development, because it's a key feature of the Government's economic growth strategy.

The potential for aquaculture is huge – with the right regulatory platform in place and appropriate consideration of all fishing interests, including recreational interests.

We acknowledge that there is competition for the use of marine space – this will always be taken into account, as well as environmental and sustainability considerations.

In July Cabinet delivered a second series of decisions so we can move closer towards freeing up aquaculture development and supporting the industry's goal of \$1 billion a year in sales by 2025.

My clear understanding is that extra space will be needed to generate plenty more production, but also that the opportunities for making better use of current space to farm higher value species, including finfish, are huge.

There will be safeguards in place to protect the interests of other users of the marine environment, including the test administered by the Ministry that ensures aquaculture cannot proceed if it would have an undue effect on recreational fishing.

A select committee process will follow the introduction of legislation later this year, which will give you another chance to have your say. We're looking to have the new law in place by early next year.

## **Species**

Your organising committee asked me to talk about the current situation with kahawai.

You have been consulted on proposals for the review of sustainability measures for all kahawai stocks and I expect to make my decision in the next week.

I have an open mind on the options presented to me.

The KAH 1 sustainability review is supported by new stock assessment information. All other kahawai stocks were also been reviewed, but no new stock assessment information is available for these stocks.

You're not the Big Game Fishing Council any more, but I know you still like them. I'd like to talk for a moment on the state of Pacific tuna and billfish.

The current scientific advice for key tuna stocks in the whole of the Pacific can be summarised like this:

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- Skipjack isn't overfished and no overfishing is happening at current levels of fishing effort.
- Bigeye tuna - There's too much fishing going on, the stock is declining - and the way it's going it might soon drop below sustainable levels. We're getting into unsustainable territory, which is something New Zealand is working hard to help prevent.
- Albacore (the south west Pacific stock) isn't overfished and there is no overfishing at current levels of fishing effort
- Yellowfin isn't overfished, but reductions in fishing effort are desirable to reduce the risk of potential overfishing.

With regard to swordfish, the scientific committee of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission has cautioned against any increase in fishing effort on the south west Pacific stock.

New Zealand has been working with other Pacific Island countries to develop and implement measures to reduce fishing effort for bigeye and yellowfin.

We've also started work with other countries to improve the management of the south west Pacific albacore fishery to avoid the potential for overfishing.

We're looking to make sure national limits on the catch of swordfish apply.

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New Zealand is at the margins of the range of several highly migratory species that are seasonally present in our waters.

There are a number of factors that can affect the distribution of these species in our waters. For example, Ministry research shows that availability of albacore in our waters varies on a three to four year cycle, roughly coinciding with El Nino.

Fishers have reported the progressive decline of yellowfin tuna in New Zealand waters over recent years. This is a matter of concern and research has been commissioned to identify possible causes.

It appears that more than just climatic cycles may be at play here.

## **Sustainability round**

Earlier this week I announced my decisions on changes to catch limits for the coming fishing year.

As usual, these decisions cover a range of inshore and deepwater species.

I have looked to make sure that my decisions balance utilisation and sustainability based on the best available information.

## **Summer education programme**

The Ministry is currently working on its next public awareness programme for the summer recreational fishing season.

The last two campaigns, 'Size Does Matter' and 'Every Fish Counts', were very successful in raising awareness of the rules and promoting good behaviour.

As passionate guardians of our fisheries, I encourage you to get in behind the next campaign and help us push the messages.

I note your promotion of ethical fishing practices in your educational planning, so there's evidently plenty of synergy going on there.

## **Conclusion**

I wish you well for your AGM. There are some interesting challenges ahead for fisheries management and I hope you can help us meet them.