

President's report 2022

As I contemplated what to write in my last annual president report, I can't help reflecting back on what drew me to joining the NZSFC board and subsequently becoming President for the last 4 years. It all started with a very narrow focus, morphed into broad focus of what NZSFC needed to become, and now crystallised into what I believe is a very simple but broad reaching mission.

In 2012 I had two concerns, the emergence of braid backing used with monofilament top shots and how the IGFA rule in play at that time, needed to change; and the continued absence/disappearance of Yellowfin Tuna from our waters. I took the view that continually asking questions from outside wasn't getting me anywhere, and the only way to get progress was to work from within. Fortunately, rejoining the board after a brief spell a couple of years earlier, wasn't difficult as Zone 6 Waikato/Taranaki had not provided a board representative since I had stepped out a couple of years earlier.

Five years later in 2017, after a fairly lumpy road of swings and misses, the IGFA changed the rules for backing and any breaking strain of backing was finally allowed.

Ten years later the battle for yellowfin tuna continues and we now also have declining Skipjack and Striped Marlin numbers throughout the Pacific Ocean. However, this is clearly a shared issue between ourselves and the commercial pelagic fleet (Purse Seine Operators). So, we have leveraged the relationship we have built with them, and written a letter to the Minister about our concerns of over fishing in the central pacific, which has resulted in the NZ Commissioner to the Western Central Pacific Fisheries Commission to continue to raise the issue until we get resolution. So there is a glimmer of hope....

In 2013 when Snapper 1 was up for review, I got my first glimpse of what happens when we engage the 'power of the people' as the then minister reviewed rec bag limits for Snapper from North Cape to East Cape. There's no doubt that the public campaign we ran alongside the LegaSea Team convinced the minister to steer away from the 4 fish bag limit proposal and go with a relatively moderate bag limit reduction of 2 fish per person to 7 total.

By the time I became President in 2018, three things had become evident to me. Given the number of anglers affiliated through our member clubs, we should have more influence within Government and our communities, for representing the interests of our affiliated Anglers. Secondly, we had a pretty decent Fisheries Management/Advocacy game, but lacked focus and resources in terms of providing Club support, promoting the sport of Fishing. We also had an untapped opportunity to support the growth of our clubs through engaging our Youth to the sport of fishing and back into clubs. The challenge became to maintain our fisheries management and advocacy game while resourcing the development of Club support, the sport of fishing and growing youth participation.

The first order of business was to address the need for resourcing. The board supported the need for a CEO to be the cornerstone of our resourcing going forward. The role was expected to become largely funded through the planned Sport NZ funding round along with other funding sources and revenue generation. No sooner did we have our new CEO Steven Stanford in place, COVID hit the world stage causing no end of disruption for the next two years. Secondly Sport NZ was similarly hit by COVID, but also hit with a number of Athlete wellbeing scandals, the resignation of their CEO, Recruitment of new CEO Raelene Castle, and a complete restructure of Sport NZ and High

Performance Sport NZ. The result is that Sport NZ have not continued with their previous funding structure and have only recently released criteria for their funding preferences going forward.

Similarly, COVID with its successive lockdowns, vaccine mandates and covid wave(s) created its own distractions limiting the ability of clubs to run comps, operate and for people to move around the Country. This seriously impacted our Clubs revenue and ability to operate and run comps.

There were a few upsides though, it created the opportunity for our first successful funding interaction with Sport NZ. Given we hadn't previously received any Sport NZ funding we were excluded from their resilience funding streams. We were successful in arguing for a share, albeit a modest \$1000/club from the Sport NZ resilience fund, then we showed them the strength of the community we have as clubs opted not to receive their share in favour of redistribution to more needy clubs.

A second upside of COVID saw the introduction of online board meetings and more importantly, the provision of online/hybrid AGM's as both the 2020 and 2021 AGMs were affected by Lockdowns in Auckland, then Northland and the Waikato. The need to provide online streaming for these events opened the door for smaller clubs that wouldn't normally have the funds to attend NZSFC AGMs for the first time ever. From personally experiencing last year's AGM online, I can tell you that once it's been experienced online, you can really see the value of making the effort to be there in person!

The third upside was the short notice shift of AGM venue to New Plymouth and Cape Egmont. Little did anybody at the time realise that this would be the last time that many of us would see Cape Egmont President, Richard van der Fits in 'full flight', as we lost him 9 months later to cancer.

Whilst the sport of fishing sits on a continuum with sustenance fishing at one end and International competition and records at the other end. Our affiliated members sit somewhere on that line with a lot of us in the middle fishing for our personal bests, club competitions or simply mastering various techniques for catching our favourite species. All of us have our own varied reasons for wanting to fish and it's our clubs where we come together to share our love for catching fish through telling stories and sharing experiences. In the modern world of Social media some of this interaction can happen online. But one thing the COVID lockdowns reminded us of is that we as Humans need face to face interaction, our clubs are still the place for that and we need to keep reminding people and attracting them back to clubs.

Alongside the emergence of COVID the board set about developing our strategic plan. The results of that work were presented to the 2020 AGM, and updates have been provided since. But most notably the execution of that plan has seen us grow our connection with NZ fishers through growing our social media presence to nearly 10,000 followers and regularly achieving reach of up to 250,000 people.

We are also now connected to the major political parties – highlighted by the fact that 3 of them speaking at this conference. We now have monthly interactions with senior Fisheries NZ officials and more recently the Director General of Department of Conservation, a seat on Maritime NZ's Boating Safety forum, the launch of the Youth Fishing Committee and this year's inaugural Youth Nationals.

In 2021 we presented our Communications plan. Communication is a two way thing, messages go out, and messages need to come back, one measure of the effectiveness of that communication is alignment of what goes out versus what comes back. One of the holy grails for NZSFC is to ensure that members of affiliated clubs know about and value what the council does, and provide feedback to the policies that the council develops for the submissions to Regulators that shape our future.

We've come a long way in terms of growing these connections, but there is still significant work to be done. It still mystifies me when we have reviewed policies such as the Hapuku Bass policy two years in a row and members of our clubs complain about not being consulted! True Story! A more contentious aspect of communication is leveraging the value of our reach. A number of funding opportunities have been foregone over the last few years as we don't have direct contact with our affiliated member base – the members of Clubs.

Our Clubs are the centre of the Council's existence. One of the Council's primary functions has to be supporting the operation and growth of our clubs in a world where the value proposition of clubs has changed and volunteer labour is becoming increasingly scarce. Whilst the sport of fishing sits on a continuum with sustenance fishing at one end and international competition and records at the other end. Our affiliated members sit somewhere on that line with a lot of us in the middle fishing for our personal bests, club competitions or simply mastering various techniques for catching our favourite species. All of us have our own varied reasons for wanting to fish and it's our clubs where we come together to share our love for catching fish through telling stories and sharing experiences. In the modern world of Social media some of this interaction can happen online. But one thing the COVID lockdowns reminded us of is that we as Humans need face to face interaction, our clubs are still the place for that, and we need to keep reminding people and attracting them back to clubs.

Our Youth Fishing committee is nearing the end of its second year and now has the inaugural Youth Nationals under its belt and has some exciting plans for the future. We're well on the way to creating a framework for engaging the youth in our communities and back into our clubs...hopefully!

Our Clubs now have additional tools that make clubs easier to run through the Sporty CRM package now available for clubs to use and the infofish / Trackmyfish App that is now used for running the Nationals and has been picked up by a number of clubs for running their comps. We had been looking at a bespoke app development for these tasks, but through Steve's investigation and involvement we found existing apps and developers that were happy to work with us to provide the solutions now on offer for much lower cost to NZSFC than the originally quoted \$100k

The Board has also been restructured to focus more on Governance, with management activities being pushed back to the subcommittees for Fisheries Management, Fishing, Communications and Finance.

Communication channels have also been streamlined with quarterly publication of Zone packs to clubs and their delegates. This has enabled us to be much more structured in terms of making sure that clubs and delegates have what they need to know, so they can provide feedback to the board through zone meetings.

Much much less of this would have been possible without the critical appointment of the CEO role. Now 2 ½ years since his appointment Steve has left NZSFC and moved back into the corporate communications sector and I want to thank him for his efforts that have helped get us to this point. We've also learnt a lot more about what's really needed achieve our objectives which has lead us to reshape and re-position NZSFC's resourcing so it can be more focussed toward connecting with our grass, or should I say fishy, roots.

Advocacy for Abundance and Access to our fishery

The most fundamental things we need for enjoying our sport/pastime are fish and continued access to where they live. The latter being a very recent manifestation of the challenges we face.

We have worked hard to grow our influence here and our success is growing as a result. For the last two years we have met monthly with Deputy Director General of Fisheries New Zealand, Dan Bolger, Director of Fisheries Management Emma Taylor and their regional inshore fisheries managers and from time-to-time policy analysts. Through these interactions we have gained insight into how the sustainability management processes work (or not!) and we are also gaining increasing access to their plans which allows us to plan our resources accordingly and also be involved in pre-consultation before initial position papers come out for Public consultation. It's also been a great tool for getting clarification on various aspects like our engagement with the Hauraki Gulf Fisheries plan advisory group.

We recently met with the new Director General of the Department of Conservation Penny Nelson. We introduced ourselves, shared our views on the impact that Marine reserves would have on the fishery, our concerns about the QMS and our proposed solution, Rescue Fish. It was a very positive interaction that ended with her team wanting to join the monthly catchup with Fisheries NZ.

We are also currently enjoying the most conservative Minister of Oceans and fisheries that we have had in the last 20 years. In Snapper 8 he actually ignored the advice of his officials and took the most conservative option that we had recommended along with our 6000 odd submitters. He still gets occasionally derailed by his ministry in matters like the Fisheries amendment bill, closure of Scallop fishery with exception of the deep water spawning beds of the Hauraki Gulf and the planned creation of Trawl Zones for the Hauraki Gulf. We must continue to leverage all angles we have at our disposal to keep him and his officials on track to an abundant fishery.

I'm really proud of our policy development and ratification process. We have a really well-structured process for raising concern about specific fisheries, developing then presenting policy to our membership for ratification at our AGM/conference, and using those policies as our mandate when we make submissions on Fisheries Advocacy. A number of the policies have triggered Fisheries NZ reviews of fisheries such as Scallops, and Hapuku/Bass. It's important that our clubs speak up on these policies when they are circulated for feedback. As I said earlier, despite all this effort to consult our membership, we still have members surprised by the approaches we take.

As a result of the Motiti Environment court lockout, we have been drawn into the realm of the RMA as community groups around the country and now councils attempt to overcome fisheries concerns with RMA controls through the coastal planning and appeal system. Last year we spent \$100k representing member's interests and presenting the 'voice of reason' to the Bay of Islands RMA hearing. This year we mobilised nearly 3000 submissions against the Waikato Regional Council (WRC) proposal to avoid the appeal process and incorporate Areas of natural significance into the WRC Coastal Management plan. The WRC appear to have listened and have signalled they will drop that proposal. Never underestimate the power of mobilising the voice of the people.

We'll also continue to submit to the Natural and Built Environment act, one of the three acts that will replace the Resource management Act.

We have also achieved representation at the Hauraki Gulf Fisheries Plan Advisory group. Both this representation and the Bay of islands representation being led by our top-class environmental Lawyer Rowan Ashton, backed up by Barry Torkington, and John Holdsworth with Andrew Johnson providing the local connections for the BOI case. We are well blessed to have the services of these men.

We now not only have mechanisms in place for representing the interests of our affiliated anglers, but the synergy with LegaSea we are now leveraging the power of our submissions through engaging the wider NZ fishing public.

And finally, Why is all this important and what makes it all possible? From the Maori Proverb

He aha te mea nui o te ao

What is the most important thing in the world?

He tangata, he tangata, he tangata

It is the people, it is the people, it is the people

All this happens through our zealous team of contractors and volunteers. In particular I'd like to extend my sincere thanks to our passionate team of volunteer board and standing committee members who bring to you fisheries management, communications, financial control and Governance of this council, and our team of contractors who provide us with our administration, fisheries and resource advocacy and policy advice. There really is too many of you to mention here, but I sincerely thank you all. However, I'd like to specifically callout Pete Saul our long serving Records Officer and until now Board Member. Pete Steps away from the Board this year and will be replaced by Tony Allan from the Whangaroa Sport Fishing Club, welcome aboard Tony!

None of this would be possible without the vision and commitment of legends like John Chibnall who devoted 55 years of his life to this council, sticking with the vision and fighting hard for it through thick and thin. It was hard to always agree with John but at the end of the day he always had the best interests of this organisation at the centre of his heart, and this organisation wouldn't be what it is today without his steadfast commitment and support over those years.

So when it's all said and done, what was all of this all about? Well for me I can now sum it up in this simple question.

Wouldn't it be great if every young person in NZ could catch fish as often as they wanted, where ever they are?

From my perspective, everything we have done, are doing, and need to do will ensure kids can do this now and into the future. We have strategy, we are building influence, connections and we are now have the basis of a framework for engaging our youth in this one thing we all love to do ...FISHING!

So that's it from me, thanks to all of you for all the support over the years, and I wish the council all the best with enabling our young to catch fish whenever they want to, wherever they are and come to enjoy fishing as we do.

Bob Gutsell