

NZSFC Fisheries Management Update 25

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Time to fight for your snapper, your rights

Once again the Government is expecting the public to shoulder savage cuts to rebuild the Snapper 1 fishery while leaving the commercial sector and their archaic, destructive fishing methods relatively unscathed. Consultation is now underway and you have until August 23rd to have your say.

The latest proposals from the Ministry for Primary Industries will become reality unless we convince the Government that we do not want a proportional allocation, that we do not have a fixed quota.

We want what is in the country's best interests – we want to stop the wanton waste of juvenile snapper because those fish are our future, and we want a fair recreational allowance to provide for our needs.

We must all act now, because if this proportional allocation agenda succeeds the same principles could be applied to your local fishery. You could end up being a minor shareholder in a fishery dominated by commercial interests. And once a fishery is privatised we will never get it back.

Snapper 1 proposals

The Snapper 1 fishery in East Northland, Hauraki Gulf, and Bay of Plenty is by far New Zealand's largest recreational fishery, with a peak catch estimated to be around 3700 t in 2011-12.

For years fishing industry representatives have lobbied for an increase to their 4500 tonne quota. But their next best option has arrived.

The Ministry's options paper is full of different size limits and daily bag reductions, percentages and projections - many distractions, but at its core it is not about sustainability or rebuild rates.

Considering sustainability, it is likely that increasing the minimum legal size to 33cm for recreational fishers will result in increased discard mortality. This has been the experience of many in the Marlborough Sounds with the blue cod slot rule and this is not an outcome we want to repeat.

More of an outrage is that nothing is being done to address the 25cm minimum snapper size limit applying to commercial fishers.

Recreational catch

Ultimately, industry will be able to maintain their catch and their killer methods while supporting the Ministry's drive to stuff recreational catch back into a 1997-sized envelope.

Ministry wants to do this by treating the current recreational allowance of 2300 tonnes as an explicit allocation, a quota that must not be exceeded. But there is no legal requirement to do this.

In 1997 the Court of Appeal ruled, "If over time a greater recreational demand arises it would be strange if the Minister was precluded by some proportional rule from giving some extra allowance to cover it".

Our recreational allowance was made in 1997, when the fishery was depleted and our catch rates were low. Recreational fishers voluntarily embraced measures to rebuild the fishery to 20% of its original stock size.

That rebuild has happened and now MPI is aiming to double that target. This new target aligns with the NZ Sport Fishing Council's policy of managing Snapper 1 at 40% of original stock size.

But the rebuild was never intended to only benefit commercial interests. Recreational fishers deserve to benefit from their conservation efforts over the past 16 years.

Instead, the Ministry is pandering to commercial interests in attempting to cut us back, just to sustain industry shareholdings in Snapper 1.

Initial reactions

Feelings of disbelief and outrage are building as people realise their catch will be limited, and they will be unable to feed their family quality food while subsidising more snapper exports.

It is up to us to make the Minister and Ministry accountable for their actions. They are there to serve the public not private interests. They must not actively undermine our way of life and the associated marine industry by imposing a proportional share.

Our recreational allowance must be able to vary as the population changes or to allow for improvement in recreational catch if the allowance was set in a depleted fishery, as has occurred in Snapper 1.

If we do nothing and the proportional policy becomes the management default our bag limits will quickly race to the bottom. This will cause public participation in fishing to collapse and make more fish available for export.

So even if you never fish on the northeast coast get prepared to fight for what is yours, because if this proposal succeeds there will be no stopping the Government from applying this policy to your favourite fishery. To stay informed, take action and make a submission before the 23 August deadline visit www.legasea.co.nz.

BREAK OUT BOX

Points to cover if you want to pen your own submission...

- No quota for recreational fishers.
- The Minister must make a recreational allowance that increases as population, demand and sustainability permit.
- Fisheries must be managed to provide for future generations' needs
- Double the existing stock so there is more and bigger fish
- Ensure fish conserved by recreational fishers remain in the water and are not allocated as commercial quota
- There must be a reduction in juvenile mortality caused by all fishing.
- Eliminate dumping, trawling and other indiscriminate bulk harvesting methods that wastes thousands of juveniles and damages sensitive marine areas.