

## NZSFC Fisheries Management Update 28

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### Snapper decision falls short

The Minister of Fisheries is no Valerie Adams. Nathan Guy gave the snapper decision a shot, but fell short of public expectations. He was not helped by his Ministry's predetermination to have us share a smaller slice of the snapper fishery to protect commercial interests. As of April 2014 recreational fishers between North Cape and the Bay of Plenty will have a smaller bag limit and an increased minimum size limit.

This decision deals a severe blow to recreational conservation efforts considering there was no sustainability issue that needed addressing, and now more fish will die as people fish longer and harder to meet the new minimum size limit of 30cm.

In some areas recreational catch will be slashed by 50% or more because of the increased size limit. Meanwhile, commercial catch limits remain intact.

In a recent survey 40% of respondents fished inshore or were landbased, and fishing for food. These people and Bay of Plenty coastal fishers will be particularly hard-hit because in some inshore areas 30cm fish do not exist.

For offshore fishers a larger size limit is less likely to pose a problem, but releasing fish with a burst swim bladder can increase mortality.

The number of fish handled may also increase as the daily bag limit has been chopped from nine to seven and fishers become more selective about the fish they keep.

For all of us more dead fish is not what we need to rebuild snapper stocks.

The New Zealand Sport Fishing Council fisheries management team is still working through the Ministry's 164-page Advice Paper and Minister's decision letter to work out how Nathan Guy arrived at this juncture. He acknowledges the proposed measures will only improve the fishery by 1% after five years.

He also notes that, "if conditions change and the number of juvenile fish entering the fishery drops significantly further changes to catch limits may be required".

The Minister can rest assured the recreational sector will not accept any further changes to our limits while commercial bulk harvesting continues to decimate inshore juvenile populations!

New management controls such as camera surveillance and GPS tracking have been proposed for commercial vessels. Maybe we will finally determine how much wastage there is, but serious reductions will only be made with gear and behavioural changes.

Meantime, bulk harvesting continues to be inflicted on our rebuilding snapper population.

The Bay of Plenty snapper sub-stock is officially classed as collapsed. It is around 6% of unfished biomass, below the Ministry's 10% level considered for closure. This means more than 90% of the fish, by weight, has been extracted from this fishery.

And while the Ministry has done a good job in masking the precarious state of the Bay of Plenty stock, by merging it with the healthier Hauraki Gulf figures, the bare truth remains - a depleted population means fewer larger fish and millions of juveniles that are vulnerable to being caught and killed by trawlers, Danish seiners and recreational fishers.

We are currently working on a Best Practice Guide for marine recreational fishers to try and reduce release mortality and waste. However, our wastage is minor compared to the millions of juveniles legally killed

every year by commercial bulk harvesting.

The Minister went with a 30cm minimum size for recreational fishers, broadening the differential between our limit and the 25cm minimum size for commercial.

This means commercial fishers will have first grabs at our snapper fishery, before many of us can even start to put our dinner on ice.

This outcome is a blatant political decision. The solution is also political.

Keep a close eye on who has the best fisheries policy in the lead up to the 2014 Election. Lest we forget.