



Report: Fisheries Amendment Bill campaign, June to October 2022

December 2022

Controversial proposals to change the Fisheries Act sparked a strong response from LegaSea, the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council (NZSFC) and other fishing and environmental organisations in 2022. A successful LegaSea campaign generated sufficient public feedback to fend off one of the greatest challenges to the future sustainability of fish populations in 20 years.

Background

In November 2021 Fisheries New Zealand (FNZ) advised Cabinet had approved the fisheries system reforms consulted on in 2016 and 2019. FNZ invited submissions in response to proposed legislative changes. The Fisheries Amendment Bill sought to:

1. Amend rules for landing discarding commercially caught fish.
2. Create a new penalty regime for illegal discarding by commercial fishers.
3. Enable faster decisions to change recreational bag limits and minimum legal size limits.
4. Enable monitoring cameras onboard commercial fishing vessels.

A closer examination of the proposals revealed the risks. The NZSFC realised the proposed pre-set decision rules were designed to fast-track increased commercial catches based on low quality evidence. Traditionally, pre-set decision rules are single-species focused and rely on self-reported commercial catch data. The proposed predetermined approach would deny us, the public, adequate opportunity to have our say. It would also remove Ministerial discretion to take account of broader environmental issues. This discretion is vital as it's the last line of defence against excessive catch limits. This was unacceptable.

LegaSea campaign

LegaSea initiated a [public campaign](#) on 14 June 2022 urging people to make a submission before the 17th, the official deadline. LegaSea worked with the NZSFC and other organisations to finalise and send a [comprehensive submission](#) to the Primary Production Select Committee considering the Bill.

There was a remarkable response to LegaSea's campaign. Within three days 5501 online submissions had been generated via the LegaSea website. These [submissions were sent](#) to the Select Committee on 17 June. That same week LegaSea published an article explaining why there were such strong objections to the current proposals. [Our say will always matter](#) emphasised the need for the Minister to continue with the original intent – to facilitate onboard cameras – and split the Bill to facilitate wider public consultation on the controversial aspects.

In response to ongoing feedback, LegaSea published a [newsletter](#) on 28 June. People who hadn't made a submission were encouraged to use the online tool so our team could take those additional submissions to the Select Committee oral hearings. Another 900 submissions were received from concerned individuals.

LegaSea Lead Sam Woolford accepted the invitation to speak with the Primary Production Select Committee considering the Amendment Bill on 1 July. As joint submitters, representatives from the NZSFC, New Zealand Angling & Casting Association and New Zealand Underwater, were also invited to an oral hearing.

These hearings were an important opportunity to stress the need to maintain public input into fisheries management decisions. Recently it has been public feedback that has given the minister the confidence to make precautionary decisions to restore fish populations and protect the marine environment.

Despite best efforts, in mid-September the Select Committee only recommended minor changes to the Amendment Bill. LegaSea aligned with other fishing and environmental organisations to express disappointment with their recommendations. Publication of [Fisheries Amendment Bill full of hidden fish hooks](#) prompted media interest and a day later Scott Macindoe was [interviewed](#) on Three's AM Show.

After much parliamentary debate and strong objections from commercial interests, the Minister for Oceans and Fisheries David Parker deleted all offending parts from the Amendment Bill on 28 September. LegaSea welcomed this brave decision by the Minister as a step towards [better protecting the marine environment](#).

LegaSea worked alongside the NZSFC to publish a [joint statement](#) when the Bill was finally passed on 25 October. The following week LegaSea acknowledged the Minister's decision to proceed with enabling cameras aboard commercial fishing vessels while pulling out all references to pre-set decision rules. The Fisheries Amendment Act 2022 took effect from 1 November. The NZSFC has captured the process [online here](#).