



Just the facts about the Fisheries Act reforms

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Last week, a journalist who holidays in the Coromandel spoke about hearing that local recreational fishers think the proposed changes to the Fisheries Act will mean fewer fish for them. I'm here to reassure you no one will be taking away your fish or your rights.

Anyone who has been paying attention to the Ministry for Primary Industries' (MPI) proposed reforms to the Fisheries Act will have seen a lot of fear, misinformation and anger being spread online and in the media.

People are understandably invested in the future of our fisheries. They want them to be healthy and abundant today and for future generations of New Zealanders.

So it's good to start on a commonality: the fishing industry wants exactly the same thing. We want flourishing fisheries and healthy

marine ecosystems to sustain them. Without that, we're out of a job and can't put food on our table – or yours.

With 642 different fish stocks for MPI to manage, our management process is complex by necessity, tailored to each fishery and reliant on many factors, including science, stakeholder views and treaty rights. This is very resource-intensive and means that only 20-30 stocks are reviewed each year. With some new tools, we think we can do better.

MPI's consultation document is a lengthy but understandable 71 pages. But not everyone will read it and, into that vacuum, misinformation is inserted.

At Seafood New Zealand we want everyone to submit on these proposed reforms, that's part of what makes our democratic process work. But it's important that submitters are accurately informed to ensure their input is relevant.

I've picked a few of the



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more confusing issues to break down for you, and I'll share a few more next week.

Misunderstanding: camera coverage on fishing boats will become watered down and less transparent.

Wrong. What the proposals actually say is that the footage from on-board cameras won't be accessible to the public, because it's a privacy and safety risk. Fishing vessels are a private workplace, and it is very rare that government cameras are required on private property or commercial premises.

Under the proposals, MPI's trained reviewers will continue to review on-board camera footage as they do now. All the data gathered by MPI using cameras and other methods will remain available to the public. For example, bycatch figures are regularly reported on MPI's website without requiring an Official Information Act request, and any member of the public can access this and other data now AND under the new proposals.

The proposal simply means the public cannot request the actual footage.

Also, anyone suggest-

ing the proposed changes would allow fishers to turn cameras off when fishing is utterly mistaken. Cameras must always be on when fishing occurs – it's the law. The changes will make sure fishers have more clarity about when they can have their camera off – for example, when at anchor after the fishing activity has finished.

And of course, what occurs onboard a fishing vessel can be commercially sensitive, as at any place of work, and requires protection.

Misunderstanding: allowing fishers to return unwanted catch that's been verified means they'll dump low-value fish and then fish more.

Also wrong. This claim mixes up two different things: "dumping" (which is definitely illegal!) and legal discarding under monitored returns.

Let's stick with the facts. The proposals will allow fishers to return unwanted catch – such as fish that is too small to be sold or is a

species that no one will buy – to the sea IF it has been monitored by an on-board camera or human observer.

But here's the key thing. Fishers will have to count these fish against their annual catch limits (known as ACE, or Annual Catch Entitlements). So even when returning these fish to the sea (rather than taking it to shore and disposing it at a landfill) fishers do not get "more fish" in exchange.

Ultimately, fishers don't get paid for fish they have to put back in the water. Whatever fish they catch is reported and counted against their total. So, this proposal means that there is a "price" for every fish caught while reducing the costs of needing to land the fish and dispose of it. We would prefer any unwanted catch is returned to the marine ecosystem.

I want to encourage people to look beyond the noise and speculation and see the proposals for what they are – common sense changes that are a win for us all.

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