

## Government's proposed amendments to the Fisheries Act - Talking Points & Questions

February 2025

Shane Jones, the Minister for Oceans and Fisheries, has proposed changes to the Fisheries Act that, if given effect, will reduce public access to fishing for food and cause environmental damage that may be irreversible. The [proposal document](#) was released on 12 February with submissions due with Fisheries New Zealand by 28 March 2025. The [New Zealand Sport Fishing Council](#) has requested a submission deadline extension for the public, to 30 March. Only strong public opposition will stop these changes. If there is insufficient public opposition to the proposals a government bill will be drafted ahead of significant changes to the Fisheries Act.

1. The proposed changes to the Fisheries Act:
  - a. Will weaken environmental protections. Instead of the Minister reducing the maximum catch limit in depleted fisheries, commercial fishers may set aside catching rights. No requirement to reduce actual catches, so no stock rebuild;
  - b. Will reduce monitoring by allowing cameras aboard commercial fishing boats to be turned off during specific times and limiting the public from accessing footage;
  - c. Will allow for more dead fish to be thrown overboard, increasing wastage.
  - d. Do you support these proposals?**
  
2. The proposed changes to the Fisheries Act would empower the Minister to set commercial catches increases for up to 5 years based on weak information, without requiring public consultation. This is concerning given that;
  - a. There is no reliable independent data to inform management of most fisheries. Management relies on unvalidated, self-reported data from commercial fishers.
  - b. Public input has been the only handbrake in the past 20 years to stop or highlight excessive catch limits that threaten sustainability.
  - c. Fish are a public resource. More than 90% of commercially caught fish are exported for little public benefit.
  - d. Do you think it's acceptable that the Minister will be able to ignore public input when considering catch limit increases for up to 5 years?**
  
3. If the changes proceed it will complete the privatisation of every New Zealander's fish into the hands of around 1300 quota owners.
  - a. Access to fish to sell overseas will take priority over having fresh fish available for local consumption.
  - b. Quota owners charge excessive rents from commercial fishers on the water to access catching rights. This drives fishers to use low cost, bulk harvesting methods such as trawling, so they can catch more fish just to make money.
  - c. Privatisation means more damage to the marine environment, a loss of productivity and biodiversity. Some of that damage may be irreversible.
  - d. Are you concerned there will be fewer fish available for the public to catch?**
  - e. Are you concerned there will be more damage to the marine environment?**

## More information

1. A 2024 [Ministry for Primary Industries report](#) revealed a staggering 46% increase in fish being tossed overboard after cameras went live on a portion of the commercial vessels. The report shows that cameras are effective at incentivising improved reporting.
  - a. The Minister has proposed to allow cameras on vessels to be switched off at certain times.
  - b. This will reduce transparency and erode public confidence in commercial fishing, the Minister and Fisheries New Zealand.
2. A 2019 [Horizon Research study](#) found 58% of New Zealanders thought bottom trawling that destroys fish habitats and targets small fish in the inshore fishery should be banned.
3. The same [Horizon Research study](#) found 70% of New Zealanders believed that fisheries needed to be reformed to ensure there is an abundant fishery. Not to deregulate the controls on commercial fishing.
4. Two Ministry for Primary Industries research projects, from 2016 and 2021, cover the operation of cameras to monitor catches aboard commercial fishing vessels. Reviewing 100% of all catch sorting and stowing for all vessels is not humanly possible. There are limitations. Even with AI there is no way to determine from the camera footage the exact size of fish or weight of a bin of fish.

Even with cameras, management will need to rely on trust and the self-reported data provided by commercial fishers. Until technology and placement improves, cameras are no substitute for onboard human observers. Current rates of observer coverage of inshore commercial fishing activity are poor.

- a. Pria, M.J.; Pierre, J.P.; McElderry, H.; Beck, M. (2016). Using Electronic Monitoring to Document Snapper Discards and Validate Catch effort Data. [New Zealand Fisheries Assessment Report 2016/57](#). 38 p.
  - b. Middleton, D.A.J.; Guard, D. (2021). Summary and evaluation of the electronic monitoring programmes in the SNA 1 trawl and bottom longline fisheries. [New Zealand Fisheries Assessment Report 2021/37](#). 69 p.
5. A 2016 study found the total economic contribution of marine recreational fishing by residents and visitors was \$1.7 billion per annum, while taking less than 6% of the national catch. Recreational fishing contributes a conservative \$188 million in tax revenues to help keep New Zealand functioning, while generating full-time employment for over 8,000 people.
  - a. Holdsworth, J; Rea, T; Southwick, R. [Recreational Fishing in New Zealand - A Billion Dollar Industry](#). Produced for the New Zealand Marine Research Foundation. March 2016.