

Hui backs local marine and land management

Several resolutions and an ongoing commitment to collectively strive for 'more fish in the water' are the spin-offs from a recent Hokianga Accord fisheries hui, held in Ruawai, Northland. Aspirations are for more and larger fish around our coastline.

Abundance will provide social, economic and cultural benefits for all New Zealanders, not just commercial fishing interests. But, convincing our fisheries managers that greater abundance will achieve these positive outcomes has proven to be the difficult task.

There was wholehearted agreement at the two-day hui that coastal communities ought to be managing their local fisheries and marine environment.

Locals are generally more attuned, than Wellington-based bureaucrats, to what measures are required to protect marine life. Preventing land run-off having adverse effects on inshore fisheries is a major concern.

Controversial issues such as the Crest Energy proposal to install 200 underwater turbines in the Kaipara Harbour, aquaculture reforms, and kahawai mismanagement were also discussed.

Ministry of Fisheries' officials addressed the hui during the first day. Their presentations and the ensuing debate enlivened discussions and set the scene for the Hokianga Accord to reach agreement on a number of issues.

Sustainable development of aquaculture is a priority. Pending government reforms had the potential to expand shellfish operations beyond current management areas and introduce industrial-scale finfish farms.

Many seaside communities have opposed widespread commercial aquaculture farming because of the detrimental impacts on both baitfish stocks and seabed marine life.

Support was also given to advocate for Ministerial approval of a mataitai in the northern Bay of Islands. There is increasing frustration that the Te Puna Mataitai application has stalled, despite considerable community support.

After a four-year process the Courts have ordered a review of kahawai quota and non-commercial allowances. The fisheries Minister has to make fresh decisions for managing kahawai, a culturally valuable fish.

Fears were expressed at the hui that the uncertainty in available science will be dismissed, resulting in more kahawai being taken by purse seiners and exported for minimal returns.

Fishers with extensive local knowledge are still concerned that there are now fewer and smaller kahawai off our coast and stocks have been very slow to recover from historic commercial exploitation.

Any response from the Accord to the MFish kahawai proposals will be developed in accordance with the forum's goal of achieving "more fish in the water/kia maha atu nga ika ki roto i te wai".

Participants in the Hokianga Accord, the mid north iwi fisheries forum, include the commercial and non-commercial interests of Ngapuhi, Ngati Whatua and other northern iwi and hapu, environmental and fishing interest groups. Greenpeace, the Environment and Conservation Organisations of Aotearoa New Zealand,

Forest & Bird, option4 and NZ Sport Fishing representatives are regular contributors to the Hokianga Accord.

This collective is determined to continue advocating for more abundant fisheries and a healthier marine environment. The fifteenth overnight Accord hui is anticipated by July 2010.

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