

option4 Update #150

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Policy of abundance is a winner

As we count down to November's general election many people are seeking clarification on what fisheries policy deserves support. option4 has worked with its allies to formulate some comments and recommendations so you can analyse party manifestos and make an informed choice when casting your vote.

Abundance is the supreme goal.

Having 'more fish in the water' makes sense, is good for the environment and does not require constant scientific monitoring. Squealing, diving birds and boiling schools of fish are ample proof of abundance for most people.

Abundant fisheries enable people to provide for their social, economic and cultural well-being. Research suggests over 40% of households have a fisher amongst them, and everyone in the house benefits when the fisher returns with a reasonable catch.

A policy recommendation

Increase abundance in our inshore fisheries to a minimum stock target of 40% of the unfished biomass.

1. This 40% policy reflects modern, international applications of judicious management encompassing precautionary principles and ecosystem values.
2. Benefits of this policy include:
 - a. Better recognition of the vulnerability of the inshore ecosystem;
 - b. Improved public fishing;
 - c. Improved commercial catch rates, reduced costs and lower carbon footprint;
 - d. Achievable within current legislation;
 - e. Meets the Crown's statutory obligation to have particular regard to kaitiakitanga [guardianship of the resource]; and
 - f. Responds to public expectations.

Default target for inshore fisheries

A bare minimum default stock target for inshore finfish must be 40% of unfished biomass. Currently stock targets range upwards from 20%.

Stocks managed at the 40% level will support diversity, maintain the range of species, and benefit all users.

The recreational sector is not seeking increased bag limits.

The need for greater abundance arises from the stark reality that successive governments have failed to establish management objectives for fisheries that enable us to provide for our well-beings, as required by legislation.

Greater abundance, at what cost?

1. Many people despair that fish stocks are managed to such low levels and are promoting alternative solutions. There are increasing demands for more no-take marine reserves, recreational only areas and spatial planning.
2. The public fishing sector is not interested in negotiating with political parties, quota holders or embarking on an undefined 'gifts and gains' process.

3. Almost all inshore stocks are below the 40% level of unfished biomass, some as low as 10% due to industrial fishing removing 90% of the available stock. Constant excuses such as soft limits, maximum sustainable yield, model predictions, likely to rebuild by 2030 and other terms, are used to rationalise existing overfishing, over allocation and depleted stocks.
4. New Zealand cannot ignore the shift to ecosystem management. Shallow, single-species stock assessments that fail to account for the very system that sustains life are inadequate. Assessments and targets can, and have been, manipulated to maximise yield for commercial interests.

Political solutions

Politicians need to take on the role of Kaitiaki, act as guardians of the resource and people, by restoring abundance to coastal ecosystems.

They also need to have the fortitude to ignore the pleas of the fish lords, who continually pursue maximum gain from their gifted quota rights.

Recreational fishers have a history of conserving fish, by applying voluntary size increases, bag reductions, differential size limits and method constraints. But unlike commercial demands, there has been little or no recognition of this effort when fisheries are “managed”.

Confidence in the quota management system turns to contempt every time fish conserved for our children’s future are allocated to commercial interests as perpetual quota.

What do we wish to exchange with the political party that adopts the policy of higher abundance?

Our precious party vote.

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