

option4 Update #109

NZ Fishing News January 2008 edition
December 2008

History never repeats?

So said Split Enz in 1987. But it has with depletion of our precious fisheries.

Year after year, as far back as the 1960s, our inshore fisheries have been overexploited, at times plundered and the governments have known all the time!

In the 1960s government was well aware inshore fisheries were being decimated by excessive commercial fishing and the introduction of bulk harvesting methods.

Delicensing the fishing industry in 1962 and offering subsidies to support commercial fishing during the 1970s just added to the devastation.

In the early 1980s the fisheries ministry advised significant reductions of at least 44 percent in snapper – a prime species – 63 percent in trevally and tarakihi 44 percent, plus others.

In December 1982, the then Minister of Fisheries, Duncan MacIntyre, admitted to being aware of problems in the kahawai and trevally fisheries since 1977.

Ministry officials tried and failed to gain industry support for controls to arrest the decline and rebuild fisheries. MacIntyre initiated a full legislative review to address sustainability concerns and overcome the frustration with cumbersome management procedures.

Various amendments followed the introduction of the 1983 Act, the quota management system in 1986 and a revised Fisheries Act in 1996.

Far from solving the problems for inshore fish stocks, the introduction of the QMS meant that commercial fishers had an incentive to fish for quota. Cunningly the fishing companies were building catch history, by bulk extraction, for when kahawai eventually entered the quota system.

Whoever held the largest catch history would be given the biggest chunks of valuable quota, thus future catching rights to continue plundering. In other words, catches were maximised to leverage quota rights.

Small-time commercial operators and non-commercial fishers were overlooked, forced out, or ignored.

Many rural and coastal communities were disadvantaged when hundreds of owner-operators were excluded from commercial fishing. Eventually the local caravan on the side of the road selling freshly-caught fish and smoked kahawai disappeared.

Non-commercial fishers, customary, traditional and amateurs suffered from a loss of access to once-abundant fisheries. Many inshore fish stocks have never recovered from this overfishing by industrialised fishing fleets. The outcome was depleted fisheries where poor fishing success leads to a drop in participation, which in turn means lower catches.

It is history now about the Kahawai Legal Challenge, the High Court win, then the appeal by the big fishing corporates. The next round begins in February 2009 with the Supreme Court hearing of the Kahawai Challenge.

In essence, it is not just about kahawai but all our fisheries – plunderers versus wise, sustainable use of our precious fisheries.

Protect your rights and interests

Your rights are only as strong as your determination to protect them - challenging fisheries decisions that erode the rights of non-commercial fishers through the courts is the ONLY way we can change the attitudes of fisheries managers when they work against our interests.

Taking Government to court is a very expensive process - as individuals we can do little but if we stick together we can achieve great things for our kids and grandchildren.

So please think of what is at stake and make make a commitment this Christmas by posting a cheque to the 'Kahawai Challenge Fund', c/o NZ Fishing News, PO Box 12-965 Penrose, or simply dialling 0900 KAHAWAI for a quick \$20 donation or visit www.kahawai.co.nz.