

## **option4 Update #136**

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### **Should we be scared?**

John McKoy is the chief fisheries scientist of our largest research agency, NIWA. He recently conceded there is limited knowledge about fish population sizes and sustainable catch levels, and much of the research is guesswork.

In contrast, the Ministry of Fisheries seems confident there has only been a 50 percent reduction in kahawai biomass since the advent of industrial bulk-harvesting in Area 1, between North and East Cape. If this were true there would be around the same number of kahawai now as there was in 1975, but on average they would be younger and smaller. This is not our reality.

In the past 30 years kahawai biomass in the Hauraki Gulf has plummeted. Numerous schools of healthy adult fish have been replaced by random schools of juveniles.

There was unrelenting purse seining of kahawai in Area 1 during the 1980s and 90s. Prolific schools of kahawai disappeared from our local bays, estuaries and headlands, and land-based kahawai fishing by customary harvesters and sustenance fishers has collapsed.

Recently many non-commercial and commercial interest groups responded to the Ministry's proposals for the future management of kahawai in all quota areas. option4 believe MFish is being overly optimistic when they assert there is half as much kahawai biomass in Area 1 now as there used to be.

option4 and its allies agree that if the Minister is serious about his government's intention to maximise the value gained from our fisheries, and MFish want to manage kahawai at a higher stock level, then more decisive action needs to be taken.

Maximising value means there are fish available to both customary and amateur fishers, and quota is allocated to only cover unavoidable bycatch by commercial fishers.

Surely the Minister can see that, on a per kilogram basis, there is far more value to our nation in rebuilding kahawai stocks to better protect the marine ecosystem and provide for people's well-being, than supporting the barely profitable purse seine catch, exported mostly as catfood and crayfish bait?

We all want to see healthy abundant oceans with more fish in the water. New Zealanders need access to kaimoana now and in the future. Restoring kahawai stocks is a great way of achieving this with little adverse impact on the fishing industry or exports.

MFish discuss maximising non-commercial values, but their preferred option in Area 1 is a 30 tonne reduction in commercial quota, from 1075 to 1045 tonnes, and a 750t reduction in recreational allowance (based on a guess) to 900t. Not good enough.

To accomplish any measurable rebuild in Area 1 the total allowable commercial catch (TACC) must be reduced by 500 tonnes, not the proposed 30t. Such a small reduction is less than the current variation in annual commercial catch and merely represents a 'Claytons' cut.

option4 and other groups support increasing the overall recreational allowances in Kahawai Area 2 (Cape Runaway to Cook Strait) and Area 3 (top of the South Island). This would give a majority share of those

fisheries to non-commercial interests and reduce commercial to bycatch levels. No changes in daily bag limits are proposed.

John McKoy has 37 years experience so we ought to take note when he says, "*for most fish stocks we don't know much at all – in other words you guess*". The Minister also needs to be wary of MFish claims that their stock models are the 'best available information'. A quick look out the window will reveal the truth.

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