

option4 Update #146

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Broad fishing interests at risk from statutory authority

There has been plenty of talk lately about establishing a statutory body to represent recreational fishing interests. This would be the go-to organisation for other rights holders or agencies seeking to change our rights or interests in the marine environment.

But before we get too excited about the prospects of what this entity may achieve we need to consider the impacts of such change on us and the next generations of Kiwis.

There are two groups pursuing different paths, a trio from Southland of Nelson Cross, Alan Key and Laurel Tierney, and secondly the New Zealand Recreational Fishing Council.

Both proponents are striving to attract the necessary political backing for a regime that includes legislated support for a small group of recreational fishing representatives to carry the mandate of the public. That mandate will be claimed by compulsory membership and possibly the requirement to possess a smart-card for reporting purposes if you aspire to fish in the sea.

The fundamental flaw in these proposals is the lack of recognition of the public nature of the right to fish and it's universal application.

A public right to fish

Any member of the public has the right to fish in New Zealand waters.

This fishing right is increasingly unique in a world of privatisation and is not exclusive to people who currently fish or belong to a fishing organisation.

It does not matter who is in the 'club' now, who holds a smart-card, if they receive information, or whether that person cares about advocacy or not. Our fishing right is a public right.

If the path of membership/license fees is followed the public nature of our fishing right will be exchanged for a right limited to those people who have paid these stewardship fees.

Whatever the terminology, this will be a license.

Your mandate is valuable

option4 believes it will be licensing and the wholesale change to who holds the right and mandate of recreational fishing interests that will kill these initiatives.

The right to fish, like the right to breathe, is a human right attached to each individual, and so it must stay.

These moves to push for a mandated recreational institution are designed to take the fishing right from individuals and vest that authority with a national body funded by a licensing regime.

Every New Zealander's access and right to fish will then be conditioned by a sub-group of the public, not our Parliamentary representatives. And while we might not always get what we want from our fisheries Ministers at least they are accountable come election day.

Politicians are well aware of the staunch opposition to licensing. A recent *NZ Fishing News* poll registered 70 percent opposition to licensing and it was the Soundings proposal that sparked option4 and 100,000 people into action 11 years ago.

There is nothing in these latest proposals that offers any meaningful benefits for the public or our fisheries.

option4 will not support licensing nor the transfer of free, individual fishing rights to a state-mandated organisation.

The right to fish belongs to every New Zealander living now or in the future.

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