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Media release for immediate use

Fishing and environmental groups join forces to fight for fisheries future

Environmental and non-commercial fishing groups have put aside their differences and formed an unprecedented alliance to combat the decline of fish stocks and marine ecosystems in New Zealand.

The groups include the NZ Recreational Fishing Council, the NZ Big Game Fishing Council, option4, the Hokianga Accord, Forest & Bird, Greenpeace and ECO.

They are all concerned about the decline of many fish stocks in New Zealand waters, and are calling on Fisheries Minister Phil Heatley to take urgent action to return the marine environment and fisheries to good health.

This week they met Mr Heatley to ask him to take a more holistic and cautious fisheries management approach.

The groups are troubled by the Government's strategic vision for fisheries – Fisheries 2030 – which Mr Heatley is considering now.

"It ignores recreational and customary fishing and the environment," says New Zealand Recreational Fishing Council president Geoff Rowling. "It seems to be about deregulation and putting money in the pockets of the commercial sector."

Fishing advocate group option4 spokesperson Trish Rea says we must protect fisheries for current and future generations of Kiwis. "It is scandalous the Ministry of Fisheries is allowing the wholesale slaughter of coastal fisheries when most people want more abundant fisheries and a healthier marine environment."

Forest & Bird marine conservation advocate Kirstie Knowles is concerned about destructive fishing methods, such as bottom trawling, that have a huge impact on the entire marine environment.

"It is crucial that we recognise the bigger picture and take action now to ensure our fisheries are managed without harming the environment, our wildlife, other industries and interests," she says.

The alliance is calling for urgent action to restore our oceans to a healthy and abundant state, with more fish in the water. The groups want:

- A more holistic approach to fisheries management that considers the wider marine environment, interaction between species and impacts such as climate change, land-based pollution and coastal development.
- Fish populations restored well above the current benchmark level (known as the maximum sustainable yield) to decrease the risk of decline or collapse of a fish stock.
- To get greater value from each fish caught by selective fishing, correct handling, reducing wastage and using more of the whole catch.
- To eliminate destructive fishing practices by supporting a switch to alternative, more sustainable fishing practices.
- Greater use of selective fishing methods, seasonal and area closures and revised size limits to help populations recover and to protect juvenile and breeding fish.
- Adoption of environmental best practices to reduce captures of seabirds, marine mammals and other sea life to raise the environmental performance of our fisheries and our international reputation.

Greenpeace oceans campaigner Karli Thomas emphasises the common ground between the organisations. "We all want to see a healthy ocean and more fish in the water – that's good whether you're a greenie, a fisherman or both."

NZ Big Game Fishing Council president Richard Baker is optimistic that Mr Heatley will act on the alliance's concerns. "We are hopeful the Minister will heed our call for a more cautious management approach to be taken when considering our treasured fisheries and the needs of future generations of New Zealanders."

The Hokianga Accord shares these sentiments. The iwi fisheries forum's Ngapuhi spokesperson, Paul Haddon, says Mr Heatley is obligated to have particular regard to kaitiakitanga (stewardship) when managing fisheries. "Effective application of kaitiakitanga will allow us to pass healthy fisheries on to our mokopuna [grandchildren]."

Alliance members are:

- Forest & Bird
- Hokianga Accord – mid north iwi fisheries forum
- option4
- New Zealand Big Game Fishing Council
- New Zealand Recreational Fishing Council
- Greenpeace Aotearoa – New Zealand
- Environment Conservation Organisations of Aotearoa New Zealand
- Guardians of Hawke Bay Fisheries
- New Zealand Angling and Casting Association
- Council of Outdoor Recreation Associations of NZ
- Marlborough Recreational Fishers Association

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