

Media Release

From fishing organisations:

New Zealand Sport Fishing
option4
Hokianga Accord

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Minister's kahawai decision provokes strong reaction

Recreational and customary fishers have reacted strongly to the Minister of Fisheries' latest kahawai decision, because it does not address long-term sustainability concerns nor will it restore abundance to significant areas such as the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park.

Recreational and customary fishers have put up with dismal kahawai catch rates in the Hauraki Gulf for 20 years. This decision will have them waiting that long again for a rebuild.

After four years of Court battles the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council, fisheries management group option4 and the mid north iwi fisheries forum, the Hokianga Accord, were hoping for more positive news from Phil Heatley.

Commercial catch limits in Kahawai 1, between North Cape and Cape Runaway, have been retained despite research showing that over 50% of non-commercial fishers targeting kahawai in Area 1 were unsuccessful.

Overall allowances for recreational interests have been reduced by 48 percent and customary fishers by 60 percent.

This decision guarantees commercial fishers are now the major stakeholder in the Area 1 kahawai fishery, the first time this has occurred since the species was introduced to the Quota Management System in 2004.

On three clear counts, the Minister's decision demonstrates a total absence of leadership and fails to provide for all New Zealander's well-being.

In the first instance, the well-demonstrated sustenance fishing needs of coastal tangata whenua have been denied. Perhaps this is because the Minister has failed to avail himself of the well-informed advice from Ngapuhi Chair Sonny Tau, that Maori fishers gather seafood primarily as recreational fishers.

Secondly, the greater non-commercial value of kahawai and its status as the people's fish has not been acknowledged.

Thirdly, the wider role of kahawai in a balanced marine ecosystem would appear to have been ignored.

NZ Sport Fishing President Richard Baker is highly critical of the decision because kahawai is one of the most important public fisheries in the country.

"It's a baffling decision, as the Ministry's proposal document had indicated a significant shift in favour of non-commercial interests," said Richard Baker.

Mr Baker is disappointed the Minister appears to have ignored over 1000 submissions expressing concerns about poor inshore catch rates, and that mass schools of kahawai have disappeared from coastal waters.

option4 questions the validity of the Minister's decision in light of recent Court decisions and the Ministry's own vision, to maximise the value of New Zealand's fisheries within environmental limits.

Scott Macindoe, option4's spokesperson, is adamant that kahawai numbers need rebuilding and that purse seining ought to be limited to unavoidable bycatch levels only.

"Historically, kahawai as a target purse seine species has been virtually worthless. To non-commercial interests, and on principle, kahawai is priceless.

"This decision is based on flawed information and slashing the recreational allowance from 1680 to 900 tonnes is completely unjustified," said Mr Macindoe.

While no cuts to individual bag limits are proposed, these may be necessary in a few years.

Chairman of the Hokianga Accord, George Riley, is concerned the government is not protecting the social and cultural well-being of all New Zealanders, by making kahawai available.

"What value does a kahawai school five miles offshore have, when families can no longer feed their children?"

These groups will be seeking to meet with other non-commercial fishing and environmental representatives over the next few weeks to determine their collective response. It is too early to decide, but renewed legal proceedings have not been ruled out, as many believe the Minister is ignoring the ruling of the Supreme Court.

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Background information

<http://www.option4.co.nz/kahawai/kahawai2010.htm>

Kahawai management has been highly contentious since purse seining was introduced in the 1970s. Commercial exploitation peaked in the mid 1980's. In the early 1990s purse seine limits were imposed by the then Minister of Fisheries, Doug Kidd. The Minister sought to address ongoing concerns from the amateur fishing sector and the NZ Sport Fishing Council's predecessor, the New Zealand Big Game Fishing Council.

In 2004 the Minister of Fisheries, David Benson-Pope introduced kahawai into the quota management system and set catch limits at 15% below historic catch levels.

Kahawai was reviewed again in 2005 and catch limits were reduced by another 10%.

In a landmark case recreational fishers challenged the Ministers 2004 and 2005 decisions on kahawai quota and allowances in the High Court, and won. Subsequent Kahawai Legal Challenge Appeal and Supreme Court hearings clarified a number of contentious points of law and overturned some of the earlier rulings.

In 2009 the Supreme Court decided the Minister has wide discretion when providing for customary, recreational and commercial interests.

The Ministry of Fisheries released a consultation paper containing several management options in late June. MFish deadline for public submissions was 13 August 2010. Over 1000 submissions were sent to the Ministry before this recent decision.

New catch limits apply from 1 October 2010, the beginning of the new commercial fishing year.