



## **An Eye on the Fishhooks In Shared Fisheries ...**

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The long-awaited shared fisheries discussion document has finally been released by the Minister of Fisheries, the Hon Jim Anderton. It was unfortunate that this paper experienced a bit of slippage from its expected time of release in July until late October.

One can only assume that government and the politicians in Cabinet kept sending it back to the ministry's authors to remove any fish hooks in an attempt to get it right.

Whether they have succeeded in doing this remains to be seen, as already we have seen much in the media from the commercial fishing industry crying wolf and foul play. Public statements by many commercial industry leaders recently clearly indicate that they are not happy. To my mind this is the first positive thing about this shared fisheries document.

I am comforted by the fact that these prominent leaders are peeved and are complaining publicly, because if they were not I would be suggesting that once again MFish has got it wrong. But no, it's the industry that is upset when they say, "The New Zealand Seafood Industry Council has grave concerns about the Ministry of Fisheries' Shared Fisheries discussion paper."

"The document's intent is not what we expected," said the New Zealand Seafood Industry Council's Chief Executive, Owen Symmans. "We already have an internationally recognised quota management system. What we were expecting in the discussion paper were proposals aimed at enhancing that system to ensure the sustainable management of our shared fisheries, not the reallocation that appears to be the intent of the paper."

Herein lies the first problem. I have to ask that if the quota management system (QMS) is so good, why is it that after 20 years of QMS management we still have a significant problem in most inshore fish stocks of key importance to the recreational fishing community.

Our biggest fear was that there would be a strong attempt to fit the public's rights to a reasonable share into the leftovers of a commercially managed fishery. Not so, as the document's authors and politicians have made a valiant attempt to recognise the high values that the public places on its access to our wild marine fisheries.

"There has already been an allocation between the recreational, customary and commercial sectors, Symmans said, and the focus should be on the shared, sustainable management of the fisheries".

Mr Symmans is wrong! There has never been an allocation to the recreational sector through the QMS. Unfortunately Symmans fails to acknowledge previous over-allocation at the introduction of the QMS after the commercial fishing industry was compensated for any reductions in their catch history and allocation. The quota appeal authority then gave away hundreds of tonnes that was not accounted for in the sustainability measures of the fishery. This, coupled with the problems of deeming and dumping of quality fish by commercial fishers, has further eroded the public's share.

It would be fair to say that any allowance consideration for the public at the time and since was often based on suspect and stab-in-the-dark guesses, because MFish does not have a good handle on the non-commercial catch.

This combined with the strong voices of the commercial leaders of the day talking down the recreational catch to Ministry officials in a successful effort to retain or in some cases increase their commercial share.

The commercial fishing industry is concerned that this document is about reallocation away from the commercial sector. This is correct, and if they believe that, they can address past wrongs by naturally rebuilding fish stocks. Why has this not happened in the last 20 years? Living memories are dieing, we can

no longer wait for the commercial industry to correct past imbalances. They say the economic sustainability of the industry will be seriously undermined by the introduction of any policies that erode the property rights provided by the QMS.

But are they failing to recognise the rights of all New Zealanders to a reasonable share. The rights to fish for food or fun with a reasonable expectation that one will be successful and come home with a feed for the family. These are explicit values we all hold dear to our hearts.

All too often we have experienced the effects of commercial overfishing eroding the public's share because there is no more fish in the bank, and any blowouts must erode our share of the total allowable catch (TAC).

At last the government has recognised that every year about a million and a bit people (a quarter of New Zealand's population) go fishing for food and recreation in New Zealand. Often the various fishing activities of customary, commercial and recreational are taking place in the same fisheries and we are harvesting the same species, which puts pressure on the sustainability of our resources and creates conflict among users when one sector takes more than has been allowed for or others has been denied a fair share.

Fisheries Minister Jim Anderton has said, "The way we manage these fisheries is important to our economy, our national identity, and to both Maori and pākehā cultural values." Here it is again. The Crown is recognising our values and rightly measures them against the commercial property monetary value. Yes the real worth of our values is finally being recognised.

"The document sets out some exciting new approaches to these issues, which I think offer hope of resolving some of the conflicting interests in these important fisheries. The challenge before us is to manage shared fisheries in a way that ensures all New Zealanders get as much value as possible from them, not only today but into the future," Anderton said.

"There are proposals for increased effort to be put into surveys and better information-gathering from amateur fishers, new criteria for setting total allowable catch limits that will enable non-commercial values to be better recognised, and new approaches to setting and adjusting catch allocations between sectors.

"We need more and better information to help with allocating our shared fisheries, particularly on the catch by the amateur sector. More information means all sector interests can be better represented," Anderton said.

New options for managing local fisheries, including by separating recreational and customary fishers from commercial activity, are proposed. Increased representation of the amateur fishing sector in planning and decision-making processes, through the establishment of a new amateur fishing trust, are also included in the document.

Sounds good, you might say. The document identifies charterboat operators as being a good source of information gathering by having them provide catch and landing records. This could provide valuable information on fishing trends within the non-commercial fishing sector.

But before we can even discuss this option, the commercial sector comes out on the attack in the New Zealand Herald, "Charterboat operators should be forced to buy quota and report their catch, say commercial fishers. They are commercial operators and as we are required to report catch against quota they should also be required to own quota," said Symmans.

I have a long history of working with the commercial fishing industry in many fisheries, and prior to the release of the shared fisheries paper I had welcomed the opportunity to discuss shared fisheries with them without prejudice and I still retain this view in the spirit of finding solutions and a way forward. However to now read and hear first-hand these statements and attacks is disappointing. The attack on charterboats is a red herring and nothing else.

But it has successfully snookered any offer of goodwill from this small sector of our fishing community and with it the sad loss of valuable information.

Clearly, the commercial fishing industry forgets that their rights start and end at the total allowable commercial catch (TACC). This is set after the minister has allowed for Maori customary, recreational non-commercial take and all other mortality associated with fishing.

Commercial fishers do not have priority right to our wild marine fisheries, as this is the preserve of the people of New Zealand. Unfortunately the act does not say how much the minister "shall allow for", and over the past 20 years of QMS these public common law rights have been constantly eroded, hence our current challenge in the courts this month. This is the first time the fishing public has stood together to challenge a minister's allocation decision.

Whether this shared fisheries paper is partly in response to our court challenge I would not like to speculate, while there are some who will be pulling the paper apart and finding all the bad points or fish hooks as I call them.

It is reliant on us all to also acknowledge the good points and build on them, and identify the fishhooks and come up with alternative solutions we can all live with.

Clearly there are some very good points in the paper and we need to work through the process to ensure that we get the best possible outcome. There will be some, like the already vocal voices in the media, who will be attempting to throw the process off the rails. Our challenge is to ensure this does not happen, because if the detractors are successful I fear it will be many long and cold winters before any government will give the commitment to revisit and resolve our longstanding grievances.

Granted, we may not resolve all the issues at once. But if we can at least knock off 90 percent of them it will be a good start.

So let's first identify some of the key points.

The document recognises that getting better information equals better management, which is a pre-cursor to good fisheries management. It acknowledges the need to measure the trends in recreational fishing. It would be nigh on impossible to account for every fish killed by the recreational fishing community, just as it is impossible to account for every fish killed by the commercial sector. But we can measure trends and this is valuable information.

Setting the TAC at above the biomass maximum sustainable yield BMSY in key inshore fish stocks will mean positive spinoffs for non-commercial fishers, from improved fish size to increased abundance. A greater certainty of catching a feed and a greater recognition of recreational fishing values. It is these values that are the most important to us all, as we all rate our fishing opportunity at differing values.

Priority of allocation is another good section and one that may contain a fish hook or two. The document reflects a further degree of priority for amateur catch. However we believe there needs to be further negotiation to improve on the 20 percent suggested in the paper. We need to build on this because at present we see that before the 20 percent priority kicked in, giving non-commercial priority over commercial a fishery would be bordering on collapse. In saying this, it could be a good deal in a situation, say if we took a fishery that was already seriously depleted, like SNA8, which is currently at 8 percent of the original biomass. A fishery that we believe has been depleted, solely by commercial overfishing.

If we decided that to rebuild this fishery quickly and massive cuts were required to the total allowable catch TAC to effect a significant rebuild in, say five years, our cut would only go to 20 percent of the current allowance. Whereas commercial might be cut by a far greater amount, say to a by-catch allowance of 5 percent of the current TACC. Short-term pain for a long-term gain. Something worth considering.

We like the idea of revisiting the baseline allocations and the paper offers six species of importance. However, maybe we should consider looking at the principles of management like deeming, dumping and other wasteful practices. Is deeming the best tool? Or should we claw back over-caught fish by commercial this year from the TACC allowance next year?

The paper talks of local area management. Most of us have experienced the problems of localised depletion by commercial bulk fishing methods causing spatial conflict among sectors. This section will empower local communities to be pro-active in looking after their patch.

There is the opportunity for redress – compensation for commercial fishers where there is a reallocation not based on sustainability, but to right past wrongs.

There is talk of a fishing trust and the opportunity to establish sustainable amateur representation in fisheries management. This is both positive and negative and will require some significant discussion to get it right.

So, now we can see the urgent need for all of us to get involved. If you value your rights to fish for food or fun, be pro-active and have your say. Contact MFish staff on 0800 666 675 or visit the shared fisheries section on [www.fish.govt.nz](http://www.fish.govt.nz) Or the Secretary of the NZ Recreational Fishing Council, Sheryl Hart Ph: 07 8258867 Mob: 021 943018 email: [nzrfcsheryl@actrix.co.nz](mailto:nzrfcsheryl@actrix.co.nz)

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