



## Sharing the fish – a summary

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**I**n the release of the shared fisheries document, the government has identified that New Zealand's shared fisheries are fisheries that are shared between Maori customary, commercial, and amateur or recreational fishing interests, and include iconic species such as snapper, blue cod, kahawai, kingfish, rock lobster and paua. Effective management of these fisheries is compromised by poor information on amateur catch and uncertainty in the approach to allocate the available catch. All of which leads to risks in relation to ministerial decisions to ensure sustainability and poor incentives for all fishing sectors to conserve, add value to and cooperate to manage shared fisheries.

The issues considered in this policy initiative are not new and have been approached several times before without significant success. Action is necessary; doing nothing has high costs through ongoing contention and litigation, lack of integrity in the fisheries management regime, and loss of value to the commercial, amateur and customary sectors. It is therefore beholden on all recreational fishers who fish for food or fun to have their say.

The overall goal of the policy reform is to enable increases in value from the use of shared fisheries. Value encompasses market and non-market values associated with commercial, amateur and customary fishing. Achieving better outcomes for shared fisheries requires initiatives to resolve fundamental problems with the existing management framework. To make progress, the public discussion paper proposes the following new measures:

The proposals are relevant to the government's national identity theme through providing for the strongly held view that the right to catch a fish for dinner and for enjoyment is a part of being a New Zealander. Information on catches is necessary to assess the effects of fishing on stock size, to monitor whether each sector's removals are remaining within

their allocation, and to assess whether changes are needed to better provide for sector interests. Information on the relative value of commercial and amateur fishing is needed to assess whether reallocation of access would increase overall value.

**Need to improve information.**  
Catch information from the commercial sector is reasonably good, and efforts are being made to improve reporting on customary take by iwi. However, there are no reporting or permitting requirements for the amateur sector. Until individual amateur fishers can be identified and sampled regularly, information on amateur catch must be obtained through surveys and sampling of the general population. Gathering catch information in this way remains difficult and expensive.

In saying this, there is some debate as to whether we need to know every fish taken by recreational fishers, or do we need to measure trends in fishing and seasonal changes.

### Reporting requirements for charter boat operators

Concern has been expressed by various stakeholders about the need to monitor and control take from recreational charter vessels. Charter boat operators take people out fishing - their customers are amateur fishers. It is proposed that charter operators be required to report catch and effort by their customers. Fisheries for which management would be improved by charter reporting are relatively small components of the overall amateur sector. However, charter effort tends to be concentrated on high-value hot spots. Reporting would provide information on trends in recreational fishing and whether the annual fishing experience is improving or showing a decline. This would be of particular use in key vulnerable species such as snapper, blue cod, groper, kingfish, scallops and rock lobster.

However, within the charter sector there is a suspicion that requirements for catch reporting signal an intention to introduce quota for the charter sector. To counter the concern that catch reporting is a precursor to quota allocation, the Government could provide an assurance that quota will not be introduced for charter operators, nor will they be required to pay resource levies.

### Estimation of relative value for commercial and amateur fishing

In aiming to improve the value obtained from shared fisheries, several of the proposals in the document rely on being able to estimate the relative value of resource use by different

sectors. Value includes commercial profit and economic activity associated with harvest from both the commercial and amateur sectors (such as employment, retail sales, and foreign exchange earnings from exports and tourism). Value also includes non-market values associated with the enjoyment and satisfaction of going fishing for food or fun.

### Managing key shared fish stocks at above the bio-mass maximum sustainable yield. Bmsy.

Under section 13 of the Fisheries Act 1996, the total allowable catch, or TAC, is set as a sustainability measure, and aims to maintain the stock at or above a level that maximises the sustainable yield (a level known as Bmsy).

Managing a fishery at Bmsy results in fewer fish being left in the sea, but greater overall productivity and hence yields. This suits commercial fishers who generally favour lower stock levels with a higher annual yield. However, non-commercial fishers tend to favour maintaining high stock levels and more fish in the water, because fish are more abundant and individual fish are larger. Managing stocks at higher levels is difficult under the current provisions of the Fisheries Act, as this is not necessary for sustainability reasons alone and is likely, in many circumstances, to be a significant disadvantage to the interests of the commercial sector.

It is proposed that provisions to set the TAC for shared fisheries be modified to explicitly allow for a management target to be set above Bmsy in key shared fish stocks, where this will increase overall value obtained from the fishery. Another proposal is to rebuild depleted shared fisheries stocks within a shorter period than commercial interests alone might favour.

These provisions would be applied where best available information indicates that this would increase the overall value of the particular fishery, taking into account the costs of the rebuild.

Both of these proposals involve foregoing current catch. Where the target level or rebuild timeframe is selected specifically to recognise non-commercial interests, consideration of adjustment costs or reallocation compensation for the commercial sector may be appropriate.

How the TAC is allocated among the amateur and commercial sectors is highly contentious. Some amateur advocates have expressed a strong sense of grievance and distrust of management processes. Their key concern is that past allocation decisions, based on