

Phil Heatley

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Speech to TOKM AGM, Friday 30 January 2009

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E nga mana, e nga reo, e nga waka nga mema o Te Ohu Kaimoana, tena koutou

* Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

* Experience on the PPC means I have met some of you before and I have some understanding of the issues faced by Māori interests in the industry and by customary Maori fishers.

* I am looking forward to the challenge of being Minister. This is a difficult time for the country, as you all know, and the conditions we face will affect all industries - the fishing industry is not exempt.

* But the fishing industry is one of the country's largest export earners and a major employer. We need the productive export sectors to help drive our economy and lead a recovery.

* I commend the initiative to hold the Maori Economic Workshop on Wednesday to generate ideas to mitigate the impact of the economic downturn on Maori, and I acknowledge the work of Ngahiwi (Tomoana) in chairing the session on the primary sector, encompassing the fisheries sector, which developed some constructive proposals

* I am committed to doing all I can to help the industry get through this slowdown in the best shape possible.

* We have a good platform to start from.

o In particular we can take confidence from the QMS and an ongoing commitment to property rights. This helps us avoid many of the problems that other countries face in managing their fisheries.

o Then there's the deed of settlement and the positives that certainty brings.

o The Government is committed to working with tangata whenua as a treaty partner.

* We recognise that Maori are major players and a critical part of the fishing industry.

* The National-led government is strongly focused on creating a positive and supportive environment for the businesses that make up the fishing industry - from the small businesses in the regions to large companies.

* I see the role of government as helping our productive sectors to prosper and deliver the results we want for our country.

* I don't want to see rules and regulations unnecessarily standing in the way of progress. That said, we have an ambitious policy programme.

* I have recently approved a special permit purpose to facilitate exploratory fishing:

o A major benefit initially will be for the exploratory deepwater crab industry, which AFL is a major part of.

o This is exciting with potential for large export earnings, crabs are a valuable international commodity and I hope that New Zealand will be able to enter this market.

o I am sure there will be other species that can be developed. This should make it easier to pioneer new fisheries and create new opportunities.

* Also on the policy front are the upcoming amendments to the Emissions Trading Scheme. As it stands the ETS will be a significant cost to the productive export sectors we need to drive our economy.

* We are also making major amendments to the Resource Management Act. We see this as being of benefit to the entire country as numerous infrastructure and development projects are unshackled and can finally move ahead.

* We are going to sort out aquaculture and get the industry developing as I believe it can and should. There is a plan in place for this, starting this year. We want to unlock aquaculture's potential; this will be good for the seafood industry and with it Maori fishing businesses.

* There is some progress being made already; we have an amendment Bill before Select Committee that we intend to progress. This will have some benefit until we get a wider amendment package in place. That package will:

o Expand the potential for negotiated outcomes where there will be a large effect on fishing.

o Improve the operation of the invited private plan change process.

o And facilitate experimental aquaculture.

* The Government and the industry have commissioned an independent review and we intend to work together on the amendments to the regime.

* The Ministry is currently holding Treaty Strategy hui around the country to discuss how it can better deliver on settlement obligations and in particular provide for better input and participation.

* This includes process to exploring with tangata whenua how their goals for fisheries management in their rohe moana and how to better integrate the views of iwi and hapu.

* The Ministry is also starting to work with the iwi reference group, a group of influential iwi leaders who will provide advice directly to the chief executive.

* While Maori are pivotal players in the fishing industry, they have rights and interests that go well beyond this, including their role as Kaitiaki, and managers of the non-commercial customary sector.

* I understand that you are discussing the challenge of bringing together and balancing these diverse interests, and TOKM has a key role to play. We look forward to talking to you about how progress can be made.

- * One area that needs some work and discussion is mātaihai reserves.
- o There is a necessity here to consider and recognise the rights and aspirations of iwi and hapu and the Crown's obligations under the Deed of Settlement.
- o We must also consider the rights and operations of our inshore commercial fishers, both Maori and non-Maori and not encroach unduly on what is a valuable part of the national economy.
- * It is good to see you working collaboratively with the Ministry of Fisheries. When government and industry work together we achieve real results. Government does not have a monopoly on good ideas and I want to see more collaboration; I want your ideas on how to make things work better.
- * The Ministry's recent discussions with industry leaders have identified areas we can work on together
- * In that vein, good progress is being made:
- o The seabirds working groups are making good progress in addressing the problem of seabird bycatch.
- o The Fishery Plans for Deepwater and Foveaux Oyster are making good progress. I'm looking forward to seeing them.
- o And management of deepwater fisheries is going well. I am very supportive of AFL and TOKM's continuing involvement here.
- * I have been pleased to hear about the Kahungunu planning initiative, which is making good progress in reconciling the diverse interests in these fisheries and developing a consensus around an approach to fisheries management.
- * In summary, a collaborative approach is productive and I want to see more of it.
- * One challenge for managing our deepwater fisheries is getting more involvement from iwi. Many iwi have received deepwater quota but are not yet actively involved in the deepwater industry. However they are important quota owners and the government is keen to see them have more involvement. I see TOKM as having a major role to play in achieving this.
- * It has been good to see work on the industry sector strategy, which will help guide the industry into the future. I understand TOKM, Sealord and AFL are working closely with senior leaders at MFish to dovetail this sector strategy with the Ministry's Fisheries 2030 project. These initiatives will help to guide how MFish is organised and the services it provides.
- * There will be some changes over the coming year in the wider public service and at MFish.
- * Taxpayers and businesses are looking to government to ensure there is good value for money in government spending.
- * We intend to deliver a streamlined, efficient public service with an increased focus on achieving results and delivering value for money. This will be of great importance during economic slowdown.

* This means little or no new money for a host of new initiatives and new spending. Government departments, including the Ministry of Fisheries will have to do more with less.

* MFish senior leadership is working closely with me and senior Ministers on an ongoing programme to review current spending and priorities. I am confident that we can get more efficiency and greater value for money.

* I want to see less regulation of the industry, remaining regulations to be less intrusive, and for those regulations to have clear benefit to the health of fish stocks.

* I will be meeting with a range of key players in the industry and amongst Maoridom over the coming months. I look forward to hearing your ideas about how things can be done better.

* Despite the challenging times we all face I am confident the fishing industry is well governed and well prepared to ride out the stormy weather ahead.

* I promise you the Government will be doing its part to support you by creating a better environment for your businesses.

* I would like to wish TOKM, AFL and everyone here today all the best for this Hui and for the coming year.

No reira tena koutou tena koutou katoa