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A positive sign of things to come?

The possibility of ‘more fish in the water’ for New Zealand’s inshore fisheries may get a boost if amendments to section 10 the Fisheries Act 1996 are enacted.

option4 has submitted in support of the Minister of Fisheries’ objectives to enable a more precautionary approach to be taken when making management decisions for our fisheries. The amendment act is due to be implemented by August this year.

This is good news for everyone who wants more conservative management of our fisheries that will both leave ‘more fish in the water’ and improve non-commercial fishing.

Another pleasing aspect of this review process has been the opportunity to endorse the Environment and Conservation Organisations of NZ (ECO) submission to the Primary Production Select Committee, demonstrating that like-minded conservation organisations can work together to improve our fisheries.

option4 has also submitted that we do not support changes to other sections of the Fisheries Act unless they are fully consulted on.

Jim Anderton’s proposal has been challenged by the fishing industry which has enjoyed the financial rewards of the laissez faire, hands-off management style of the Ministry of Fisheries, for years.

Kahawai Legal Challenge

The amendments were proposed before the release of the High Court judgment in relation to the judicial review of the Minister’s 2004 and 2005 decisions for the allocation of kahawai – the ‘Kahawai Legal Challenge’.

The ruling, released on March 21st 2007, has now overtaken some statements made in the Minister’s statement on the intent of the proposed amendments. Of particular relevance is Justice Rhys Harrison’s reference to the hierarchy of sustainability and utilisation, where he clearly states in paragraph 17,

“...on plain reading of s 8 the bottom line is sustainability. That must be the Minister’s ultimate objective. Without it, there will eventually be no utilisation.”

Given the court’s interpretation, there is no obstacle to the Minister applying a more precautionary approach now, without any changes to the Act.

As conservationists we wholeheartedly agree with Justice Harrison and will support the Minister in his ‘fish come first’ approach to manage our fisheries.

A good place to start implementation of this new approach would be Snapper 8, the west coast snapper stock. This fishery has been managed at half the sustainable level for years and a whole

generation of people have missed out on access to an abundant fishery. Unquestionably there are other important fisheries that would benefit from more conservative management.

If the modification means the days of managing inshore fisheries to satisfy purely commercial objectives are numbered then let everyone support the Minister and his amendments to emphasise that 'fish come first.'

To read the option4 submission in support of the Fisheries Act 1996 Amendment Bill go to http://www.option4.co.nz/Fisheries_Mgmt/farsoption4.htm.