

Hokianga Accord Update #27

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Some species should remain public property

Following advice from his Ministry Phil Heatley, the Minister of Fisheries, has decided to introduce Bladder Kelp off the South Island and around the Chatham Islands into the quota management system as of October 2010. It seems no species, not even the humble seaweed, can escape the Ministry of Fisheries' ongoing drive to allocate perpetual private property rights to our marine wildlife. Surely some species ought to remain sacred, public property.

In an effort to avert commercialisation of Bladder Kelp, the Hokianga Accord and option4 teams jointly submitted against the mass exploitation of such an important, national resource that sustains many other species that we value.

We live in hope that the Minister sets the commercial catch limit at zero by October next year. However, that is unlikely given that there are several commercial interests waiting to get their claws on a perpetual allocation of this prized taonga [treasure].

In their final advice paper to the Minister, the Ministry of Fisheries (MFish) noted they received 26 submissions in response to their management proposals. These submissions were interpreted as giving "overwhelming support" for introducing Bladder Kelp into the quota management system (QMS).

The reality is that:

- ⇒ 14 submissions supported the introduction of Bladder Kelp into the QMS with a catch limit set at zero;
- ⇒ Seven submissions opposed QMS introduction. Some of those submitters preferred a zero catch limit if Bladder Kelp was introduced into the quota system; and
- ⇒ Five industry submissions supported QMS introduction with higher catch limits.

Once again, it seems the Ministry have taken the "we support QMS introduction" statements from the initial 14 submissions as confirmation for their privatisation agenda, without giving proper regard to the remaining concerns about setting the catch limit at zero.

MFish are quick to claim that fisheries management is not a voting game, and due consideration is given to the content of public submissions. However, it is difficult not to come to that conclusion when we read statements like "overwhelming support".

There will be another consultation process next year before the Minister sets the total allowable catch (TAC) and total allowable commercial catch (TACC) for Bladder Kelp. Not surprisingly, commercial interests are already lining up for their allocation.

Based on historic behaviour, the Ministry will allocate the majority of catching rights to those who have taken most of these living seaweeds in the past.

From a non-commercial perspective the Minister, when making his decision in 2010, will need to give due consideration to the concerns raised by the public in regards to the environmental, social and cultural value of these growing seaweeds.

Sustaining the growth and abundance of species at the lower end of the food chain will enhance the survival rate of those finfish and shellfish that we value.

It will be a day to celebrate when the Minister can claim he received genuine, “overwhelming support” to apply the purpose and principles of the Fisheries Act to ensure the sustenance of our marine environment and the social, economic and cultural wellbeing of all New Zealanders.

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