

Hokianga Accord Update #12

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Hasty legislation rarely delivers good outcomes

For a long time Maori felt we were on our own in being denied justice. Little did we realise that while we were dealing with land, customary fishing and Treaty issues our ability to catch kaimoana to feed our whanau was slowly being eroded. It was not until mid north iwi got together with option4 and the NZ Big Game Fishing Council, through the Hokianga Accord, that we now know why we struggle to catch a feed - unsustainable fishing practices and poor application of our fisheries laws.

A recent court case has highlighted deficiencies in the way the Minister and Ministry of Fisheries have been managing our kaimoana under section 13 of the Fisheries Act 1996. An amendment has been proposed which will legalise what the High Court said was unlawful practice. There is no attempt to address the faults or improve management, just a legalisation of current, defective processes.

On July 22nd the Minister, Jim Anderton, presented the Fisheries Act 1996 Amendment Bill (No.2) to Parliament. Fisheries spokesperson, Phil Heatley, immediately expressed National's support and the Maori Party has since endorsed the government's Bill. The Bill will be considered by the Primary Production Committee and reported back to Parliament before the end of August. Anderton is in a rush to set catch limits for Orange Roughy and Bluenose by October.

Why the rush to amend section 13 when it could be so much better and achieve what we are all aspiring to – more fish in the water?

At present, if information is poor decision-makers can take a precautionary approach and set lower catch limits to ensure sustainability. If this Bill is passed the Minister will be compelled, every time, to set the highest catch level possible, with or without good information.

This change will not only affect deepwater species but all fish stocks. It will jeopardise the management of all fisheries important to non-commercial fishers, a significant portion of whom are Maori non-commercial fishers seeking food to put on the table.

A lot of effort went into developing an alternative solution and the Accord's submission was presented to the Select Committee in early August. MFish has already rejected those suggestions in favour of the current amendment. It seems they are quite happy to allow today's generation to flog our fisheries at the expense of future generations.

There is no logical reason why the Minister cannot make an interim decision this year and start an in-depth review process that will include considering the impact of such drastic measures on our mokopuna/grandchildren.

People are struggling to catch a feed now, what will happen under such an extreme maximum catch regime?

Section 13 is the key sustainability measure applied to most of our inshore fisheries. This amendment is not about an urgent requirement to set catch levels for a couple of deepwater fish stocks. It is about denying every New Zealander the right to healthy fisheries and the ability to feed our kids.

Hasty legislation rarely delivers good outcomes. We should make haste slowly.

This issue will be hotly debated at the next Hokianga Accord hui on September 4th and 5th at Te Tii marae, Waitangi. All welcome – please call Shelley Naera on 0275 872466 for more details if you would like to attend.