

Hokianga Accord Update #18

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Where are the fish?

As family budgets are stretched to breaking point the ability of our whanau to go fishing and put food on the table gains in importance. So it is vital we maintain easy access to kahawai and other key fisheries including snapper, tarakihi, crayfish, paua, mullet and flounder.

Kahawai was once a staple food for many families, but since the advent of bulk harvesting in the form of purse seining many of our whanau have been denied access to this traditional food source.

The Kahawai Legal Challenge has received strong support from Ngapuhi, Ngati Whatua, and many other Maori associated with the Hokianga Accord because of the need to protect the well-being of our mokopuna.

A delegation from the Accord is planning to attend the Wellington Supreme Court hearing to witness the final stage of the legal proceedings which seeks to achieve “more fish in the water/kia maha atu nga ika ki roto i te wai”.

It is also the first time that amateur (recreational) fishers and Maori have worked together through the courts to ensure that all New Zealanders can continue to put kai on the table.

This collaboration was a natural development after realising that non-commercial fishing interests, both customary and amateur, suffer similar difficulties in depleted fisheries. Fishing with or without a permit is meaningless if there are no fish to catch.

Another reason for supporting the Challenge is that the majority of the time Maori fish for food it is under the amateur fishing regulations not within the customary regime. Permits are for special occasions.

Kahawai have an important role in the marine food chain. There is an obligation on fisheries managers as well as the people to protect this taonga/treasure so our mokopuna inherit healthy fisheries and an environment that will sustain them in the future.

It has been an interesting discovery journey to learn the ins and outs of the Fisheries Act 1996 through this legal process. Sustainability has always been the bottom line.

When providing for people's use of the fisheries the Minister has to have particular regard to kaitiakitanga/guardianship and ‘allow for’ our non-commercial fishing interests. The Minister can do this in various ways. What matters is what we see and catch when we go down to the sea. Having abundant fisheries, clean water and a healthy and diverse marine environment will help to sustain us all.

We are only one recession away from fishing for the pot being a vital way for people to feed themselves. But where are the fish?

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