

Hokianga Accord Update #2

NZ Fishing News November 2007 edition

October 2007

Marine protection. On whose terms?

A network of large marine reserves around the coastline has been proposed by the Department of Conservation and Ministry of Fisheries' in their joint Marine Protected Areas (MPA) Draft Classification and Protection Standards policy. Decisions on the regions and habitats that need protecting have been made by an 'expert' panel with very little input from those who fish to put food on the table.

Sustenance fishers know their local fishing areas, have seen the damage and indeed advocated against the adverse effects of silt-laden land run-off and sewerage overflows degrading their coastal waters for many years.

Other significant threats to biodiversity come from toxic algal blooms, invasive species and seabed mining. Clearly marine protection encompasses more than just banning fishing in an area.

Maori and non-Maori involved in the Hokianga Accord, the mid north regional fisheries forum, know first hand the impact of marine reserves. They understand that unless quota is reduced fishing effort is displaced into surrounding areas thereby depleting that portion of the coastline. This while ignoring the central issue of managing fisheries so there is more fish in the water.

A much broader approach to environmental management is practicing the Maori principles (tikanga) of kaitiakitanga (guardianship), which underpins the customary local area fisheries management tools of mataitai, taiapure and rahui. The failure to acknowledge the potential of these tools to improve fisheries abundance seems to suggest that the implementation of the MPA policy has been predetermined. If so, this is a disappointment for those hapu and growing coastal communities who are working together to achieve more fish in the water and a healthier marine environment.

The latest MPA proposals were released in June 2007. For many the MPA document's existence went largely unnoticed until the recent Accord hui when DoC's Whangarei officer, Alan Fleming, explained the details. More information is in the August hui report online at www.HokiangaAccord.co.nz.

For such a challenging subject as marine protection, the growing relationship between Maori and non-Maori working together has proved its true value. Far north iwi, mid north iwi, the teams from option4 and the NZ Big Game Fishing Council combined their collective knowledge and jointly submitted their response on October 1st. The submission is online at http://www.option4.co.nz/Marine_Protection/documents/Joint_NC_MPA_Submission_1007.pdf.

For several years these groups have actively promoted customary management as a uniquely Aotearoa/NZ way to provide abundance for present and future generations of all New Zealanders. This is because any changes to management of the coastline and surrounding waters will have a major effect on all of us.

The wider community often benefit from the implementation of the customary tools yet both MFish and DoC have done little to educate the public about them and how they can qualify as marine protected areas.

The MPA process appears to be a long-winded way to try and justify huge marine reserve networks and is not necessary to achieve biodiversity protection.

You are welcome to join in further discussions at the next Accord hui on November 9th and 10th at Waipapa marae, Auckland University.