

Matariki – A New Year, a new beginning

Matariki is the traditional Maori New Year. In Northland Matariki is being celebrated on 14th June. The Hokianga Accord is hopeful this occasion will bring a fresh approach in fisheries management so that all people who live in Aotearoa enjoy bountiful seas, a healthy lifestyle and teach their children to conserve the earth we depend upon.

Fishing is an important aspect of Maori life. An estimated 51 percent of Maori go fishing. For many urban Maori, their only access to fishing is by chartering a boat with a bunch of mates. In rural areas, the old dinghy, a couple of oars and a net are still common.

Using these simple methods people have harvested enough to feed the whanau and a few elders who are unable to fish. As fish become scarcer, the traditional fishing ways are less successful.

Fisheries forums

For the past five years Ngapuhi, Ngati Whatua, other iwi and hapu, as well as recreational fishing and environmental organisations have gathered as the Hokianga Accord to advocate for "more fish in the water/kia maha atu nga ika ki roto i te wai".

At the most recent hui Ngapuhi and Ngati Whatua confirmed their strong resolve to work together as the mid north iwi fisheries forum.

Despite this determination, the Ministry of Fisheries has still not committed to resourcing this shared model of advocacy that could have benefits for all New Zealanders.

Instead, MFish has continued reforming regional recreational fisheries forums, limiting both numbers and coverage areas. All this while still deciding how Maori will be represented in separate forums established for customary issues.

Permitted fishing under the customary regulations represents a small fraction of total fishing by Maori. As Ngapuhi's chairman, Sonny Tau has said on numerous occasions, *"99.9 percent of the time Ngapuhi fish to feed our babies we are categorised as 'recreational' fishers"*.

Representation

Prior to the April hui there was a torrid exchange of correspondence in response to a South Island-based initiative to organise a meeting and discuss creating a single over-arching body that would represent all recreational fishing interests.

On the basis that only national organisations were invited, both Ngapuhi and Ngati Whatua were excluded from that meeting. Conversation with Maori would occur later. But Maori are tired of being treated as an after-thought.

One organiser, Nelson Cross, assured Sonny in March that, *"This concept is definitely not a fait accompli - Iwi can, will, and must be at the sharp end of decision making with us. Not only do we totally acknowledge this fact but we also welcome it. We are simply taking this initiative one small step at a time and full involvement with Iwi is obviously fundamental to progressing this concept after common ground has been identified with the National bodies."*

In mid-May we learnt the representation proposal had already been presented to the Minister of Fisheries, without any direct input from us. This is not the end of the matter.

The Hokianga Accord will continue to foster the kotahitanga [unity] that has developed between tangata whenua and non-Maori to achieve abundance through better fisheries management and representation, for the benefit of all of our mokopuna [descendants].

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