

option4 Update #1
NZ Spearo magazine
October 2008

More fish in the water

option4 has joined forces with the New Zealand Big Game Fishing Council and the mid north iwi fisheries forum, the Hokianga Accord, to achieve abundant fisheries and a healthy marine environment.

This is good news for fishers, spearfishers and freedivers.

option4 is a diverse group of fishing representatives from around Aotearoa who rallied in mid-2000 to argue against the government's Soundings policy, which sought to confine every New Zealander's right to fish.

Soundings and licencing

In addition to limiting access to abundant fisheries, the bureaucrats also proposed that fishermen be licenced, irrespective if you were fishing for food or pleasure.

Unprecedented opposition to the three options in the Soundings document provided fertile territory for an organised response.

Advent of option4

option4 developed four principles based on the fundamental right of all New Zealanders to harvest quality kaimoana from the sea.

Project leader, Paul Barnes, and Scott Macindoe travelled thousands of kilometres talking with fishing and dive clubs, various groups and public meetings.

Overwhelming support was given for option4's principles:

1. A priority right over commercial fishers for free access to a reasonable daily bag limit to be written into legislation.
2. The ability to exclude commercial methods that deplete recreationally important areas.
3. The ability to devise plans to ensure future generations enjoy the same or better quality of rights while preventing fish conserved for recreational use being given to the commercial sector.
4. No licensing of recreational fishers.

By the end of the Soundings submission deadline over 60,000 New Zealanders had rejected the three options put forward - a record response to a fisheries management proposal. It was also a warning to any aspiring fisheries Minister to avoid the licencing issue if they wanted to maintain their credibility.

option4.co.nz

A website www.option4.co.nz was initiated to act as a portal of hard-to-source information, a contact point for all Kiwis who want to stay abreast of the issues affecting their free access to saltwater fishing and to allow people to provide their input on important issues.

Monthly Updates provided regular news via email. These were interspersed with occasional Alerts to advise of urgent developments requiring a speedy response.

Eight years later a diverse range of people with an interest in abundant fisheries and innovative ways to protect the marine environment are still receiving the free e-news.

All spearfishers and freedivers are encouraged to register and join the thousands already online.

Public awareness

Increasing public awareness about why and how our fisheries have declined is a priority for option4. So too is offering cost effective long-term solutions to rebuild our fisheries to former abundance levels. In today's environmentally friendly world it makes no sense to kill so many juvenile fish in the process of landing fish for export.

It is unfathomable why Kiwis are being denied access to healthy fisheries in the pursuit of feeding the world with quality fish.

How can a person dining in the finest European restaurant have more right to eat New Zealand fish than a man standing on the beach casting a line to catch a fish for his kids' dinner?

Thousands of Kiwis have also objected to the ongoing use of industrial, bulk harvesting methods such as purse seining to scoop up thousands of schools of kahawai for low value use such as crayfish bait and fish meal.

NZ Big Game Fishing Council

option4 and the NZ Big Game Fishing Council have formed strong bonds. The Council is the largest fishing representative organisation in Aotearoa. Its 31,000 members and 59 clubs span the country and are ably represented by a management committee of fourteen and President Richard Baker.

In earlier years the Council focussed on sportfishing and ensuring ongoing access to the game species valued by their members. In more recent times they have taken a broader interest in the management of inshore species.

This is partly due to their changing membership, more mobile fleet and the recognition that having a healthy marine environment requires both commercial fishing to be constrained to sustainable limits and meaningful marine protection.

Kahawai Legal Challenge

Underwriting the Kahawai Legal Challenge is the Council's biggest investment to date. The Challenge was initiated in 2005 and sought to clarify how the Minister of Fisheries should be applying the law when making management decisions for all fisheries, to achieve the purpose of the Fisheries Act 1996.

This purpose directs the Minister to manage fisheries sustainably so all New Zealanders can provide for their social, economic and cultural wellbeing. In part this means people having access to sufficient numbers and quality of fish to put food on the table, or enjoy while diving!

option4 and our largest iwi, Ngapuhi are fully supportive of the Council's commitment to the Challenge. Ngapuhi's Chairman, Raniera (Sonny) Tau, delivered a compelling affidavit on behalf of their iwi in August 2005. In it he confirmed that if a cut was required for a staple food such as kahawai, that cut must come initially from the commercial sector.

While Maori are indelibly linked to commercial fishing through the Treaty Settlement it is their non-commercial fishing interests that gives rise to their ability feed their children and mokopuna/grandchildren.

Ngapuhi people would prefer to have food on the table than have kahawai exported as pet food or crayfish bait.

Hokianga Accord

After four years of debate, discussion and twelve overnight hui a strong relationship has developed between the option4 team, the NZ Big Game Fishing Council and the non-commercial fishing interests of mid north iwi, both Ngapuhi and Ngati Whatua.

All have a common goal of “more fish in the water/kia maha atu nga ika ki roto i te wai”.

Non-commercial fishing, whether for Maori customary, recreational or sustenance purposes relies on having enough fish available in the places we normally fish. To achieve this we need:

- fisheries to be managed at abundance levels that allows small fish to grow to adult size,
- rich diversity in the ecosystem protected from damaging fishing practices, and
- sustainable use of fisheries by today’s generation so fisheries will be healthy for future generations.

Many of our fisheries fall below these standards and have been doing so for more than twenty years, despite the introduction of the quota management system.

Most divers appreciate the value of having a ‘buddy’, particularly when things go wrong. In recognising that Crown agencies and commercial interests were not meeting our non-commercial fishing and environmental interests, the Hokianga Accord is a natural partnership.

Using the combined skills of the legal, fisheries management and advocacy teams substantial submissions have been made to both the Ministry of Fisheries and Department of Conservation on numerous proposals.

If you want to be part of this growing community seeking more fish in the water please go online and register your details at www.option4.co.nz.