

option4 Update #76 NZ Fishing News
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Sustainable Shared Fisheries

Without doubt the Shared Fisheries Policy review must address the injustices of the past and provide real incentives for people to conserve fish. option4 supports the public's view that proportional allocation with any associated licensing regime is neither fair or acceptable, unless the fundamental flaws of the current system are addressed. Only then will we be able to ensure abundance for future generation through the sustainable management of shared fisheries.

Jim Anderton, the Minister of Fisheries, says that a fair outcome is desirable from the Shared Fisheries Policy review. option4 agrees with him. The delayed release of the public discussion document from July to the end of October has fuelled robust discussion amongst groups representing the fishing interests of the public.

Allocation of fisheries resources has been a hot topic for years; more so since the introduction of the Quota Management System (QMS) in 1986 and the new Fisheries Act in 1996.

The simple truth is: if fish stocks were sustainable there would be sufficient fish for all sectors and fewer debates about allocation and the environment.

Excessive Commercial Fishing

The Quota Management System was introduced to constrain excessive commercial fishing and rebuild the resulting depleted fisheries:

- Section 8 of the Fisheries Act requires fisheries managers to give due regard to sustainable use of the fisheries while conserving enough resources for future generations;
- Section 21 covers the need to ensure that the non-commercial sector (recreational and customary fishers) has access to their fair share of the fisheries.

The Ministry of Fisheries (MFish) has not applied the sustainable use provisions of the Act as they were originally intended. option4's concern is that MFish has indicated that the objective of the Shared Fisheries Policy review is a change to section 21 of the Act.

Recreational, traditional and customary fishers should not accept changes to section 21, particularly while their social, economic and cultural expectations are not being catered for under the current regime (as the Act requires), and the effects of overfishing are not being adequately addressed.

Moyle's Promise

A previous Fisheries Minister, Colin Moyle, released a document supportive of the public's interest in fisheries in 1989. In it he wrote:

“Government's position is clear, where a species of fish is not sufficiently abundant to support both commercial and non-commercial fishing, preference will be given to non-commercial fishing. This position reflects Government's resolve to ensure all New Zealanders can enjoy and benefit from our fisheries.”

Despite having the QMS in place for twenty years successive Governments have failed to deliver on its promises to rebuild depleted fisheries and to give preferential access to non-commercial fishermen.

Indeed, the Ministry of Fisheries seems to be incapable of limiting a rampant commercial industry to the Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) in many of our shared fisheries. So any suggestion in the review to resolve the shared fisheries issue through the use of proportional allocation would need to address the injustices within the current system.

Proportional Allocation

The last time allocation was publicly discussed was during the *Soundings* process in the year 2000. Proportional allocation was promoted as being a fair way to distribute fisheries resources. To sweeten the proposal, an offer to provide limited funding for recreational representatives was presented. The public saw through the façade and realised that a form of licensing would need to be imposed if the proportional allocation concept was successful. Over 100,000 people signed up to reject *Soundings*.

On the surface proportional shares in fisheries appears to be a fair way of allocating fisheries between competing sectors. If fisheries improve, commercial and non-commercial fishers enjoy an equal increase in their share. If a fishery needs to be rebuilt each sector takes an equal reduction.

The trap with this argument is when fisheries are depleted and need to be rebuilt, which is the case in most of our important fisheries. Facts are, several proportional management decisions over the past few years took no account whatsoever of the damage caused by commercial overfishing. The 2005 decision for the west coast snapper stock is a prime example.

Commercial fishers have caught, on average, 10 percent more snapper in Area 8 (SNA8) than they have been allocated, in fourteen of the last seventeen years. To engineer a rebuild the Fisheries Minister reduced all sectors' catch by an equal proportion - around 13 percent. No regard was given to the conservation efforts of recreational fishers, who conserved more than a quarter of the catch to which they were entitled. Totally unfair.

Conservation

Unjust proportional decisions such as that for SNA8 give the wrong signals to the public. It seems that any conservation effort will be penalised, and commercial fishers who take excessive amounts of fish will be rewarded with more than their fair share.

Non-commercial fishermen are becoming increasingly aware of the need to conserve fish but they should not have to prop up unsustainable commercial take.

The outcome of this scenario is threefold: a timeframe to rebuild SNA8 spanning beyond 2020, an unconstrained fishing industry and a seemingly powerless Ministry.

Resources

The imbalance of resources between sectors is a major impediment to achieving robust outcomes from fisheries management processes. Solutions aimed at improving the abundance of fish (or rapidly rebuilding depleted fisheries) often fail due to the mismatch in representation. Educated volunteers with little experience, such as option4, cannot compete equally with determined professional lobbyists employed by the fishing industry.

The Government, with all of its resources invested in the Ministry, has failed to fulfill its obligations and promises, to rebuild depleted fisheries and give preference to amateur fishers, the public fishing for food not profit.

option4 will keep you posted when the Shared Fisheries Policy public discussion document is finally released.