

option4 Update #104

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The Immeasurable Joys of Fishing

The next best thing to actually fishing is being able to give your catch away. The look in the eyes of the neighbour's kids as you load up their dinner plate with freshly caught fish while answering their incessant questions is priceless. And while economists search for ways to put a 'value' on the pleasures derived from fishing most people appreciate that a dollar-and-cents analysis will never encompass their interest in fishing.

Previous legislators recognised the difference between commercial and non-commercial fishing and drafted laws that treated each activity separately, so it was pleasing to read the recent Court of Appeal kahawai decision, which upheld the 2007 High Court's ruling, that non-commercial fishing interests must be allowed for first, prior to the Minister setting a commercial catch limit in a fishery.

Currently the Minister sets the total allowable catch (TAC), an overall limit specifying how much can be extracted from each fish stock. Next the Minister 'allows for' non-commercial fishing interests and all fishing-related mortality. This is achieved by making allowances in the form of a tonnage, which is subtracted from the TAC. The remainder is specified as the Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC).

The allowances are:

- Non-commercial fishing interests, both Maori customary and recreational
- All other mortality in the stock caused by fishing.

Finally, the TACC is set. So, the equation is:

$TAC - \text{allowances} = TACC.$

What are our non-commercial interests?

Our non-commercial fishing interests can range from supporting land conservation measures that will give us a healthy marine environment to having an abundance of fish in the places where we go fishing. For non-fishers, their interests could be in having adequate measures that limit the unnecessary mortality of a particular species. Of high interest to coastal bach owners is having surface-schooling fish swimming in and out of the nearest bay, for others it is the tranquillity of standing on the seashore at dawn while the rest of the townsfolk are asleep.

Several unsuccessful attempts have been made by government to redefine the value of non-commercial fishing. Both the 2000 Soundings process and the 2006 Shared Fisheries policy sought to remove the requirement to 'allow for' non-commercial interests before the remainder becomes the TACC. This would have achieved three outcomes:

- ⇒ non-commercial interests would be limited to a specific tonnage within the quota management system
- ⇒ a rigorous reporting regime, funded by a licence scheme, would be necessary to ensure our catch remained within the allocated tonnage
- ⇒ it would alter the Minister and Ministry of Fisheries status from being guardians of sustainability to simply fish accountants.

option4, in conjunction with other non-commercial fishing representatives, provided comprehensive responses to both of these processes. Most of that feedback was ignored. But they will be back!

In anticipation of further attempts to downgrade your non-commercial fishing interests from being 'allowed for' to simply having a specific catch amount, all New Zealanders need to consider how they want their, and their children's, fishing interests catered for in the future.