

#### **option4 Update #106**

NZ Fishing News OCTOBER 2008 edition  
September 2008

#### **Smokescreen covers cracks in Amendment Bill**

Objections from non-commercial fishing interest groups have failed to convince the Primary Production Committee that proposed changes to fisheries legislation:

- are detrimental to sustainable management;
- could leave future Ministers open to legal challenge; and
- appear as a smokescreen hiding an intention to increase commercial take.

In late August 2008 the Select Committee made its recommendations to Parliament on the proposed Fisheries Act Amendment Bill, with no significant changes to the draft. The Bill could be passed into law by mid-September.

Representatives of amateur, customary and environmental interests from option4, the Hokianga Accord and the NZ Big Game Fishing Council are demanding a more democratic process before any legislative changes are made that could deplete inshore fisheries further and affect people's ability to fish for food.

Major concerns surround the manner in which an exclusive group of industry, Treasury and Ministry of Fisheries officials developed the amendment. Amateur, customary and environmental interests were not invited to participate in the development of the Bill and to debate the relevant sustainability issues.

Richard Baker, President of the NZ Big Game Fishing Council is concerned that the sustainability threshold will be lowered which will lead to more fisheries declines.

"Fisheries management is littered with examples of devastated fish stocks because of poor information. It is ludicrous to suggest the Select Committee could have considered all the consequences of this law change in just four weeks. Fisheries legislation is complex. Time is needed to review the proposals and allow people to have adequate input."

Ngapuhi's non-commercial fisheries spokesperson on the Hokianga Accord, Paul Haddon, also questions the rushed changes and the motives of the people promoting the Bill.

"If the Bill is just a 'technical' change then you have to ask why both Maori and non-Maori are being excluded from participation and input in the process. Is it because industry and Ministry want to make sure they protect themselves from a public backlash?"

If the intention is to make the current purpose of the Fisheries Act subordinate to the objective of achieving maximum yield, then this carries other risks. A shift from managing fisheries to enable people to provide for their wellbeing to a goal of achieving a single biological objective is a huge shift in legal obligation.

Scott Macindoe, spokesperson for option4, has additional concerns.

“The Crown has an obligation to maintain our fisheries for future generations of New Zealanders. The proposed amendment is at odds with Ministerial duty to protect our fisheries, the environment and leave enough fish in the water for our children’s children.

“Future Ministers could be vulnerable and under constant pressure from commercial operators to set maximum catch levels whilst going against the Crown’s statutory obligation to manage fisheries by ensuring fish in sufficient abundance to enable people to provide for their social and cultural wellbeing.”

Non-commercial representatives are determined to work together to bring this important sustainability issue out in the open for discussion and uncover the façade that is being used to cover the cracks in this fisheries debate.

Visit [http://option4.co.nz/Fisheries\\_Mgmt/section13.htm](http://option4.co.nz/Fisheries_Mgmt/section13.htm).