

option4 Update #135

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Cautiously optimistic reaction to kahawai proposals

If community service awards were being handed out the most deserving recipients would be all those individuals, clubs, businesses and organisations who supported the Kahawai Legal Challenge. The consequences of this litigation appear to be reflected in the Ministry of Fisheries' recent proposals, and managing kahawai for public non-commercial fishing interests has finally been recognised.

Now we need to support the Minister, Phil Heatley, to make a bold decision before October. Submissions are due with MFish by 13 August.

Many of the issues raised during the four-year Challenge are discussed in the kahawai paper. Notably that the Minister can choose to maintain stocks at higher levels to provide better quality of fishing, kahawai has high social and cultural value and they are an integral part of the food chain as both predator and prey.

The Supreme Court confirmed the Minister could use his wide-ranging discretion to restore kahawai stocks. Doing so would enable the public to maximise its value while protecting future interests by having 'more fish in the water'.

Kahawai 1 (KAH1)

A major flaw is the proposal to reduce the non-commercial allowances in Kahawai 1 (KAH1), which extends from North Cape to East Cape. MFish propose reducing the recreational allowance by 46 percent and customary around 60 percent.

MFish recognise that the customary allowance is not meant as a constraint, the adjustment from 495 tonnes to 200t is merely a "correction".

But the reduction in the overall recreational allowance from 1680t to 900t is completely unjustified.

There is general agreement that recreational catches have been reduced because of depletion caused by excessive purse seining.

While no cuts to individual bag limits are proposed, MFish suggest these may be required in a couple of years to ensure recreational catch is constrained to the new 900t limit.

This 900t harvest estimate is based on uncertain information, numerous assumptions and biased towards the lower end of the mathematical models. But fish do not exist in cyberspace.

Fisheries must be managed sustainably to enable all New Zealanders to provide for well-being. The absolute minimum and most precautionary approach would be to set the recreational allowance at the mid-point of assumption – 1300t.

There are three variations of commercial catch limits; the Minister must choose one.

Commercial allocations ought to be reduced to cover inevitable bycatch only. Therefore the total allowable commercial catch (TACC) must be reduced by 400t, not the proposed 30t.

This will enable stocks to flourish and hopefully repopulate areas currently devoid of kahawai. It would also deliver on MFish's claim to manage kahawai based on greater public value and at higher abundance levels.

Social responsibility

option4 generally support the kahawai proposals and acknowledge MFish's interpretation of the Supreme Court ruling reflects most people's concerns. Now it is up to the Government to demonstrate some real social responsibility in these challenging times – at little or no cost to our society or economy.

Continued industrial targeting of our precious kahawai represents a huge loss of value to New Zealand when they are sold for minimal returns to feed cats and Australian crayfish.

If the public's interests are to be elevated up the scale, leapfrogging cats, crayfish and the pittance a few corporates net from this trade, the Minister will need to be much bolder with his kahawai decisions.

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