

option4 Update #137

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What are the Minister's priorities for kahawai?

Raging controversy and kahawai have become synonymous terms over the past twenty years, but the next few weeks will be most influential. The Minister of Fisheries, Phil Heatley, is currently considering the future management of kahawai. A decision is expected before 1 October 2010.

On 11 August option4 and its allies initiated online Alert #16 and survey asking people to comment on the quality of the kahawai fishery in their area. Within 48 hours over 800 individuals completed the survey and sent their views to MFish. Days later survey respondents numbered over one thousand.

All survey participants deserve a round of applause. We cherish the right of free speech in this country; sadly we do not exercise it enough.

Thanks also for your generous donations, these provide much-needed support for the team striving to achieve 'more fish in the water'.

MFish management proposals

In June MFish proposed various management options for three kahawai stocks. Kahawai 1 extends from North to Cape Runaway (KAH 1). KAH 2 spans East Cape to Wellington, and KAH 3 surrounds the South Island.

In our reply submission we endorsed the Ministry's stated intention to manage Kahawai 1 to better provide for the marine ecosystem, amateur and customary fishers. But we rejected their proposals because they were based on MFish's unsubstantiated view that the stock has never been fished down much and will recover on its own.

Another management strategy was developed by option4, the Hokianga Accord, the Bay of Islands Swordfish Club and NZ Sport Fishing. This draft was refined after an encouraging 96 percent of all survey respondents supported the team's alternative recommendations for KAH 1, 2 and 3.

Importance of kahawai

There was strong opposition to the ongoing purse seining of kahawai, and overwhelming support for reducing the total allowable commercial catch (TACC) limits to cover unavoidable bycatch only. Kahawai abundance needs to increase so that people can provide for their social, economic and cultural well-being.

Kahawai contribute to coastal productivity and ecosystems, while providing an important link between plankton and larger predators. It is evident that the bulk-harvesting of kahawai, largely for low value craybait and petfood markets, has resulted in a huge loss to the nation and our marine environment.

Alternative recommendations

In Kahawai 1 we rejected the proposed 30 tonne TACC reduction as too little, too late.

We proposed a 500t reduction to eliminate the targeted purse seine catch, which has been the cause of most "value demolition" over the past 30 years.

For Kahawai 2 and 3 MFish preferred to maintain current catch limits. However, the most effective way to rebuild stocks would be to reduce the TACC in both areas.

It is of national importance that the Minister makes a bold, but precautionary, decision now to rebuild our kahawai fisheries due to the dubious scientific information and the concerns expressed by so many experienced fishers.

At least by October we will know where Phil Heatley's priorities lie - with future New Zealanders or on the bottom line of a handful of corporate fishing companies determined to hang onto every last gram of quota they can, even if it has been allocated on the back of the unsustainable slaughter of our fisheries.

www.option4.co.nz/kahawai