

option4 Update #141

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No excuse for incompetence and mediocrity

Fisheries management in New Zealand is so contrived that maximising the profits of a few corporations has taken precedence over achieving the sustainability levels required enabling Kiwis to provide for their social, economic and cultural well-being.

In most fisheries our collective well-beings will be met by having a healthy, abundant stock. Catch limits set by the Fisheries Minister, Phil Heatley, will determine abundance levels.

As of October 1st Heatley and his government colleagues have given Sanford Ltd the majority shareholding in Kahawai 1.

Sanford's superior catch entitlements and actions are now the main determinant whether you or I are likely to chance upon a kahawai school if fishing anywhere between East Cape and North Cape this summer.

Years ago these schools were ubiquitous, seemingly everywhere, but that was before the crude purse seiners moved in with their spotter planes to bulk harvest thousands of tonnes of our traditional food source.

No account was taken of the value that ordinary New Zealanders placed on the humble kahawai, the 'people's fish'

Kahawai were guaranteed to give any youngster a fishing lesson, usually winning the first few battles despite the encouragement from dad or poppa.

For generations kahawai sustained coastal communities as a food source and as a target species for the local part-time commercial fishermen. Much of that catch was smoked and sold from roadside caravans managed by the fisher's family.

These people, their lifestyle and community's well-being were sacrificed in the early 1980s so that thirty years later our kahawai could be sold as industrial waste, for 23 cents per kilo.

Now, a West Australian crayfish is more likely to eat our kahawai than your kids.

Kahawai challenge

In 2004 the then Minister, David Benson-Pope, introduced kahawai into the quota management system.

Over the next two years thousands of people nationwide submitted that targeting of kahawai by purse seiners ought to be reduced, to enable a stock rebuild.

Those pleas were ignored and the Kahawai Legal Challenge was initiated in 2005, to clarify how the Minister ought to be making decisions for all important fisheries not just kahawai.

After traversing the High Court and Court of Appeal the Supreme Court decision was released in May 2009. The recent management review of kahawai was one outcome of those proceedings, but faint regard has been given to many of the Courts' determinations.

During the proceedings the Crown acknowledged there were many elements that contributed to 'allowing for' recreational interests in a fish stock. It was more than just the Minister setting aside a particular tonnage of fish.

A good way to measure whether recreational interests are being met in a fishery is to monitor both catch rates and the size of caught fish. Recent enquiries prove the Ministry has no meaningful data to describe either of these aspects.

Without this information it is easy to maintain the priority given to commercial interests in the kahawai fishery. It also means there is no data to compel fisheries managers to take positive action on behalf of the public.

After years of litigation and countless taxpayer dollars spent on boat ramp surveys there is no justifiable excuse for this level of incompetence and mediocrity from our public servants.

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