

option4 Update #97

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Brighter Prospects for Fisheries Management

As every fisherman knows, if the fish are not there you aren't going to catch them. Conversely, if there is an abundance of fish plenty will be caught. How then have we, on an island in the South Pacific, ended up scrapping over the remnants of fisheries managed under a 'world-leading' quota management system?

What about the future fishing prospects for our children and their children?

Shared Fisheries, the government's proposals for future fisheries management, was released in November 2006. So much has been written about the proposals and process that often it has been a case of 'never let the facts stand in the way of a good story'. Good news is on the horizon.

Fishing representatives from both amateur and industry have now agreed to jointly develop a framework to achieve outcomes acceptable to non-commercial and commercial fishing interests. Clearly customary fishing interests need to be involved in these discussions if meaningful solutions to fisheries abundance levels and local area management are to be found.

option4, the NZ Big Game Fishing Council and the NZ Recreational Fishing Council are jointly working with representatives from SeaFIC and Te Ohu Kaimoana, to reach some agreement by April 30th. This is the group's deadline to report progress to the Minister of Fisheries.

A Working Group of three people will be convened to carry out analysis, develop options and prepare a report for the Minister. The Steering Group of up to 12 representatives will be providing strategic guidance to the Working Group. This group will include four representatives from the amateur groups.

Both the Working and Steering groups are realistic about how much can be achieved by April 30th, however it is progress.

Group meetings are now underway. It is important to find the areas of agreement and those issues that require further discussion.

Given the considerable investment that amateur fishers have made to the Kahawai Legal Challenge, the High Court 'win' and subsequent defence of the industry's challenge in the Appeal Court, all parties are clear that these discussions are being held on a 'without prejudice' basis. That is, that nothing in these discussions can be used in these or any subsequent [legal] proceedings on this matter, unless mutually agreed by all the parties in the proceedings.

Terms of Reference are being developed to ensure all parties to these joint discussions are clear about the scope of work to be undertaken.

A United Amateur Voice

Another benefit of these discussions is the development of a protocol of engagement for amateur fishing representatives from option4, the NZBGFC and NZRFC. If agreed, this document has the potential to empower the collective effort and allay concerns of how each organisation can operate effectively with the other groups, to achieve a high level of consensus.

This agreement initially applies to the Shared Fisheries process but could conceivably be used to guide engagement in future discussions. We will keep you posted on progress of this protocol.

Enjoy your fishing; it has certainly been a summer to remember.