

option4 Update #99

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Marine Reserves – Coming to a Place Near You

Finalised guidelines for the implementation of marine protected areas (MPA), including marine reserves, have now been released. A considered analysis of the February document from the Ministers of Fisheries and Conservation is required however, it does confirm that nationally there will be fourteen coastal regions with at least one marine reserve and another MPA within that same zone.

What does this mean for fishing?

No fishing will be allowed within a marine reserve and depending on the MPA tool chosen, there could be limits to both commercial and amateur fishing. At this stage it is unclear whether the fishing restrictions will apply to customary harvest. This will need clarification as the process unfolds, as there are ongoing statutory obligations to tangata whenua that need to be met by the Crown.

What does this mean for our fisheries?

In March 2007 the High Court confirmed during the kahawai proceedings that ‘sustainability (was) the bottom line’ and that the Fisheries Minister has a mandatory obligation to manage fisheries to achieve the purpose of the legislation, which is to enable people to provide for their social, economic and cultural wellbeing.

It is ironic then that one government agency, the Department of Conservation, which is not involved in fisheries management, campaigns for more marine reserves to fix our fisheries when DoC’s partner in the MPA process is the Ministry of Fisheries. In over 20 years of having the quota system MFish has failed to demonstrate the leadership required to manage fisheries according to the legislation.

Providing for people’s wellbeing

There are few fisheries that are sufficiently abundant to provide for people’s current needs nor are they in good shape to hand on to our next generation of New Zealanders.

Excluding people from their coastal food-basket by allowing fisheries to deplete or confiscating areas for marine reserves does not constitute sustainable management. Many people in isolated regions rely on the sea for food and their wellbeing. Generally there are no supermarkets nearby or high wages to depend on.

All New Zealanders have a common law right to fish to provide for their needs. This right is particularly valuable because of our easy access to the sea and temperate climate. These factors contribute to the popularity of fishing whether as a pastime, a food-gathering exercise or a cultural experience.

Previous response

option4, in conjunction with the NZ Big Game Fishing Council and the Hokianga Accord, provided a substantial submission to the draft MPA document in October 2007. This was one of 158 submissions received by DoC/MFish and explained many of the concerns expressed above.

The submission can be read online at http://option4.co.nz/Marine_Protection/mpas.htm.

What next?

Once MFish and DoC have completed their inventory of current protected areas, identified the ‘gaps’ and decided which areas are priorities, regional forums will be established. Forums membership is

expected to be by Ministerial appointment only. It seems the Auckland/Hauraki area is next inline. If you want to protect your fishing while ensuring sustainability, make sure your voice is heard!