

option4 Update #122

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Pre-determined 2030 Vision process

The outcome of the Fisheries 2030 project is of real concern. Originally the Ministry of Fisheries sought support from fishers and marine interest groups to develop an agreed long-term vision and action plan. Despite the concerted effort of an alliance of environmental, amateur and customary fishing organisations, the project has morphed into another attempt to strengthen commercial fishing rights through privatising the fishery.

Privatisation would allow MFish to set minimum standards, allocate the available catch amongst commercial, customary and amateur interests, count the landed (dead) fish, and then retreat as the various groups battle amongst themselves for access rights.

Similar allocation proposals were rejected during the *Soundings* process in 2000, the *Shared Fisheries* debate in late 2006 and throughout the Kahawai Legal Challenge proceedings.

Vision 2030

Earlier this year MFish issued draft proposals on how a collective vision for fisheries management will be achieved by 2030. Twelve non-commercial environmental and fishing organisations formed an Alliance to respond. Several submissions and a meeting with the Minister eventuated.

Phil Heatley seemed genuinely interested in the Alliance's view that the proposals were skewed towards maximising economic outcomes with not enough consideration given to the social, economic and cultural wellbeing of all New Zealanders. The Minister assured the Alliance he would seek to "fix" that.

Very little of the Alliance's feedback has been incorporated into the final 2030 document, released in September.

Even more ominous is the complete removal of any intention to develop alternatives to managing fisheries at maximum sustainable yield (MSY). MFish has replaced this with an action point to "*set and implement fisheries harvest strategy standards*".

However, harvest standards all reference to the stock level (biomass) required to achieve this elusive maximum sustainable yield!

option4 supports managing fisheries at higher biomass levels because maximum sustainable yield is a knife-edge target that is hard to measure and very difficult, if not impossible, to know when surpassed.

After more than 20 years of the quota system MFish only has sufficient information to evaluate 117 out of the total 628 fish stocks. Seventy nine of those 117 fisheries are near or above target levels. 18 are considered depleted, eight collapsed and 19 are being overfished.

MFish and the fishing industry are already working towards reducing research and management costs so there is unlikely to be a major change in available information, particularly for those fisheries where there is little prospect of increasing commercial catch limits.

To overcome this information deficit we need to err on the side of caution, because we need abundant stocks of fish to enable us to provide for our social and cultural wellbeings.

We do not need another pre-determined reform process that will ultimately deny our children and grandchildren their right to have more fish in the water and a healthy marine environment.

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