

Securing an amateur fishing future

What's the issue?

The status and credibility of the amateur marine fishing sector is at an all time low:

- Representation is fragmented. No one group has a mandate to speak on behalf of all who fish under the amateur fishing regulations. For the Government this continues to be a very frustrating situation. For instance, to seek feedback on MFish recreational research options the Minister recently chose to invite seven individuals to a one hour meeting in Wellington. Even then feedback was fragmented.
- Over recent years fragmentation within the amateur fishing sector has been fostered by organisations that represent particular types of fishing attempting to claim a mandate to represent all amateur fishers. These tactics are not only divisive and counterproductive they are likely to compromise the credibility of all those who work hard in the interests of their members - something that has implications for the entire amateur fishing sector.
- A relatively small number of dedicated individuals work voluntarily on behalf of hundreds of thousands of nameless, faceless fishers who harvest the resource but contribute nothing to its sustainability or health. We have adopted a figure of 500,000 fishers, a number that falls within estimates that range from 300, 000 to over a million. In reality no one knows how many fishers there are.
- After many years of voluntary commitment these dedicated individuals become overwhelmed by the demands of advocacy and representation, the lack of support from the bulk of fishers and the absence of adequate funding.
- Representation of amateur fishing interests in MFish decision making processes suffers from insufficient specialist expertise and the ability of volunteers to attend the numerous meetings involved.
- The inadequacy of information about amateur fishing patterns and harvest continues to compromise the Government's ability to, among other things, devise sustainability measures such as the Total Allowable Catch and associated allocations. Such a deficiency in the system must be addressed for fisheries decisions to be robust and the whole resource managed with greater confidence.
- Despite the tremendous voluntary effort put into many local and national issues amateur fishers have experienced some significant losses over the past decade. The result is disillusionment and a loss of confidence in the system.
- But perhaps the single most significant factor in the loss of status for the amateur fishing sector is government policy and legislation promoting the rights and roles of the other major players in the fishery. Twenty years ago amateur fishers enjoyed more or less equal status with both

commercial and customary Maori fishers. At that time the Quota Management System defining the rights of commercial fishers was relatively new. And Maori were in the process of securing their place in the commercial fishery. Taiapure, or management rights for areas of customary Maori significance were introduced at the same time.

Over the past two decades the commercial sector has worked with the Government to extend and better secure their management role in the fishery to the point where the Ministry and commercial sector now co-manage some fish stocks. Similarly, tangata whenua now have regulations with which to manage their customary harvesting, and mataitai, a stronger area management tool than taiapure, has also been introduced.

Current policy and practice such as contained in the MFish 2030 document and the recent restructuring of the Ministry clearly demonstrate the government's intention to continue working co-operatively with both the commercial sector and customary Maori to further develop and strengthen their respective rights and roles in the fishery.

Just as the government is fostering greater autonomy within the commercial sector and customary Maori, the Ministry is assuming greater control of the revamped amateur fishers' Regional forums by introducing an application process where members will be selected by the Ministry.

So where does that leave the amateur fishing sector? At an increasingly serious disadvantage - that is, *unless something is done about it.*

What can be done about it?

The marine amateur fishing sector needs to get organized:

1. There needs to be one body representing the interests of all marine amateur fishers - mandated by the fishers and recognised and mandated by the Government. Top priority for the representative body, will be engaging with the government over the rights and responsibilities of the amateur fishing sector within the fishery. Unless this can be achieved, the status of the amateur fishing sector will continue to decline.
2. The body needs to operate effectively for fishers at all levels - on the coast, in the regions and in Wellington.
3. All fishers need to be identified so that for the first time effective communication can take place at all levels and the enormous pool of information held by individuals can be tapped with more than significant benefits for fishers, the Government and the fisheries resource.
4. Adequate, secure and ongoing funding is required for the representative body to carry out a wide range of functions required to advocate for amateur fishing interests with the Government, agencies, other groups in the fishery and other organisations.

How this initiative evolved

This initiative began more than a year ago when three individuals from the south with a wealth of experience representing and working with amateur fishers began talking with others about the situation and their ideas. Over the past year they

have been invited to share their thoughts with other southern fishers in Dunedin (May 2009), the NZ Recreational Fishing Council AGM in Nelson (July 2009), NZ Recreational Fishing Council members and other interested groups in Christchurch (October 2009) and most recently with the national organisations involved in marine amateur fishing in Auckland (March 2010)¹.

Feedback from each of these presentations has been incorporated with the result that the original concept has been further developed and refined. In addition, investigations have been carried out into the practicality of some critical components of the concept.

We would have preferred to confine ourselves to a basic concept but have had to incorporate a level of detail to answer questions raised during the meetings. We acknowledge there may well be alternative ways of achieving an improvement for amateur fishers or implementing parts of this package and would expect such modifications and refinements with wider input from amateur fishers.

A proposal for organising the amateur fishing sector

Tackling the loss of amateur fishing sector status requires first stepping back and identifying the causes involved. The package we have developed consists of a number of integrated components that deal with these causes. Delivering on the components is integral to the success of the whole package.

Rather than focusing on specific aspirations or "rights" that are central to some amateur fishing organisations, we take a broader view. Every aspect of this proposal represents part of the amateur fishing "right". Without the means of turning each component into reality the "right" will remain unattainable. So the package, as a whole, can deliver on the "rights" of amateur fishers by providing for both the right and ability to:

- get organized
- be represented effectively
- provide information
- provide funding to ensure the representative body can work successfully for all amateur fishers.

If the status of amateur fishers has any chance of being turned around the whole sector must be willing to work together.

Structure and functions of an integrated organisation

Taking all amateur fishers into account, and the need for one mandated representative body, an integrated amateur fishing organization seems to logically involve four levels of participation. Details about structures and functions at each level does not indicate a fait accompli but rather an opportunity to stimulate ideas and feedback. For instance, comments made at the Auckland meeting of national fishing organisations indicated participants wanted more information about how certain aspects of the concept would work in practice. The following detail on possible structure and functions has been included for these reasons.

¹ NZ Recreational Fishing Council, NZ Angling and Casting Association, NZ Trailer Boat Federation, NZ Underwater Association, Spearfishing NZ, NZ Marine Transport Association, NZ Council of Outdoor Recreation, NZ Fish and Game, Game and Forest Foundation. The NZ Sports Fishing Council (formerly the NZ Big Game Fishing Council) and Option4 decided not to attend but sent an observer.

An **integrated amateur fishing sector** could logically be made up of:

1. A Governing body
2. A Chief Executive who is responsible for professional staff in Wellington and the regions
3. Existing organisations and clubs
4. 500,000 fishers

The **representative body** would include the Governing body together with the Chief Executive and professional staff and this group would need to be mandated by both the fishers and the Government.

Roles and responsibilities of the component groups:

1. The Governing body

The body would be responsible for developing and advocating amateur fishing policy with the government and negotiating over amateur fishing interests in allocation and shared fisheries issues. The body would also take responsibility for the budget and for appointing and oversight of the CEO and professional staff.

Members of the governing body require strategic and policy capabilities. They need a clear understanding of the current marine fisheries regime and the place of amateur fishing within that. An appreciation of the variety and geographical distribution of amateur fishing and associated issues is another fundamental requirement of board members. Members could either be elected or appointed according to appropriate criteria.

2. CEO and professional staff

Both the CEO office and professional staff who advocate for amateur fisheries in MFish Wellington based processes need to be located in Wellington. The amateur fishing sector remains at a serious disadvantage by not having a full time amateur fishers' presence in Wellington when importance issues are regularly negotiated with government, the agencies and the other players in the fishery.

- CEO office, Wellington

The CEO would work with the Governing body on policy development and directions.

Developing strategic and operational directions for the organisation with other Wellington based and regional staff would be an important part of that role. Professional staff would report to the CEO who would also maintain an overview of communications and public relations. Relationship building with organisations and groups in Wellington, both directly and indirectly involved in marine fisheries, is another priority function.

- Wellington based staff

Wellington based staff would be responsible for representing amateur fishing interests in the Ministry's annual TAC setting and allocation processes, in fisheries management decisions and research planning. Given the level of scientific and fisheries expertise required of these roles they would also advise on data collection and analysis of amateur fisher data required in these and other processes.

- Regional staff

Regional staff would be responsible for working with amateur fishers on local and regional issues, and with the MFish regional forums. They would also be

in the best position to represent the amateur fishing sector in the development of Fisheries Plans, Marine Protected Areas and other regionally based processes. The location of regional staff would logically be another function for the Governing Body and CEO office. Locations would be selected according to criteria that might, among other things, include geographical distribution of fishers, valued amateur fisheries and areas subject to contentious issues.

3. Existing organizations and fishing clubs

Council members and others on existing national amateur fishing organisations are likely to be elected or appointed to the Governing body. Furthermore, those with suitable expertise may be appointed to the professional staff, either in Wellington or the regions. Such an organization may also wish to contract certain activities out that might best be undertaken by those in existing organisations. We anticipate that the good work currently carried out on specific fisheries and issues would continue with the support of the representative body. Certainly, those committed to a better deal for amateur fishers have experience and expertise that must be fostered to achieve their own and the organisation's goals.

With a strong, supportive organisation in place membership of fishing clubs may well be boosted. Good working relationships between the clubs and the regional staff will benefit all.

4. The 500,000 who go fishing

This is the information source required for fisheries management processes and decisions. The inadequacy of amateur fishing and catch data has seriously hampered sound fisheries decision making for years. Fishers will all become members of the integrated organisation and their identification will allow the huge potential data base to be tapped. Membership needs to include children, over 65 year olds and cover all types of fishing.

Current technology makes contacting members, providing information, seeking views and collecting data possible. When members have names and contact details they can be sampling over a range of matters. Involvement at this level is fundamental to our concept.

Identifying fishers, a major plus

Being able to identify amateur fishers for the first time introduces a whole new facet to fisheries research, management and monitoring.

What's in it for the fishers?

- The ability to communicate to, from and between fishers will finally be possible.
- Fishers will be able to be kept informed about their organisation, about issues and developments at the local, regional and national levels, and about agency and political initiatives and those of other relevant organizations.
- Fishers will be able to convey their views about proposals and issues.
- Fishers will be able to communicate their concerns to their organisation and can expect feedback.
- Fishers will be able to feed information about their fishing areas, methods, species and harvest into a database that will allow their organisation to

effectively advocate in research and management processes conducted by the Government.

- Fishers will belong to an organisation that advocates and participates on behalf of all 500,000 amateur fishers.

How can this be implemented?

Such a system can only be delivered by an electronic facility such as that provided by ECardz, a group with experience in a range of applications using this type of technology. Tailoring such a system to amateur fishers has been discussed and a member of the company attended a Dunedin fishers' meeting to better appreciate the requirements the system has to deliver to the amateur fishing sector.

Members of the organisation would be provided with a membership card. Contact details are encrypted on the card, stored in a data base and can be accessed, but only via a secure website.

Just being able to identify fishers has immediate benefits. For instance, the entire telephone component of the current recreational harvest research would not be needed. A random sample of fishers could be selected straight from the data base with significant savings and many fewer potential biases. Furthermore, if a particular area was the target of investigation, catch data can be recorded on site as in a boat ramp survey and uploaded directly into the data base. Monitoring the harvesting patterns associated with a particular species or area can also be facilitated by recruiting a sample of fishers and repeating the data collection over time. Such a scheme has the added advantage of providing for feedback to the participating fishers and raising their levels of interest and involvement.

The membership card can also provide incentives to members. Retailers who join the scheme will provide a discount to card holders. Considerable savings for fishers are therefore possible. The retailers also benefit from better information about the purchasing choices marine amateur fishers make.

Other technologies may be available and deserve investigation but we consider the system discussed with ECardz would introduce a new tool of significant benefit to fisheries management in this country.

Furthermore, catch reporting can be carried out by fishers themselves. When returning from a fishing trip they can enter catch details into their computer and send them directly to the secure data base. Should they not wish to keep a personal diary they can access their cumulative catch data at any time. This feedback together with encouragement from the regional staff is likely to see catch reporting increase and become another source of reliable data for the decision makers.

Adequate, ongoing and secure funding

Feedback from our meeting with national fishing and fishing related organisations in Auckland on 26 March 2010 revealed general agreement about four fundamental aspects of our concept:

1. The need for one representative body for all who fish under the amateur fishing regulations
2. Individual fishers to be the basis of the organization
3. A Wellington presence is critical
4. Adequate, ongoing and secure funding is required

Existing amateur fishing organisations constantly face limitations imposed by inadequate funding. Even the most successful fund raisers are unable to generate sufficient funds to represent their members' interests effectively. Insufficient funding has played an important part in the loss of status amateur fishers have suffered over the past 20 years.

Adequate, ongoing and secure funding will be required for the type of professional representative body proposed. After evaluating a number of funding possibilities² and identifying the pros and cons of each, it is clear that the three criteria of "adequate, ongoing and secure" can only be met by the self funding option.

Self funding is essentially a payment from amateur fishers to their organisation so that individuals' fishing interests can be protected. In other words, it is a contribution "*by the fishers for the fishers and for their fisheries*".

*Self funding is not a payment to the Government*³.

Self funding will enable the representative organisation to participate fully in the management of the fisheries resource as well as advocating for amateur fishing interests. Since talking with fishers from some clubs it has become apparent that there is in fact a level of support for contributing financially in order that their fisheries interests are properly taken care of.

This contribution could take the form of a membership fee - a modest amount that would provide adequate funding to operate an effective amateur fishing organisation. To put a modest fee into perspective, a fee in the vicinity of \$20 - \$30/year is the equivalent of three fishing magazines, five hamburgers or half a tank of gas.

The membership card system is an ideal way of implementing self funding. Members simply pay a fee for their card. Fisher details on the membership card also make fee exemptions possible and easy to implement for such groups as children or fishers over 65 years. The organisation would no doubt develop protocols relating to fee types and exemptions.

Given the potential value of the fisher data base and information, it is possible that the Government would consider entering into contracts with the representative body for data base associated purposes and that would represent income for the sector. It is unlikely though that this source of funding would be adequate or ongoing.

Turning the concept into reality..... an ideal solution!

The current fragmented situation cannot be resolved overnight. Time and a groundswell of support from fishers are fundamental to making progress. But creating an "ideal solution" gives amateur fishers something to work towards. The

² Targeted sales tax, Dedicated fuel tax, Marine industry levy, Free membership (retailer access to market data), Government/MFish funding and Self funding.

³ For many years the national fishing organisations have held firm on the principle of no licensing. Whenever licensing has been raised, the level of protest together with the sheer number of amateur fishers has seen successive governments take a no licensing stance. When licensing has been raised the implication is that the government will impose it on the fishers. In direct contrast, self funding is a payment from fishers to their own organisation to represent their interests. The abhorrence of government licensing has prevented fishing organisations from taking advantage of potential funding to advocate more effectively for their members. Indeed some clubs support the idea of making contributions for that purpose.

concept outlined here is a package of different components, some of which need to be in statute for the whole package to work.

There are those who believe that specific proposals such as a priority in TAC allocations must be adopted by the government to define amateur fishing rights. In contrast, if implemented, the whole package will represent the rights of amateur fishers, not just a few individual requirements. Let's imagine what an amendment to the Fisheries Act might look like:

- The purpose of the Amendment might be to ensure more robust fisheries decisions by providing for an integrated amateur fishing sector and representative body with which to engage in the range of fisheries processes and issues.
- The creation of one body to represent the amateur fishing sector could address the mandate issue.
- Defining the functions and responsibilities of the representative body (including the governing body and the CEO and staff) is of fundamental importance to the sector and could provide, among other things, for negotiations with the government over specific amateur fisher aspirations.
- Describing the structure of an integrated amateur sector and the functions of existing organisations, clubs and individuals may not require legislation but given the functions and responsibilities are to be defined, so too does the representative body.
- The means of identifying all amateur fishers to guarantee the flow of information and views needs to be in statute (membership)
- A means of accessing adequate, secure and ongoing funding – from the fishers, for the fishers is required in statute (membership fee)

Benefits to amateur fishers and Government: a win-win approach

The proposed package could bring very significant benefits to both the amateur fishing sector and the government. Each advantage for the fishers has a corresponding advantage for the Government as follows:

Amateur fishers	Government /agencies/other groups
1. One integrated organisation	Know who to talk and listen to
2. All fishers identified and support canvassed	A clear mandate from amateur fishers
3. Governing "body" elected or appointed	Confidence that the "body" is representative
4. Negotiate amateur fishing rights/aspirations	Able to negotiate aspirations with representative "body"
5. Professionals advocate and negotiate on behalf of the sector	The team has expertise, time and resources to participate in all processes
6. Open communication fundamental to the organization	Assured that members' views will inform the representatives
7. Fisher informed data base	Amateur fishing data - an upgraded component of research, management and monitoring
8. Adequate, ongoing and secure funding from members' fee	Dealing with a reliable/credible organisation

Implementing the concept will take time but that period provides an opportunity for developing confidence and trust both ways. Having a well organised and represented amateur fishing sector is fundamental to a robust fishery. And that will be realised when the amateur fishing sector takes its place beside the commercial sector and customary Maori fishers once more.

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