

NZRFC News

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Opportunities in shared fishery

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One of the proposals contained in the MFish Future Management of Shared Fisheries discussion paper (refer MFish website www.fish.govt.nz) shows that the government is prepared to invest several million dollars in helping to establish a similar organisation to enable amateur saltwater fishers to enhance and protect their access rights.

This organisation will be able to halt the erosion of amateur rights and allowances witnessed over the years by ensuring our voice is consistently and professionally heard in the places where management decisions are made. Effect will be given to other positive policy initiatives, including assisting in providing better information on the amateur fishing catch, thus ensuring we are adequately allowed for when available fish stocks are being distributed.

For over 20 years amateur advocates have been asking that proper recognition be given to the value of our fishing. This should include not just the significant economic activity generated around boat building, fishing gear, bait, accommodation etc, but also social and well-being values. While some are suspicious of the proposal to include value as criteria for assessing allowances, overseas experience suggests this will provide significant advantages for the amateur sector in the future.

A further initiative that will result from better representation will be assisting in the setting up of local management areas. Many groups around the country have investigated or have wanted to take a more pro-active role in solving localised depletion or inter-sectarian conflict issues. While the Quota Management System (QMS) has the ability to provide large-scale geographic management, there are presently no tools available for pro-active amateur local management. Shared Fisheries offers an opportunity to change this, with only our imagination limiting what could be achieved.

Many of us are aware that significant over-catch has depleted a number of our shared fisheries – usually as a result of poorly constrained commercial fishing. A strong organisation will be able to work constructively with those who share an interests in responsible management, but will be in a good position to expose those who seek to prosper with no care for other users or the environment.

Significant opportunity exists within the document to speed the rebuild of depleted fisheries, reassess sector allowances and provide for ongoing adjustments to these allowances. This includes managing some fish stocks as a level that will provide for greater abundance and larger fish.

This provision will most likely meet with significant opposition from the commercial sector where they perceive they have an undeniable property right. For this reason the government

has indicated it is prepared to offer some incentive for commercial fishers to reduce their catches and set aside some areas for exclusive amateur use.

It is very unusual for any government to come up with an up-front offer of compensation, and having this included in the Shared Fisheries discussion paper should be seen as something of a coup.

Priority for amateur fishing over commercial has been long held as the pinnacle of achievement and would give true recognition of where we think our rights stand. Some degree of priority over commercial is offered within the document but is twenty percent enough? We don't think so, especially if it is calculated from some of the miserly allowances we presently hold and suggest that any submissions reflect a desire for a significant increase in this figure.

Fish stocks vary from year to year. Responsible resource users and managers will recognise this and create flexible management systems to accommodate for these variations.

Some suggest it is all about denying you your right to fish and locking you into a fixed share. Defending a right until there are no fish to catch is not responsible advocacy and will very likely result in the imposition of more marine reserves. A better alternative is wholehearted support for positive fisheries management reform along the lines of what is on offer.