



1.

Unprecedented agreement in Marlborough fishery

For the first time in four years management of Marlborough Sounds Blue cod is being reviewed and LegaSea is encouraging recreational fishers to have their say on the future of this most prized fishery.

A multi-stakeholder group, the Blue Cod Management Group, is seeking people's views now before they develop potential management options to be included in a public consultation document, due for release mid-year.

If you have an interest in this important fishery then please send your feedback as soon as possible to MSbluecod@mpi.govt.nz. Your comments can be short or long, detailed or brief. Do it now so your comments can be considered early, and be sure to include your contact details so you can be kept informed of any further developments.

Coalition of interests

There is unprecedented agreement on how Blue cod in the Marlborough Sounds ought to be managed in the future. So far groups representing more than 20,000 people have agreed on a range of potential options that could be applied to this fish stock after this year's review.

Specific groups that have worked together on this issue include the Marlborough Recreational Fishers Association, the Coalition of the Combined Clubs of Wellington and the NZ Angling and Casting Association.

Their recommendations have been distributed so others can support the same measures. The intention is twofold; firstly to have fair, sensible rules that apply to recreational fishing across the entire Top of the South Island, and secondly, to have simple regulations that are well supported by the local community and visitors to the area.

LegaSea is supporting the combined group's recommendations as they align with our Principles to 1). Rebuild the fishery, 2). Stop senseless waste and 3). Set equal size limits, including minimum size limits for sustainability reasons rather than to give priority to commercial fishers.

Feel free to download the details from www.legasea.co.nz/bluecod.php.

Next steps

The Ministry for Primary Industries will conduct a formal consultation process in May-June this year. Submissions to that process will be required by 15th June. Ministry will review all submissions and make recommendations to the Minister on what regulations ought to apply when the new Blue cod season opens on 20 December 2015.

Please take the time to have input into this process. The Marlborough Sounds Blue cod stock is worth conserving as it draws people to the area from around the country and overseas. Let's do what we can together to rebuild this iconic fishery.

2.

Crayfish decisions underwhelming

On 19th March Nathan Guy released his decisions for the future management of five crayfish stocks nationwide. Those areas include east and west Northland, East Cape to Gisborne, Canterbury/Marlborough coasts, Otago and the west coast, north from Westland to the Kaipara Harbour.

Concessions that enable the commercial harvest of undersized crayfish continue in three areas, Gisborne, Otago and Southland. The Ministry advises these concessions will be reviewed later in the year, during a different process.

But how can catch limits and concessions be considered separately when catch of undersized crayfish in the Gisborne area alone was estimated to be between 60 and 70 percent of landed commercial catch?

Concessions are an ongoing concern as they legalise the targeting of young animals that are the future breeders, and because of their small size, there are more taken per tonne of commercial catch than if these crayfish were twice or three times their current weight.

We are particularly interested in the reasons why the Minister has agreed to increase commercial catch levels in the Otago crayfish stock despite the ongoing concession. Commercial catch limits have more than doubled in the past two years, yet it is implausible the fish stock has doubled in abundance during that same period.

So the increased commercial catch limit, combined with the concession, means that more small crayfish are likely to be harvested.

Small crayfish must be left in the water to grow, become more productive and to provide the services required to have a balanced marine ecosystem.

Crayfish are a social and cultural treasure, and important ecologically. There are no reasonable grounds to allow the ongoing exploitation of such young crayfish purely to supply an insatiable export market.

Northland crayfish management

Nathan Guy's recent decision for the future management of the Northland crayfish stock applies from April 1st. The commercial catch limit of 131 tonnes is retained, and 20 tonnes has been set aside for Maori customary interests. The new allowance for recreational interests is 50 tonnes. These tonnages apply in the area from the northern Kaipara on the west coast, to around Waipu out east.

In its February submission the NZ Sport Fishing Council recommended the Minister for Primary Industries set aside 20 tonnes (t) for customary interests and 75t for recreational interests, to provide for maximum estimated catch. Catches can vary a lot between years and the Minister is duty-bound to make sure the overall total allowable catch limit is not exceeded.

Our reality is that recreational catch has declined over time. Commercial catch rates have stayed high, as effort has moved. As catches plummeted on the east coast commercial fishers targeted the Three Kings Islands, and more recently the northwestern coast.

As crayfish in those areas get harder to catch it is likely commercial effort will shift again, down the east and west coasts. This is a concern, as this movement will likely have the most impact on people in our coastal communities who have fished in their local waters for a long time, searching for that special kaimoana to share with their whanau and visitors.

If you missed out on having your say this year you are not alone. We only had 18 working days to respond. Next year we will be prepared and LegaSea will seek to inform you so you can have your say on what happens to this most precious fishery. www.legasea.co.nz/crayfish.php

3.

Gisborne crayfish woes continue

Another opportunity to rebuild the Gisborne crayfish stock has unfortunately been missed. The Minister recently decided to retain current commercial catch levels in this fishery, despite the fact that stock levels are predicted to decline by 15 to 31 percent in the next four years.

Local recreational interests have for years advocated for the removal of the concession enabling commercial fishers to take 52mm and 53mm crayfish for several months of the year, below the recreational minimum legal size of 54mm.

Surveys of recreational catch estimate just eight tonne of harvest, with the lowest average weight (580g) per crayfish in the country. This is from a fish stock that was once very productive!

In July 2014 the Gisborne Tatapouri Sports Fishing Club worked together with the local community to develop an agreed policy for the future management of their local crayfish stock, officially referred to as CRA 3.

In September last year the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council AGM adopted the policy and committed to helping the Gisborne community achieve a more abundant cray fishery.

This most recent decision ignores the community's combined concerns and effort.

It has also reignited the flames of injustice and feelings of inadequacy, when a club of over 3,000 members, that enjoys community support, cannot influence management decisions that have a direct impact on the local population.

LegaSea stands by the claims made in the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council's February submission, that a full review must be undertaken to correct the contradiction that in all rock lobster stocks commercial catch rates are a reliable indicator of abundance.

Clearly there is a growing gap between what the science models are predicting and what people are witnessing in their local waters.

Where there is uncertainty, and there is a lot from a non-commercial perspective, the Minister must apply a precautionary approach to ensure sustainability.

It is also a legal requirement on the Minister to sustainably manage our fisheries, to maintain the potential of the fisheries resources to meet the reasonably foreseeable needs of future generations.

And one fact is certain; New Zealand's population is growing, not declining, so the demand for non-commercial access to abundant crayfish stocks will continue to climb. The Minister either provides for the legal harvest of crayfish or there will be ongoing conflict not only in the management arena, but also on our rocky shorelines.

4.

What can you do?

Help us protect the future of fishing in New Zealand by getting on board with LegaSea-

1. Visit www.legasea.co.nz
2. Sign up for our updates at www.legasea.co.nz/subscribe

3. Become a LegaSea Legend by making a regular \$10 per month contribution.
www.legasea.co.nz/legend
4. Check Facebook www.facebook.com/legasea
5. Email: info@legasea.co.nz
6. Phone 0800 LEGASEA (534 273)

ENDS

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LegaSea is a public outreach initiative of the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council. The Council has an experienced fisheries management, science, policy and legal team. On behalf of the Council LegaSea raises funds and provides public-friendly information about a variety of processes that are important to the sustainable management of fisheries for future generations.