

Fisheries Management Update 4

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In early July the NZ Sport Fishing Council faced the challenge of responding to at least seven management proposals from the Ministry of Fisheries. The Council's Fisheries Management sub-committee of Peter Campbell, Mark Connor, John Chibnall and Wayne Bicknell organised the drafting and distribution of preliminary papers. All submission deadlines were met.

After receiving submissions the Ministry formulates Final Advice Papers (FAPs) including their recommendations for the Minister's consideration. On 23 September Phil Heatley announced his decisions, none reflect the NZSFC's views.

It was a feature of these recent proposals that MFish was offering commercial shareholders perpetual catching rights that previously belonged to the public. Cuts were being proposed to overall allowances and/or daily bag limits while commercial catch limits were being either maintained or cut merely "to remove potential catch headroom".

This is double jeopardy for public fishing interests.

On the one hand people cannot catch their daily bag limit because of depleted fisheries, then MFish propose to cut the bag limits to "*reduce the risk of expansion of recreational catch*". If and when the fishery is rebuilt commercial fishers benefit from increased catching rights while minimal bag limits remain.

NZSFC is very concerned about this development on future public access to a reasonable daily bag limit.

Kingfish 8

In Kingfish 8, off the North Island's west coast, the Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) was set to keep commercial catch at bycatch levels. The 36t TACC has been exceeded every year since 2003. MFish proposed to increase the TACC to 45t.

NZSFC argued against an increase because the principle of TACC increases made solely on the basis of commercial over-catch cannot be considered sound fisheries management advice.

Large midwater factory trawlers are moving north and the NZSFC is concerned that their potential kingfish bycatch is large. NZSFC submitted there needs to be 100% observer coverage on chartered vessels in NZ waters as it is difficult to quantify their bycatch. The Minister approved MFish's recommended 9 tonne increase of the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) and TACC.

Blue Cod 5

Most of the catch taken in Blue Cod 5 is harvested from Foveaux Strait. BCO5 is depleted and MFish offered three management options. Of those only one would reduce actual commercial catch, but two out of three reduced the recreational daily bag limit, by 33 or 66%.

NZSFC submitted that there are limited fishing days in Southland and because MFish had not presented a valid case to reduce bag limits they ought to be retained. The Minister followed his Ministry's recommendation and reduced recreational bag limits and the TACC, without reducing actual commercial catch.

Blue Cod 8

Recreational fishers take most of the Blue Cod in Area 8, lower west coast North Island. MFish proposed to reduce the overall recreational allowance and the daily bag limit while cutting the TACC, but not reducing actual commercial catch.

NZSFC argued the TACC ought to be set at current catch levels and the current recreational allowance retained. MFish altered their preferred option in the FAP and left the allowance unchanged but advised they wanted to remove potential 'headroom' in the fishery, so recommended a 50% cut in bag limit, and cut the TACC to 34t, the highest recent recorded commercial catch. The Minister agreed with MFish's recommendation.

Rig 2

Rig is an important catch for all interests in Area 2, between Cape Runaway and Wellington. Commercial catch had exceeded the TACC for 20 years. NZSFC submitted that none of the MFish options would adequately address over-catch. Minimum trawl mesh size needed to be increased to 125mm to avoid these fish.

It is poor management to simply reward fishers who were depleting the fishery with more quota. NZSFC argued for the status quo until more effective measures were implemented. The Minister followed MFish's recommendation to increase the TAC and TACC.

Pacific bluefin tuna

Pacific bluefin tuna were introduced into the quota management system in 2004 and an allowance of one tonne was made for recreational interests. Since 2007 a game fishery has developed off the South Island's west coast and recreational take is now exceeding that allowance. MFish proposed to increase the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) and the recreational allowance by 24t.

NZSFC advocated that the allowance needed to be increased by 24t but the TAC ought to remain at 120t and the commercial allocation reduced. That was because the Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) had never been, and was not likely, to be caught. The Minister followed MFish's recommendation and increased both the recreational allowance and the TAC.

Bluenose

Nationwide bluenose stocks need rebuilding. NZSFC agreed that TACCs need to be cut to bycatch levels, but rejected the pre-determined reductions to daily bag limits.

Commercial fishers have thumped bluenose for many years. Those responsible for depleting the fishery ought to rebuild the stock.

MFish proposed a phased 3-year reduction in TACC, despite industry submitting that, "*Bluenose bycatch issues can be managed by adapting fishing practices*".

Better technology, fishing gear and access meant there was growing recreational interest in Bluenose and this needs to be allowed for within the TAC.

Ministerial approval was given to MFish's recommendations, to reduce recreational bag limits and a phased TACC reduction.

Summary

It is concerning that these latest stock reviews have resulted in unprincipled and random reductions in daily bag limits for Blue Cod and Bluenose.

It is clear that MFish is advising the Minister that recreational catch is to be constrained by bag limits, and uncaught allowances will be removed. Contrast this with recommendations that are not intended to reduce current commercial catch, but remove most of the uncaught portion of a TACC, so the TACC *does not* constrain commercial catch.

If the TACC is exceeded as in Rig 2 and Kingfish 8 it is increased to legitimise excess catch. There is no mechanism for increasing the public's share in fisheries, only unfair proportional reductions.

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