

## **NZSFC Fisheries Management Update 14**

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### **Truth is stranger than fiction**

It's true. Fisheries management is political. One week we have Matt Watson exposing trails of dumped snapper in the Hauraki Gulf, the next politicians are telling the Ministry of Primary Industries to 'do something'.

Currently the Ministry is considering reducing the \$13 deemed value rate for snapper in Area 1, between North Cape to Cape Runaway.

But kneejerk reactions rarely address the core issue; they merely serve to satisfy political demands for a response.

Deemed values are an agreed fee commercial fishers must pay to the Government if they have insufficient quota to cover all of their catch at the end of the fishing year.

This levy is supposed to provide a balance between the incentive to dump excess catch, to avoid penalties, and the inducement to land a small amount of overcatch for profit.

In reality there isn't a single price point that serves both purposes.

If the deeming rate is set too high most benefit accrues from dumping catch; if set too low, fishers land the extras, profiting from exceeding the Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC).

### **Support for recreational fishers**

The New Zealand Sport Fishing Council is supporting recreational fishers who are objecting to changing deemed value rates until a full management review of Snapper 1 (SNA1) is completed. This review is likely in 2013, after the new stock assessment results are available.

Close analysis will clarify what is required to rebuild Snapper 1 to the new management target of 40% of unfished biomass. In some areas of SNA1 the fishery is thought to be under 20%.

### **Legalised overcatch**

Legally the Minister is required to set the Total Allowable Catch (TAC), to allow for our non-commercial interests in each fishery, and then set commercial limits, the TACC. The TAC and TACC are supposed to represent the upper bound of lawful catch.

Years of industrialised fishing rapidly depleted SNA1. Now, any overcatch undermines the stock's rebuild rate, productivity is lost and this leads to poor quality fishing and less public amenity.

Despite numerous manipulations, the current deemed value regime still rewards either dumping or overfishing; both are highly undesirable outcomes in all regards.

### **Current proposals**

The Ministry is consulting on proposals to reduce the deemed value in SNA1 from \$13 to \$8 per kilo, and in SNA7 (top of the South Island) from \$8 to \$6 per kilo. This represents a 40% and 25% reduction respectively. This is hardly fine-tuning the system.

Either the old deemed values were incorrect or the new rates will be totally wrong..... or both.

There is a 7% increase proposed for SNA2 (Cape Runaway to Wellington), from \$5.60 to \$6. Excessive commercial catch, particularly for snapper and trevally, has been a major source of conflict in Area 2 for years.

Earlier, when the Minister decided to get tough and increase the deemed value (instead of increasing the TACC) there was an immediate change in fisher behaviour - excess snapper catch declined dramatically.

When the incentive was there, fishers found ways to avoid catching excess snapper.

Conversely, when deemed values were low enough to make a profit, there was zero incentive to remain within the limits.

Chronic overcatch eventually leads to industry pressure to increase quotas; we do not want this outcome in SNA1 and SNA7.

Already one fisher has been nabbed for deliberately rorting the system, incurring huge deemed value charges with no intention of paying.

This excess represents fish stolen from the stock and us, the public. Just like dumped fish, they are never returned to rebuild the stock, nor is the equivalent tonnage taken from next year's quota.

NZSFC will be highlighting these flaws, and offering solutions, in a submission to the Minister by the end of July.