

## **NZSFC Fisheries Management Update 8**

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### **Morgan's book – a controversial stocking filler**

*Hook, Line and Blinkers* is a novel that tells a tale of oceans unmanaged, polluted, depleted by overfishing and about to finally fall into complete ruin.

Obviously the authors, Gareth Morgan and Geoff Simmons, released the book to maximise the Christmas gift market opportunities.

They make several recommendations that are designed to generate argument.

No-one is spared; politicians, managers, commercial, environmental, customary and recreational interests. The book needs controversy to sell.

Amateur fishers, whether fishing for food or recreation, are singled out as myopic, self-interested individuals wanting rights but no responsibilities, unwilling to compromise for the greater good of the fisheries or nation.

Given that the authors' specialty is economics it is not surprising their solution is to fit recreational fishing into the Quota Management System, with a permanent, tradeable share of the fishery.

However, for most Kiwis fishing is not a commodity that can be traded away. For many, it is part of our social and cultural fabric.

Fishing with family and friends in a healthy ocean provides a special richness and the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council will continue to defend universal access to fish within sustainable limits.

### **The Quota Management System**

The book lauds the introduction of the Quota Management System and the efficiencies gained in the mid 1980s. Undoubtedly there were financial benefits for many savvy commercial operators.

Conversely, there were massive social and financial losses and Maori were disproportionately affected.

Coastal communities were decimated when thousands of part-time fishermen lost their livelihood without compensation.

One positive is that fisheries are now under direct Parliamentary control, where the people's elected representatives are accountable for ensuring catches are limited to sustainable levels.

### **No 'tragedy of the commons'**

Morgan's book portrays New Zealand's fisheries as suffering from the 'tragedy of the commons', where common property with open access ends in ruin. Fisheries are often described in this way to explain overfishing.

Basically, each fisherman seeks to take as much as possible today, with no incentive to conserve for tomorrow – fishermen compete for catch until there are no fish left.

Thankfully New Zealand has no open access fisheries and has largely avoided the extreme depletion seen in other countries.

### **Public fishing interests**

The authors promote their view that amateur fishing in New Zealand is undertaken by ‘rednecks’, people with no interest or care for fish stocks. And that these people plunder fisheries at will, in unbridled enthusiasm. This leads them to recommend fantasy-based proposals to rein-in this perceived effort.

This mythical ‘redneck’ character is necessary to rationalise their free market theories, because for every criminal there must be a crime. The fishing public is cast as a freewheeling, destructive force that must be curtailed.

It doesn’t suit Morgan’s purpose to acknowledge that the fishing public is largely a cross section of society with increasing conservation awareness.

Moreover, poor weather, bag limits and method controls all limit amateur fishing effort and catch.

In the north snapper and kahawai stocks are rebuilding under the current management system.

### **A stocking filler**

Sadly, the real tragedy is the book’s disregard for the very essence of what it means to a New Zealander, to spend time fishing with the kids, gathering kai moana for the whanau and the intense joy of giving food to those who do not, or can no longer, fish.

*Hook, Line and Blinkers* needs to be acknowledged for what it is - a superficial, controversial commentary on our fisheries management regime, serving as a lucrative stocking filler for the Christmas past.

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