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NZ Sport Fishing Council Submission on the increase in TACC and other management measures for yellowtail kingfish on the west coast of the North Island (KIN8)

NZ Sport Fishing Council

1. The NZ Sport Fishing Council (NZSFC) is a national sports organisation. Membership from affiliated clubs has grown steadily and we now represent over 30,000 members in 57 clubs spread throughout NZ. We run the NZ Nationals fishing tournament, which has evolved over time and remains successful.
2. NZSFC compile and publish the New Zealand records for fish caught in saltwater by recreational anglers. NZSFC is affiliated to the International Game Fish Association (IGFA) which records and publishes catches that qualify as recreational world records.
3. In 1996 the NZSFC helped establish the NZ Marine Research Foundation, which aims to sponsor research on marine species and fisheries for the benefit of all New Zealanders, including participants in ocean recreation.
4. Many of our most established fishing clubs have a focus on fishing for large pelagic species such as marlin, tuna, and sharks. In recent years our membership has expanded beyond the traditional deep sea angling clubs to include many local clubs targeting other species.
5. NZSFC representatives have engaged in the Inshore Working Group Meetings that have reviewed the jack mackerel catch sampling on the west coast and kingfish age and growth.
6. Yellowtail kingfish are highly valued by sport fishers, our members and supporters.

Recommendations

- ⇒ NZSFC supports option 1 as there is no information on changes in abundance.
- ⇒ There should be 100% observer coverage on chartered factory trawlers while in New Zealand waters because there is potential for significant under reporting of commercial kingfish catch in KIN8 as part of the 30,000 t jack mackerel fishery.

New Zealand Sport Fishing Council Inc.

(Previously New Zealand Big Game Fishing Council Est. 1957)

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- ⇒ That action be taken to monitor sixth schedule releases and collect information on the survivability of trawl caught kingfish.
- ⇒ MFish must consider the impact of an increase in current catch and sixth schedule releases on the allowance for other sources of fishing mortality.
- ⇒ That action is taken to monitor kingfish abundance.
- ⇒ MFish needs to do more to address possible declines in kingfish availability to recreational fishers.
- ⇒ MFish should provide a breakdown of kingfish catch by statistical area to help show the distribution of catch within KIN 8.

MFish Proposals

7. The Ministry proposes a 25 % increase to the commercial quota (TACC) in KIN 8 to cover current over-catch which has persisted since the stock was introduced into the quota management system in 2003/04.

Table 1: MFish proposed options for the management of kingfish on the west coast of the North Is.

Option	TAC (t)	TACC (t)	Customary Māori Allowance (t)	Recreational Allowance (t)	Allowance for Other Sources of Mortality (t)
Option 1 (status quo)	83	36	9	31	7
Option 2	92	45	9	31	7

8. The first option is to retain the status quo.
9. Option 2 has a 9 tonne increase in in the TAC and total allowable commercial catch (TACC) leaving non-commercial allowances and incidental mortality unchanged.

The fishery and current allowances

10. Kingfish are an iconic recreational species in New Zealand. If given the chance, they grow to be large and strong and smart. They offer a real challenge to recreational anglers whenever they are encountered.
11. Non-commercial fishers have been concerned about the future of the kingfish fishery for many years.
 - It was recreational fishers who insisted on the introduction of a size limit and bag limit in the early 1990s.
 - It was recreational fishers, concerned about set netting over reefs that instigated the closure of prime headlands and offshore islands to that method in 1993.

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- The bycatch of kingfish by pilchard purse seine boats was seen as a new threat to the fishery in 1997 and this loophole was closed after considerable public concern was expressed.
- The exemption to the Minimum Legal Size for commercial trawlers was finally removed in 2000 after being proposed by recreational representatives in 1998.
- For many years recreational groups asked that kingfish be managed as a non-commercial species.
- Many fishing clubs support NZSFC voluntary catch limits of one metre minimum size and 1 kingfish per person per day for their members and contests.
- The recreational allowance for KIN 8 was set at 31 tonne in 2003 and the minimum legal size limit increased from 65 cm to 75 cm.

The fish

12. The same species of yellowtail kingfish is present in other southern hemisphere countries, Australia and South Africa. The largest kingfish are predominantly found in the northern half of the North Island but also occur from 29° to 46° S, Kermadec Islands to Foveaux Strait.
13. Kingfish are large predatory fish with adults exceeding one and a half metres in length. They usually occur in schools ranging from a few fish to well over a hundred fish. Kingfish tend to occupy a semi-pelagic existence and occur mainly in open coastal waters, preferring areas of high current or tidal flow adjacent to rocky outcrops, reefs and pinnacles. However, kingfish are not restricted to these habitats and are sometimes caught or observed in open sandy bottom areas and within shallow enclosed bays.
14. The IPP is incorrect about the length at maturity of kingfish. It is not 70 to 83 cm. The most recent analysis suggests that the length of 50% maturity is 97 cm in females and 83 cm in males. Half of the fish are larger than this when they first mature.

NZSFC submission

15. The state of the KIN 8 stock is unknown. Commercial catch records are all that inform the review. MFish is wrong to say that "*The Ministry notes that the available information from commercial catch trends does not indicate sustainability concerns*" Professor Ray Hilborne (SeaFIC) advisor clearly stated in a recent public meeting that catch data alone does not tell you what is happening to stock abundance. Changes in Catch Per Unit of Effort (CPUE) or other abundance indicators need to be monitored.
16. NZSFC is concerned about the increased use of large mid water trawl factory ships fishing the west coast for a high volume low value species like jack mackerel. They are regularly catching in excess of 30,000 t of jack mackerel a year off the west coast. These vessels have started fishing further north and the bycatch of high value species such as kingfish is potentially very large. This was seen in 2002-03 when over 90 t of kingfish was reported as bycatch of the jack mackerel fishery the year before they were placed in the quota system.

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17. The public has a deep distrust of these foreign charter vessels operating over the horizon with little or no supervision. Who would ever know if an occasional large catch of kingfish disappeared into the factory or meal plant and was misreported to avoid significant deemed value payments? Interestingly, very few small catches of kingfish per shot are reported in the mid water trawl fishery. It seems if a species is less than 500 kg it does not get recorded. Furthermore, returns of tagged kingfish from these vessels have only been reported when observers have been present on board at the time of catch. The obvious conclusion is that when there are no observers, kingfish disappear into the meal plant, whether tagged or not. There should be 100% observer coverage on these vessels while in New Zealand waters.
18. On face value it would seem that some fishers are willing and able to use the provisions of the Sixth Schedule to release kingfish alive. The IPP states that 22% of the reported catch was released in 2009-10. If the landed catch of 43 t is the remaining 78% that means 12 tonnes (estimated weight) was released alive. This is a significant benefit to the resource if the kingfish are mostly surviving. However, it could be a significant contributor to additional mortality if the survival rate is moderate or dead fish are dumped to avoid deemed value payments.
19. MFish need to implement measures to monitor Sixth Schedule releases and collect information on the likely survivability from the vessel/gear types that release most of the fish. We note that the allowance for other sources of fishing mortality was set at 7 t in 2003-04 and was not changed when Schedule Six releases were introduced in 2005-06. It is time to review those allowances given that 12 t was caught last year, mostly in trawl nets, dumped on deck or in a hold, and released at some stage while sorting the catch.
20. MFish need to monitor kingfish abundance. Kingfish CPUE trends the trevally target fishery is one possibility. As stated above, catch level alone does not monitor abundance.
21. The principle of TACC increases made solely on the basis of commercial over-catch cannot be considered sound fisheries management advice.
22. The MFish practice of steadily reducing public allowances and transferring these to ITQ shareholders is a continuation of taking fish resources from the public and giving them free of charge to private interests in perpetuity.
23. There is inequity when operating two diametrically opposed principles within the same framework. This is to operate a catch-it or lose-it principle in respect of non-commercial catch; and a take it for perpetuity principle, regardless of even ability to catch, in respect of commercial catch.
24. We are concerned that possible declines in availability of kingfish to recreational fishers have not been addressed in any way in the MFish Initial Position Paper.
25. There is a significant recreational fishery around the Three Kings Islands and associated banks which is part of KIN 8. NZSFC ask that MFish investigate trends in commercial kingfish catch from this area as it may be associated with target fishing by some vessels.

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26. It is all very well for MFish to have a stock objective to limit commercial kingfish catch to unavoidable bycatch only, but it is perfectly legal for fishers to catch their ACE by targeting if they wish. Providing a breakdown of kingfish catch by statistical area would help show the distribution of catch within KIN 8.

The NZ Sport Fishing Council appreciates the opportunity to submit on the review of sustainability measures and other management controls for Kingfish 8. We are available to discuss our recommendations or submission in more detail. We look forward to MFish addressing our concerns and would like to be kept informed of future developments.

Yours faithfully,

Richard Baker
President
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