

NZSFC Fisheries Management Update 20

New Zealand Fishing News magazine, MARCH 2013 edition



Wayward advice skewing decisions

Significant commercial catch limit increases have been proposed for two important fisheries and the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council has strongly objected to both proposals. There is insufficient or downright dodgy information to support catch increases in Coromandel Scallops and in several Rock Lobster fisheries.

Decisions by the new Minister for Primary Industries, Nathan Guy, are expected by the end of March.

Both Council submissions strongly emphasise the need for the Minister to comply with the Fisheries Act 1996 and the Supreme Court Kahawai ruling, to sustainably manage fisheries so the public can provide for their wellbeing and recreational fishing interests.

Harvesting, then sharing, Scallops and Crayfish with family and friends contributes to a memorable occasion or holiday. For many people, Crayfish simply cannot be valued in dollar terms.

Despite the social and cultural importance of these fisheries, the final decisions will potentially be swayed by poor advice, commercial interests' arguments and priorities.

The New Zealand Sport Fishing Council has urged the Minister to take a more active management role to reduce the risks associated with low stock levels and to increase abundance so there are more and bigger fish in our coastal waters.

Rock Lobster depletion

Depletion of Rock Lobster in many areas is causing chronic and unnecessary conflict. For example, the fishery around Gisborne, Crayfish 3, has been depleted by the ongoing Concession that allows commercial fishers to take Crayfish smaller than the Minimum Legal Size.

Consequently, much of the fishery close to Gisborne is seriously depleted and recreational fishers struggle to find legal size Crayfish to take home for the family.

This Concession was granted in 1993 as a temporary measure to offset the effects of a catch limit reduction.

It still applies today because commercial interests dominate decisions made by the National Rock Lobster Management Group, the statutory body established to provide advice to the Minister.

There is a paucity of reliable information about the Cray fisheries. It is implausible that CRA3 has gone from low and declining to record highs within three years. Local fishers certainly do not believe this "science".

In the NZSFC's view, it would be foolhardy for the Minister to increase commercial catch limits in Crayfish 3 and 4 (Hawke Bay to Wellington). For depleted fisheries the goal must be restoration.

Interestingly, fishers further south have taken a longer-term view. Late last year commercial interests in Crayfish 7 (Otago) and CRA 8 (Southland) seemed to recognise the need to rebuild CRA 7, and they rejected a proposed catch increase in CRA 8. They want abundant fisheries producing more and bigger fish.

The NZSFC has made several recommendations to the Minister. We support a full review of the (mis)management of our most precious Rock Lobster fisheries.

Coromandel Scallops

Officials have proposed a Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) increase in the Coromandel Scallop fishery, between Kawau Island and the Bay of Plenty. The Ministry for Primary Industries prefers either a 290 or 450 percent increase in the TACC. The status quo is also an option.

The New Zealand Sport Fishing Council recommends retaining the current TACC until there is better understanding of the productivity of the newly discovered beds in the Hauraki Gulf.

We do not want a repeat of previous management, where smash-and-grab and 34% mortality was the norm. A new bed was discovered, raked and exploited leaving a highly modified environment as effort shifted to a new patch.

Current legislation and the NZSFC support abundant fisheries. Let's hope the new Minister takes advantage of this support, ignoring the pressure to increase catches and opts instead to give us the opportunity to enjoy our most prized inshore fisheries.