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Joint recreational submission on reporting requirements for amateur-fishing charter vessel operators

Submission summary

1. The submitters question the timing of these changes to the charter reporting system. The opportunity for Fisheries New Zealand to engage with charter vessel operators and listen to their views before making changes has been missed.
2. The submitters support the inclusion of snapper and tarakihi in the charter reporting system.
3. The inclusion of blue cod in Area 1 is supported, as the additional burden on charter vessel operators will not be great as few are caught.
4. The submitters do not support the inclusion of scallops into the charter reporting system at this time.
5. The submitters consider recording the weight of retained catch will be useful if charter vessel operators are motivated to take the time to do it well.
6. In northern areas there is a far more urgent need for charter reporting of red snapper, pink maomao, red pig fish, and scarlet wrasse, which have become target species and are caught in large numbers on some charters.
7. The submitters ask the Minister to require a review of the recreational bag limits for reef species targeted by charter and private fishers.
8. The submitters ask the Minister to add pink maomao to the schedule of 19 reef fish prohibited for sale if taken from the Auckland Fisheries Management Area.

The submitters

9. The New Zealand Sport Fishing Council (NZSFC) appreciates the opportunity to submit on the proposals for the future management of Tarakihi 1, 2, 3, & 7. Fisheries New Zealand (FNZ) advice of consultation was received on 18 June 2019, with submissions due by 26 July 2019.
10. The NZ Sport Fishing Council is a recognised national sports organisation of 54 affiliated clubs with over 35,000 members nationwide. The Council has initiated LegaSea to generate widespread awareness and support for the need to restore abundance in our inshore marine environment. Also, to broaden NZSFC involvement in marine management advocacy, research, education and alignment on behalf of our members and LegaSea supporters. www.legasea.co.nz.
11. The New Zealand Angling and Casting Association (NZACA) is the representative body for its 35 member clubs throughout the country. The Association promotes recreational fishing and the camaraderie of enjoying the activity with fellow fishers. The NZACA is committed to protecting fish stocks and representing its members' right to fish.
12. Collectively we are '*the submitters*'. The submitters are committed to ensuring that sustainability measures and environmental management controls are designed and implemented to achieve the Purpose and Principles of the Fisheries Act 1996, including "maintaining the potential of fisheries resources to meet the reasonably foreseeable needs of future generations..." [s8(2)(a) Fisheries Act 1996].
13. The submitters appreciate the somewhat longer consultation period (29 working days) for this year's October sustainability round.
14. Our representatives are available to discuss this submission in more detail if required. We look forward to positive outcomes from these reviews and would like to be kept informed of future developments. Our contact is Helen Pastor, secretary@nzsportfishing.org.nz

Background

15. Reporting by charter vessel operators on the days fished, number of fishers, the fishing area and methods used started in 2010. Catch reporting required the numbers of fish caught for a limited number of species. The layout of the form has space for recording the weight of catch for any species. Some operators have been recording estimated weights for all fish caught or just those retained, and this has been entered into the database by FishServe.
16. Fisheries New Zealand has contracted a review of all the charter vessel data and a report on how useful the data is. There has been some discussion of preliminary results at science working group meetings, but the final report has not been completed.
17. In 2013 proposals were released to include snapper and weight of retained fish in the reporting regulations. However, the Minister decided not to proceed.

Fisheries New Zealand proposals

18. Fisheries New Zealand proposes to include blue cod for Fisheries Management Areas 1, 9 and 10, scallops, snapper and tarakihi for all areas into the charter reporting scheme from 1 October 2019 as set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1: (Status quo) and proposal for additional catch reporting, effective 1 October 2019.

Species	FMAs from which catch must be reported	
	Status quo	Proposal
Blue Cod	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8	All
Scallops	None	All
Snapper	None	All
Tarakihi	None	All

19. Operators are currently required to report the actual or estimated weight of each fish for southern bluefin tuna and Pacific bluefin tuna to assist with New Zealand’s international requirements for catch reporting of these species.
20. Fisheries New Zealand proposes to require the actual or estimated weight of the retained catch for all species for which catch reporting is required which currently include bass, bluenose, hapuku (groper), kingfish, rock lobster, and the bluefin species.

Submission

21. The Fisheries New Zealand (FNZ) discussion document states that charter vessel operator reporting “provides a valuable time-series information, and analysis of the available data and trends is used to support fisheries management decisions.” In reality, the recent research project had to address serious problems with the quality of the data before consistent summaries could be produced, and for most species and Fisheries Management Areas the charter catch was relatively small and of limited value for management decisions.
22. Many charter vessel operators opposed the introduction of a reporting requirement because they would have to pay to register their vessels, and reporting would be an additional burden on them, with no clear evidence that the data was needed or would be used.
23. A survey of charter vessel operators was designed and implemented in May 2019 as part of the research project to review the reporting system. This raised a number of issues and potential changes to the reporting that could have been included in this review. However, there was no notice from FNZ that this review was happening in 2019 nor any pre-consultation about what would be included in the review. This is a lost opportunity to build a more constructive relationship between Fisheries New Zealand and charter vessel operators.
24. A more useful process would have been to release the reporting summaries and survey results from the research project, followed by a discussion about the changes that could be made to improve the reporting system. More work is required to get the majority of charter vessel operators to fully support the reporting system and see value in the information that they provide. At present, many operators see registration and the reporting system as an imposition with little practical value, consequently the accuracy of data provided is often not as good as it could be.

25. In fisheries like snapper and tarakihi charter catch and effort information will show trends over time, but the absolute amount of catch is relatively small and will have no impact on stock assessments or management decisions. Recording the weight of retained catch will be useful if charter vessel operators are motivated to take the time to do it well.
26. There is likely to be limited information on blue cod in Area 1 because few are caught.
27. It appears that the proposal to include reporting of scallops was to help monitor catch in SCA7, if and when the Marlborough Sounds scallop fishery is re-opened. Based on the latest biomass survey results this may take a while.
28. In northern waters there is a much higher priority. The submitters have been in discussion with the New Zealand Underwater Association and dive operators about the significant decline in the size and number of schools of reef fish. More catch information is urgently needed on the number of "red" fish that are coming under increasing pressure from some amateur charter fishers. These species include red snapper, pink maomao, red pig fish, and scarlet wrasse. Pink maomao is not a quota species and commercial landings also need to be closely monitored.
29. The submitters want management action to add pink maomao to the schedule of reef fish prohibited for sale if taken from the Auckland Fisheries Management Area. There are currently 19 reef species listed, that that have been protected since 1993. In addition, the recreational bag limits for reef species targeted by charter and private fishers needs to be reviewed.