

# New Zealand Big Game Fishing Council

(Incorporated)

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## **NZ Big Game Fishing Council Submission on the introduction of new species to the Quota Management System October 2004**

### **NZ Big Game Fishing Council**

1. The NZ Big Game Fishing Council (NZBGFC) was formed in 1957 to act as an umbrella group for sport fishing clubs and to organise a tournament that would attract anglers from around the world. Club membership has grown steadily and we now represent over 33,000 members in 60 clubs spread throughout NZ. We still run New Zealand's only nation wide fishing tournament, which has evolved over time and remains successful.
2. NZBGFC compile and publish the New Zealand records for fish caught in saltwater by recreational anglers and are affiliated to the International Game Fish Association who compile world record catches.
3. In the early 1980's the NZBGFC was instrumental in establishing and funding the NZ Recreational Fishing Council to ensure better representation of non-commercial fishers at the national level. The NZRFC continues to be recognised in this role.
4. In 1996 NZBGFC helped establish the NZ Marine Research Foundation, which aims to sponsor research on the interactions between people and marine ecosystems to the benefit of all New Zealanders, including participants in ocean recreation.
5. 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 inshore species.

# KAHAWAI

## Importance

6. Kahawai are the most accessible recreational species, caught throughout New Zealand, though most often in coastal waters from Kaikoura north. They used to form numerous visible schools in bays or harbours throughout the country and can be caught in estuaries, at river mouths, and from wharves, beaches or headlands. Boaties catch them as well - they are the second most common catch after snapper according to recreational harvest surveys.
7. Kahawai has always been an important species to our members, though in the last 15 years that role has been changing. For 60 years kahawai was the main species used as bait when fishing for marlin, sharks and kingfish. Fresh bait was caught each morning on the way to the fishing grounds where they would be carefully rigged (with the hook sewn into position) and trolled behind the boat as "skip baits". Kahawai schools were always available, seen feeding on the surface or around particular reefs. In the late 1980s gamefish boats switched to fishing lures because the kahawai schools had faded away and it could take hours to catch baits in the morning. Surplus kahawai were often taken to the smokehouse. Eaten straight from the smokehouse, hot and salty, it has a far better flavour than today's supermarket variety. Fishing with plastic lures had some advantages and disadvantages but the unreliability of kahawai bait was a major factor in the switch to lure fishing by 1990.
8. NZBGFC was one of the groups that insisted on management controls on commercial kahawai catch in the early 1990s after commercial catch had reached 10,000 tonnes in 1987-88 and availability of kahawai had declined. The Ministry (MAF) published a discussion document in July 1990 to address the management of kahawai. It summarises the recreational views at the time as the kahawai fishery:
  - "has suffered significantly reduced catch rates because of increasing fishing pressure on the stock;
  - "has significantly declined the quality in recent years both in size of the fish available and in abundance of fish;
  - "is no longer managed to provide recreational access to a reasonable share of the kahawai resource"
9. Today kahawai is regarded as an important and versatile part of the recreational catch. It is encountered in a wide range of coastal habitats, but far fewer surface schools are encountered and the concerns expressed in 1990 remain. In many places kahawai are available in good numbers for short periods, then the schools move on.
10. For the last 12 years kahawai were promoted as quality light tackle sport fish by NZBGFC and some member clubs. The "Sea Trout" brand hasn't stuck but there are still light tackle and fly-fishing contests held with the prime target species kahawai. New Zealand holds seven world records in salt water line classes and seven world records in salt water fly line classes. The other 14 world records are held by anglers from Australia.

### *Is the overall catch of this species or stock sustainable?*

11. We are concerned about local depletion of kahawai with all the purse seine boats now based in Tauranga and their admission "that it is not worth steaming very far to catch

kahawai". Near half of all NZBGFC affiliated members (over 15,000) belong to clubs in the Bay of Plenty. The Tauranga Game Fishing Club and others are concerned at the increase in purse seine effort in the western Bay of Plenty and the effect reduction of bait fish schools may have on the number of marlin and tuna that are attracted and held in that area. Introduction to the QMS will not reduce local depletion.

12. We strongly dispute the assertion in the IPP that there has been no effect on the abundance of kahawai in the Bay of Plenty *"For the Bay of Plenty, where the bulk of the KAH1 purse seine catch occurs, information from the aerial sightings does not support this assertion. There is no evidence of a change in the abundance index based on the median number and size of kahawai schools seen per month between 1976 and 1990 in KAH1 and KAH9, and there may have been an increase in these values after 1990"* (paragraph 4). This information is out of date and mean number and size of schools is not a valid index of abundance using the aerial sightings data.
13. A review of the aerial sightings research was undertaken by an international expert, Dave Sampson, in 2000. His conclusions include:
  - It may be very difficult to establish trends in stock abundance from simple analysis of the aerial sightings data that do not account for environmental factors.
  - There seems little justification for using total sightings or tonnage as abundance indices.

NZBGFC would hope that the Ministry would keep up to date with research work they commission. It seems clear that the aerial search pattern in support of purse seine vessels is not random and is affected by target species and the availability of more preferred species. A new method of analysis has been developed by NIWA for blue mackerel aerial sightings using a "combined model" with a stepwise multiple regression and a delta-lognormal approach using fine scale sighting rate as the response variable. (see PELWG03/34) Until a credible analysis of kahawai aerial sightings data is available it is misleading to use any aerial sightings data in advice papers to the Minister.

14. We are not convinced that kahawai harvest is sustainable. The combined recreational, customary and commercial catch may be over 10,000 tonnes. This has to start ringing alarm bells when the current estimates of maximum constant yield (MCY) are 5,100 t to 12,600 t. The best estimate of MCY is probably 6900 tonnes (where  $M = 0.18$ ). Now would be a really good time for MFish to review the sustainable yield for kahawai.

*Are there allocation issues between commercial and non-commercial users for this species or stock?*

15. This section of the IPP does not answer the question. Are there allocation issues? We ask that MFish acknowledge that there has been a longstanding issue over the decline in the kahawai fishery since the late 1980s. It is a fact that allocation and access for recreational and Maori have been long-standing issues. The Motu River mouth now has a seasonal closure to commercial methods and the Hauraki Gulf and other areas were closed to purse seine fishing after a public outcry over excessive kahawai catch by this method.

16. From the Council's perspective the most effective measures in kahawai management are the purse seine catch limits - KAH1 was 1666 tonnes, KAH2 was 851, and KAH3 was 2839 tonnes. These limits came out of a review of the fishery in 1990 and were later reduced in two areas KAH1 to 1200 tonnes and KAH 3 to 1500 tonnes. MFish should recognise that these catch limits were effective and necessary especially in KAH1.
17. Also effective at reducing conflict between commercial and non-commercial fishers over kahawai are voluntary agreements to purse seine seasonal and area closures. NZBGFC want see these measures that help address local depletion continue under the QMS.
18. It is good that the Ministry are quoting the new 2000 national survey estimates. (Note: The recreational kahawai harvest estimates particularly for Fisheries Management Area 2 needs to be reviewed by the Recreational Fishers Planning Working Group)

*Is there evidence of inefficient utilisation or under utilisation of this species?*

19. Yes, we think that too much of this valuable public resource has been squandered in high-volume low-value commercial purse seine and set net fisheries, which have brought a minimal return to the nation or the companies. In many cases target kahawai fishing would only cover the cost of running the vessels.
20. If kahawai caught in New Zealand are worth so little that they are sold to Australia for crayfish bait, then they are better off left in the water. They form an important link in the marine ecosystem and have a high intrinsic value as visible surface schools.

## Conclusion

21. NZBGFC agree that it is time for an overhaul of the management of the kahawai fishery and would support introduction to the QMS, if MFish sit down with stakeholders and Maori and develop a management strategy or harvest strategy that clearly sets out where this fishery is headed in the future.
22. NZBGFC ask that the Minister is informed that the aerial sightings data quoted in paragraph 4 in the IPP is out of date and misleading in light of the Sampson review from 2000 and the methodology used in latest NIWA study of blue mackerel aerial sightings.
23. Although it is thought that kahawai forms one nation-wide fish stock, tagging studies show that some barriers to movement exist at North Cape and East Cape (pers comm. Paul Taylor, NIWA) therefore we support a separate QMA for FMA1 This will also mean that the purse seine fleet can't move all the kahawai quota from around the country into the western Bay of Plenty.
24. NZBGFC support the option to combine the two west coast North Island areas into one as for snapper and kingfish. There is probably kahawai movement up and down that coast during the year.

## BROADBILL SWORDFISH

### Importance

25. Catching a broadbill swordfish on rod and reel is one of the great challenges in the sportfishing world. Despite the competition from tuna longliners on all the accessible seamounts in the north, the few fish we have been able to catch have been noticed by international anglers. Many of the anglers have lost the opportunity to catch large swordfish in their home waters and are coming here before the big fish disappear from New Zealand as well.
26. Numerous Charter boats have up-graded their surveys to include the option of fishing the close Swordfish grounds and there has been a prolific increase in suitably equipped private game launches that attempt Swordfish targeting. We are acutely aware of commercial fishers claim that our stake in this fishery is minimal. However we do have a stake and believe that access to this fish species has been denied to us, as areas accessible by recreational craft are rapidly fished down.
27. The illegal targeting of swordfish by tuna longliners and the fact that commercial fishers have ignored the agreements made in the Billfish Memorandum of Understanding have been an issue for the NZBGFC for the last 5 years. The very rapid increase in commercial catch in the late 1990s was a great concern to many of our members and many feel strongly that the Minister has been stalling on effective management in this fishery. Since 2000 the catch tonnage has stabilised.

### *Is the overall catch of this species or stock sustainable?*

28. Swordfish probably migrate around the southwest Pacific. Most of the harvest in this region is in Australian and NZ waters. We don't know if it is sustainable. We are concerned that the most accessible areas are being heavily fished and there is local depletion.

### *Are there allocation issues between commercial and non-commercial users for this species or stock?*

29. NZBGFC have made it clear that their members want to be able to access this fishery without longliners setting over the top of them. New recreational fishing techniques have been developed that allow the extension of the traditional gamefish season into winter months by targeting swordfish. Although the recreational catch is small the MFish should make allowance for reasonable access to this fishery.
30. A report on the Australian target swordfish fishery found "that there has been a sequential spatial depletion of the swordfish resource off the central east coast of Australia" (Campbell and Hobday, CSIRO 2003). An analysis by one degree square in the "Brisbane grounds" showed that the more years an area had been fished, the lower the catch rate. For example in 1999 one degree squares that had been fished for 5 years had a catch rate one quarter of that found in squares that were fished for the first time that year. Annual indices of swordfish availability for the whole of the "Brisbane grounds" have declined to one third of their 1996 levels.
31. This work also reveals that catch rates are much higher over seamounts than off seamounts in the first year of target fishing, but from two years on the difference

disappears. As we find out more about these fisheries it is clear that local depletion is an issue that the Minister must take seriously.

32. NZBGFC has tried though the Minister, through the Ministry, and most recently through a joint stakeholder working group to get management controls that would firstly, ensure that catch remain within sustainable limits and secondly, ensure that areas accessible to recreational fishers were not fished out by tuna/swordfish longliners. The Council has invested considerable time and effort on these issues over the years and, so far, has little to show for it. (Who knows what this open access fishery would look like today if the Japanese tuna price had kept climbing and the markets hadn't been flooded with swordfish. 250 longline boats and 15 million hooks set per year?) If this fishery is to develop the areas of conflict out to 60 nautical miles off the mainland coast in FMA1 and FMA9, must be off limits to tuna longline gear. This would protect key seamounts but also greatly reduce the marlin by-catch on longlines and provide non-commercial access to yellowfin tuna.

*Is there evidence of inefficient utilisation or under utilisation of this species?*

33. The catch statistics show that very small swordfish are being landed and sold. There was a time when commercial fishers agreed to a voluntary 50 kg size limit on swordfish. At the time (1994) there was no market for small fish. Now it seems that companies can sell swordfish down to 5 kg in size to Australia and thousands of very small fish are being landed. This is not good practice and is putting the future of this fishery at risk.
34. There has been a longstanding issue between recreational and commercial fishers over targeting of swordfish. It is illegal and the Billfish Memorandum of Understanding between the sectors made it clear that swordfish was not to be targeted. It seems that most longline skippers target swordfish at times – the increased use of chemical lightsticks on longlines has been shown to dramatically increase swordfish catch rates (see PELWG03/11). NZBGFC is concerned that under the QMS the longline fishery will become a swordfish target fishery with tuna by-catch instead of a tuna fishery. Without effective QMA boundaries and TACCs there will be no way to spread longline swordfish effort away from areas important to recreational fishers (FMA1 and the Three Kings Area).

Table 1. Swordfish reported catches for NZ domestic and charter vessels by fishing year.

Fishing Yr	<b>FMA1</b>	<b>FMA2</b>	FMA3	FMA4	FMA5	FMA6	FMA7	FMA8	<b>FMA9</b>	FMA10	Total LFRR
1994-95	<b>54.6</b>	<b>22.1</b>			0.1		10.5	0.1	<b>1.9</b>	1.7	102
1995-96	<b>69.0</b>	<b>65.0</b>					5.9		<b>5.8</b>	2.3	187
1996-97	<b>98.0</b>	<b>86.0</b>			1.8		5.3	0.1	<b>30.8</b>		283
1997-98	<b>162.0</b>	<b>106.0</b>			0.9		6.1	1.2	<b>99.0</b>	0.1	534
1998-99	<b>254.0</b>	<b>209.0</b>			19.7		24.8	12.4	<b>139.5</b>	15.7	965
1999-00	<b>220.0</b>	<b>355.0</b>	0.1		4.8		29.2	3.3	<b>148.0</b>	15.0	976
2000-01	<b>273.0</b>	<b>399.0</b>	0.2		22.7		12.2	3.2	<b>153.0</b>	37.0	1102

35. We support the separation of FMA1 and FMA2. The boundary between these areas runs from Cape Runaway along the 178° E longitude so the two areas can be easily distinguished by fishers. In this aspect we support option 1 in the IPP. However, The boundary between FMA8 and FMA9 runs at a diagonal though the Taranaki Bite and beyond for about 600 kilometres. There is currently little swordfish catch in FMA8 (Table 1) and logically it sits better with FMA7. We propose that FMA9 is made a

separate QMA, then the boundary would be shorter and split the West coast into north and south. FMA8 could be added to QMA3, the southern fishery.

## Conclusion

36. NZBGFC support the introduction of swordfish into the quota system as catch limits must then be set for QMAs in New Zealand waters. However the quota system on its own will not offer any protection to the most accessible recreational fishing areas.
37. NZBGFC support a separating QMA1 and QMA2 and propose that QMA9 is also separated. It is vital in our view to have a separate QMA1 and QMA9 so that swordfish catch can be spread to areas where there is less conflict with the recreational fleet. NZBGFC support a separate QMA10 as an area that may be developed in the future.

## MAKO SHARK

### Importance

38. Mako shark are an important target species for many of our clubs in the lower North Island. They were a reliable component of the summer sportfishing scene, particularly in areas such as Gisborne, Hawke Bay and Wairarapa. Further north, large makos are targeted by a few teams in contests, but generally they are a by-catch of the troll fishery for marlin and tuna.
39. The predecessor of the Bay of Islands Swordfish Club, formed in 1924, was called the Bay of Islands Mako and Kingfish Club. Books such as Zane Grey's 'Tales of the Anglers Eldorado, New Zealand' record many encounters with large mako sharks.
40. Today most of the mako sharks caught by recreational anglers are tagged and released as a means of recording the capture for the angler and to aid research into mako growth and movement.

*Is the overall catch of this species or stock sustainable?*

41. There is no way of knowing. However, there are recent and disturbing trends in the recreational catch of Mako in New Zealand. The total reported catch by clubs affiliated to NZBGFC has declined dramatically in the last 8 seasons to 2001-02 (Table 2) and is expected to be low again in 2002-03.

Table2. Combined mako catch of all NZBGFC affiliated clubs by season.

Season	Weighed	Tagged	Total
1994-95	288	1405	1693
1995-96	424	1118	1542
1996-97	352	898	1250
1997-98	455	485	940
1998-99	320	709	1029
1999-00	338	323	661
2000-01	255	277	532
2001-02	155	282	437

42. The decline has been most notable in the number of mako tagged and released. There were more small makos than usual in 1995. The decline in the number tagged is mainly due to a decrease in the number of 20 kg to 60 kg mako sharks caught.

*Are there allocation issues between commercial and non-commercial (customary and recreational) users for this species or stock?*

43. NZBGFC believes there has certainly been an adverse effect of increased tuna longline effort on the recreational catch of mako sharks. This is particularly apparent out from Gisborne and Napier where large numbers of domestic tuna longline vessels base themselves until all of the southern blue fin tuna quota is caught, and where recreational fishers have a mako target fishery that is now mainly catch and release.

*Is there evidence of inefficient utilisation or under utilisation of this species?*

44. If trends in recreational catch of mako sharks reflect trends in mako abundance in New Zealand waters then fishing mortality may already be too high. The practice of finning sharks and discarding the rest is wasteful and at times inhumane. Finning at sea has been banned in the USA, EU and Australia. NZBGFC would support prohibiting mako finning at sea in New Zealand.

## Conclusion

45. NZBGFC support the introduction of mako shark to the quota system as catch limits must then be set for New Zealand waters. Recreational fishers have sustainability concerns, so now is a good time to start active management of commercial mako catch. We have to ask, how can the Ministry manage a species under the QMS when they have no idea of how many tonnes of mako are caught each year? The commercial catch records for this species are impossible to interpret and, according to our information, many tonnes of shark fins are still being sold for cash and not recorded at all. It is time to sort out the management of mako shark.
46. NZBGFC support option 2 with a separate mako QMA for the Kermadec area and greenweight as the unit of measure.
47. NZBGFC support the inclusion of mako onto the Sixth Schedule, which would allow unwanted mako sharks to be released alive rather than requiring them to be landed.

## BLUE SHARK

### Importance

48. NZBGFC members target blue sharks off the east coast of the South Island and in some other locations. They are recognised by the International Game Fish Association as a sport fish but they are not highly regarded as a catch and most are tagged and released. NZBGFC publish the catch tallies for each affiliated club in their yearbook. Over the six seasons 1996-97 through 2001-02 an average of 100 blue sharks have been weighed (to qualify they must be above the NZBGFC minimum weight of 50 kg) and an average of 300 blue sharks (75%) have been tagged and released per season. An unknown number have been released without being tagged.



*Is the overall catch of this species or stock sustainable?*

49. Across the whole southwest Pacific the overall catch probably is sustainable but they are the most common species taken on tuna longline in NZ. About 40,000 blue sharks were caught in New Zealand in 1997-98 alone, according to estimates from observer coverage (Francis et al 2000). More than half of these are killed for their fins. The recreational catch of blue shark has declined over recent years in New Zealand and fishers are saying they seldom see blue sharks in areas where they used to be common.

*Are there allocation issues between commercial and non-commercial (customary and recreational) users for this species or stock?*

50. NZBGFC believes there has been a general decline in shark numbers in recent years. It seems very likely that this is in part due to the large numbers that have been killed on tuna longlines.

*Is there evidence of inefficient utilisation or under utilisation of this species?*

51. The practice of finning sharks and discarding the rest is wasteful and at times inhumane. Finning at sea has been banned in the USA, EU and Australia. It is only a matter of time before it is prohibited in New Zealand.

## Conclusion

52. NZBGFC support the introduction of blue shark to the quota system as catch limits must then be set for New Zealand waters. We have to ask, how can the Minister set a TACC when he has no idea of how many tonnes of blue shark are caught each year? According to our information, many tonnes of shark fins are still being sold for cash and not recorded at all.
53. NZBGFC support option 2 with a separate blue shark QMA for the Kermadec area and greenweight as the unit of measure.
54. NZBGFC support the inclusion of blue shark onto the Sixth Schedule, which would allow unwanted blue sharks to be released alive rather than requiring them to be landed.

## YELLOWFIN TUNA

### Importance

55. Yellowfin tuna are a key target species in the Bay of Plenty sport fishery and recreational charter fishery over spring and summer. They are a highly regarded component of the catch in blue water fishing grounds around the North Island. They are fast, strong swimmers that test an angler's skill and are excellent to eat whether fresh or smoked.

56. New Zealand seems to be on the edge of Yellowfin distribution with availability varying greatly from year to year. Some years yellowfin form a significant proportion of the catch of NZBGFC affiliated clubs. For example in the 1996-97 season 27 clubs reported weighing a total of 5282 fish of all species, 44% of these (2325) were yellowfin. NZBGFC clubs generally have a rule that yellowfin must exceed line weight or 15 kg to be accepted into the records. A large number of unrecorded yellowfin are kept for food or released in some seasons. They were not accepted into the tagging programme until 2000-01.

*Is the overall catch of this species or stock sustainable?*

57. Across the whole western central Pacific the overall catch probably is sustainable but more attention should be paid to yield per recruit of yellowfin in future management decisions. This is more an issue for fleets in the tropical Pacific than the longline fleet in New Zealand.

*Are there allocation issues between commercial and non-commercial users for this species or stock?*

58. There is potential for conflict in areas where longline fishing overlaps with sport fishing. This area of conflict is not something the QMS can fix. Voluntary agreements have been tried in the past but have failed as a flood of new entrants joined the commercial fishery in the mid 1990s. A more enforceable area separation is required if yellowfin becomes a longline target species.

*Is there evidence of inefficient utilisation or under utilisation of this species?*

59. NZBGFC agrees there may be potential to develop the fishery for yellowfin in the Kermadec Management Area. This area needs to be managed separately. We would not welcome the development of this fishery in coastal New Zealand if the result was a large fleet of longliners working the eastern Bay of Plenty as soon as the yellowfin arrive each year.

## Conclusion

60. NZBGFC support the introduction of yellowfin tuna to the quota system as catch limits must then be set for New Zealand waters. However the quota system on its own will not offer any protection to accessible recreational fishing areas.
61. NZBGFC support option 2 with a separate yellowfin tuna QMA for the Kermadec area.

## SOUTHERN BLUEFIN TUNA

### Importance

62. Southern bluefin tuna is rarely recorded in NZBGFC records. There are sport fisheries for this species off the West Coast and Fiordland in particular but few fish make it into club records. In the 1970s and early 1980s a number of New Zealand record bluefin tuna were caught in the Bay of Plenty. The International Game Fish Association world record heaviest SBT is a 148 kg fish caught out of Whakatane in 1981.

*Is the overall catch of this species or stock sustainable?*

63. There is worldwide concern about the sustainability of this species. New Zealand is seen as part of the solution, as a founding member of CCSBT, rather than part of the problem.

*Are there allocation issues between commercial and non-commercial users for this species?*

64. The over-fishing of this species for decades may have limited the availability of SBT to recreational anglers. At present there are no allocation issues between commercial and non-commercial fishers for this species. However the early closure of the SBT commercial fishery for the last four years has pushed all the tuna longline fleet north each winter and has heightened the conflict over recreational access to swordfish.

*Is there evidence of inefficient utilisation or under utilisation of this species?*

65. Closure of the fishery just as the highest value SBT become available off the east coast and the subsequent requirement to return to the sea any SBT caught is inefficient and leads to waste of a scarce resource.

## Conclusion

66. NZBGFC support the introduction of SBT to the quota system as individual entitlements. This will promote better utilisation of the resource throughout the season.
67. NZBGFC support a single QMA that encompasses all New Zealand waters and all areas on the high seas.

## Summary

68. NZBGFC represents a large number of fishing clubs throughout New Zealand. They have an interest in many of the species up for introduction to the QMS in this round. For most species it is obvious that the Ministry will not consider any alternative to the quota management system (Table 1 in the IPP). We generally support the introduction of species that require "active management" but have our doubts about low volume, high value species such as Pacific bluefin tuna. We oppose the introduction of red moki which is already a non-commercial species in the north. Thank you for the opportunity to express our views on the future management of these species.

Jeff Romeril  
**PRESIDENT**  
NZ Big Game Fishing Council