



PRESS RELEASE - 9 March 2021

New Zealand Sport Fishing Council and Legasea call for wider protection of the Hauraki Gulf.

A fundamental reset is required in fisheries management. Band-aid solutions don't address the actual problems of overfishing and habitat destruction.

The State of the Gulf 2020 report says there has been a 27% reduction in recreational snapper catches throughout the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park. Total snapper catch has also declined by about 600 tons over the last five years in the Hauraki Gulf.

The decimation of the once abundant Hauraki Gulf finfish assemblages, extensive green-lipped mussel beds, and many scallop beds was caused by the widespread use of indiscriminate and destructive bottom contact commercial fishing methods. It is only in recent times that we have seen the trawling effort abate and a subsequent reduction in the catch of snapper by the commercial sector within the inner half of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park. According to the State of the Gulf 2020 report, commercial fishing has actually increased 30% since the Marine Park was established" in 2000, and "470% more blue mackerel were landed in the latest three-year period compared to when the Marine Park was established". Given other accumulated stressors (sedimentation, habitat loss, climate change, the introduction of non-indigenous species, etc.), things are reaching a tipping point and we can no longer ignore the Fisheries Act's environmental principles.

The call for increased marine protection on TVNZ's Sunday program is quite understandable given the lack of action to restore abundance and to provide for our fishery's ecological function. While we continue to manage our fish stocks with a so-called hard limit at 10%, a soft limit at 20%, and a target value of 30–40% of carrying capacity, it's hardly surprising that our marine ecosystem is in chaos and showing symptoms of overfishing such as kina barrens and the loss of seabirds, marine mammals and other large predators.

Recreational fishers do see the value of marine reserves for both education and science purposes but do not accept them as a band-aid solution to woefully inadequate implementation of fisheries management. We acknowledge that reserves like Goat Island can increase local abundance, but they cannot restore wider populations to their original unfished levels while excessive fishing pressure and destructive methods outside their boundaries continue to undermine any meaningful recovery. Furthermore, creating additional no-take zones may only further intensify fishing pressure elsewhere.

We need to go further than just protecting some areas and address the underlying problems of catching too many fish and habitat damage by using destructive fishing methods like trawling and dredging, or any proposed protection will not bring about widespread recovery. In 2020 the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council led the way by voting in a policy to stop recreational scallop dredging, and now we would like to see MPI use the tools available in

the Fisheries Act and to immediately stop all environmentally destructive fishing methods (creating 100% benthic protection).

There also needs to be a serious reset of how we manage our fisheries, and for the government (on behalf of the people) to set much more conservative catch limits to allow fish stocks to recover to at least half their original unfished size. This will provide larger fish to restore balance to the ecology of our marine environment while maintaining optimal economic output. Stocks of forage fish like blue mackerel also need to be maintained at biomass levels above 60% of carrying capacity to provide food for fish-eating seabirds, marine mammal populations, and other large predators.

* Daniel Pauly & Rainer Froese (2020). MSY needs no epitaph—but it was abused. *ICES Journal of Marine Science*, doi:10.1093/icesjms/fsaa224

About the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council and LegaSea

LegaSea is a not-for-profit organisation established by the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council in 2012. The Council has 55 member clubs with 36,200 affiliates. LegaSea's core roles are to elevate public awareness of the issues affecting New Zealand's marine environment and to inspire public support to effect positive change. Its primary mission is to restore New Zealand's coastal fisheries. The New Zealand Sport Fishing Council advocates for the responsible and sustainable management of New Zealand's marine resources. To achieve its goals the Council funds education initiatives, commissions and funds relevant research projects, participates and contributes to fisheries management decisions.

www.nzsportfishing.co.nz

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