

Sea Change Roundtable-SWG Handover Meeting

Whitianga Airport, Whitianga, 2 February 2015

A report for the NZ Sport Fishing Council, Hokianga Accord & non-commercial interests
By Trish Rea and Barry Torkington
2 March 2015

Introduction

The last Sea Change Roundtable meetings were held in December 2014. This Whitianga meeting was an opportunity for each of the seven Roundtables to present a short overview of their work and handover the full reports to the Stakeholder Working Group (SWG). A SWG report is due in June 2015. Any issues arising from the SWG work will be referred to the appropriate agency for action, which may include a statutory process prior to implementing any changes.

Barry Torkington and Trish Rea attended this meeting for 3.5 hours on day one of the 2-day event. Prior to this meeting neither Barry nor Trish had seen any of the full Roundtable reports as presented to the SWG. The Roundtable reports are now online at <http://www.seachange.org.nz/News-Events/Media-release-library/Roundtable-handover-to-SWG/>

Discussion

Barry was one of five speakers to explain the Fish Stocks Roundtable process and outcome. It was unfortunate that most of his presentation went unheard due to heavy rain pelting on the roof. The 73 people were assembled in a modified aircraft hangar providing few protections from several external noise sources.

Fish Stocks Roundtable members had agreed on a vision:

“Fish stocks in the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park are Productive, Diverse and Abundant.”

It was apparent early in the meeting that the reports to the SWG were little more than a series of sector group promotions. Commercial interests from the Fish Stocks Roundtable took the opportunity to promote their perspectives rather than reflect those of the group. Marine reserve advocates in the Biodiversity and Biosecurity Roundtable also used the presentation time to promote their desires for marine protection. When talking to ‘What we agreed’ these advocates produced an image of “Important marine areas”. This map had not been presented to the Roundtable and came as a complete surprise.

These developments were a disturbing aspect of the day’s proceedings. These matters and other concerns around the Sea Change process were raised in a letter to SWG chair, Nick Main, and facilitator, Kaaren Goodall after the meeting. Their reply was as expected, rather dismissive. We note the offending map has been removed from the presentation available online at the above link.

Outcomes

As a result of the SeaChange process around marine reserves the cable lane running from Tiritiri Matangi Is. and out past Little Barrier has been filmed to compare the state of the bottom ecology with fished areas. Some commercial and recreational members pressed for this study, to support the notion that it is already an effective reserve, but more importantly to see if the change from a soft seabed to hard bottom will happen if all trawling is removed. The results are due out soon and will be critical to increasing pressure on removing bottom contact bulk harvesting methods such as trawling and Danish seining out to the 100m-depth contour.

The advocacy for Roger Grace's marine reserve plan for the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park continues. At the SWG meeting held on 24 February 2015 Dept. of Conservation (DoC) staff weighed in to support the notion that 10% of the Marine Park ought to be marine reserves. The SeaChange process is clearly driven by DoC and Council marine reserve advocates. All other topics seem to have been kicked for touch, including Water quality, Infrastructure, Fish stocks, Aquaculture and Biodiversity. This process is not going away any time soon and with DoC teamed up with the Councils to make a play for powers to make regulations in the Marine Park the NZ Sport Fishing Council needs to remain fully engaged in any further developments.