**President’s Report 2021 – Bob Gutsell**

What’s in a name? We’re the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council, we formed in 1957 as the New Zealand Big Game Fishing Council. We changed the name in 2010 to the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council to try and distance ourselves from the common misconception that we were a bunch of overly entitled launch owners. Nothing wrong with launch owners mind you, just that wasn’t who we have become. The trailer boat fishing revolution happened 20 years earlier and small boat Sport Fishing became popular with the emergence of light tackle fishing and Marlin becoming easily accessible from trailer boats off the North Island East and West Coasts. So the move to becoming the Sport Fishing Council seemed like a logical and somewhat overdue next step…. At the time.

But still today the mention of the name of our organisation almost immediately triggers a response along the lines of “oh we’re not really into fishing for records or anything like that we just like catching a feed.”

Meanwhile on a recent LinkedIn social media post an acquaintance posed a question whether it was ok to say you’re of a certain profession if you don’t have a credential aligned with that profession? Of course, the obvious answer is that you can call yourself whatever you want as long as you can do the job.

So, what’s our job? We are the New Zealand Sportfishing Council, we have a mission;

“To promote and develop the sport and recreational activity of fishing for all”,

that supports our Vision for “Responsible fishing for a more abundant tomorrow. Clubs / Communities / Fisheries”

That’s what our Strategic plan says and we’re well on our way to delivering those aspirations.

For a start we provide a central connection point for 37,000 members of our affiliated clubs. We provide communication channels from those clubs resulting in a united voice for our 37,000 affiliated members. Our club delegates create, debate, amend and ratify policy that represents their collective view of what we as a Council believe is the right thing to do. That’s a really solid basis for representing the interests of Recreational fishers.

We created LegaSea in 2012 for taking our ambitions to the wider public of New Zealand (NZSFC owns Legasea), informing them of burgeoning crises, and providing a channel for the public to support our work. LegaSea supporters add critical mass to the mandate we have from our affiliated members and provide financial support for our advocacy activities.

*Policy creation and engagement*

Over the three last AGMs we voted to accept 3 such policies; Pink Mao Mao (2019), Scallop Dredging and Hapuka/Bass (2020).

The knock-on effect from these policies over the last 12 months has been tremendous. No sooner had we released our Scallop Dredging policy, I had a radio interview on one of the Talk Back radio shows. The Opito Bay Ratepayers association were listening and reached out for help with the depletion of their local fishing grounds off the beach from Opito Bay. From that came the Opito Bay Citizen Science project, and the Rahui from Ngati Hei (which is now awaiting approval from the Minister).

Similarly, the announcement of our Hapuka Bass Policy was well received by none other than Fisheries Inshore NZ, the representative organisation for Inshore commercial fishers. The issue had been a bone of contention between them and Fisheries NZ for some time as they watched their annual catch plummet to half of what they’re allowed to catch over ten or more years. Fisheries NZ have just completed a consultation review forHapuka/Bass areas 1 and 2. Hapuka and Bass are two unique species that move around for breeding purposes. They are extremely susceptible to overfishing due to their slow growing residential nature. We recreational fishers can more easily over fish them with the advent of high-power depth sounding technology, anchorless position holding, electric reels and boats that will travel much further distances to fish new grounds. This increased recreational effort and effectiveness, combined with continued commercial effort has not been good news for the Hapuka / Bass population. We all have a part to play in helping these species to recover - we will have more to do for these species no matter what the Minister decides.

*Fisheries Management Systems*

NZ is said to have a “world leading” fisheries management system. Those claims are “supported” by statistics about the number of species that are supposedly doing well. But when the system fails it fails cataclysmically. We see this time and time again - Scallops, Crayfish, Tarakihi and now Hapuka & Bass. These downward trends are plain for all to see in annual commercial catch records. But still these signs are ignored in the interests of getting more scientific evidence from more scientific assessments. But when the data eventually is made available, it’s too late, Commercial fishers lose 60% or more of their annual catch entitlement and recreational fishers have our daily bag limits slashed.

We developed an alternative to the current management system, and we keep working to build momentum to get this system. The proposed system comes as close to the holy grail as you can - imagine in leaving more fish in the water and putting more money in the pockets of those who fish commercially.

More recently the unlicensed commercial fishery of Pink Mao Mao on the Coromandel East coast was “outed”. Our Policy from 2019 formed the backbone of our response to the Government.

*Marine Protected Areas and the RMA*

Looking forward we now have the issue of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) to deal with. Our position is that we don’t support “Type One” MPAs (total non-extraction) unless there is a very specific reason for protecting something in the target area.

However, Type 2 and 3 MPAs can be quite useful for restricting fishing methods like Bottom Trawling, and Dredging. We are seeing parts of desperate communities attempting to use the RMA for purposes that it’s not intended for. As I write this, the reefs surrounding Motiti Island have been closed off for at least the next 10 years as a result of an Environmental Court judgement. We’re heavily invested and engaged in the Environment court attempting to prevent a similar thing being imposed in the Bay of Islands. No doubt there will be other unintended outcomes of this outdated RMA to deal with before the RMA is replaced.

*Revitalising the Gulf: Government action on the Sea Change Plan*

Finally, we have just seen the Government response to the Sea Change plan for the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park announced. They couldn’t have got it more wrong if they tried. This plan is the implementation of 18 Highly protected areas areas which are Type 1 Marine Protected Areas that allow Customary fishing.

Meanwhile Trawling and Dredging are allowed to continue in designated areas, and the future of purse seining in the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park depends on the outcome of a forage fish evaluation. We have work to do here to get this plan back to what was originally agreed by the original stakeholder group that formed it.

*Fisheries management Submissions*

If that wasn’t enough, we also submitted on behalf of recreational anglers for

* Southern bluefin tuna 1
* Deemed value rates
* Blue cod 3
* Snapper 8
* Gurnard 1

A huge thanks to Ken Barry and John Holdsworth and Trish Rea for their tireless efforts in leading the charge on the Snapper 8 stakeholder engagements, and particularly to Trish, John Barry and the wider FMMP team in putting together these submissions.

*Discussion*

So, we might be called the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council we create and deploy policy for achieving an abundant fishery and protecting your access to fish your part of New Zealand’s coastline.

But wait there’s more…

The last 12 months has seen the withdrawal of Club Marine from the NZ insurance landscape. This has left a number of us literally high and dry looking for a new insurance provider. One of the chief concerns about why people wouldn’t sign up with Club Marine is that they did not want to depart from the relationship they had with their Broker. So this year we have introduced PIC Insurance brokers as our insurance option for our members and affiliates. PIC provide advice on insuring our boats but beyond this they work for us come claim time making sure insurance companies meet their obligations under the insurance contract. As a fully-fledged brokerage PIC are able to advise on Club Insurance and all other insurance risks. They have upped the ante and got right in behind our new NZSFC National Measure champs competition.

The National Measure Champs competition has been launched. All you have to do is enter, then photograph your catch on a measure mat and submit via our new app. There are great prizes supported by PIC Insurance brokers and Marine Deals. You may have noticed that fish can even be caught on a handline, allowing grass roots fishers from across the nation to participate.

We also kicked off the development of our Youth fishing programme with the steering committee being formed in January of this year, and more recently a youth committee consisting of our younger enthusiasts from around the country. I have great hopes for this initiative to become an ‘end to end’ programme that connects young people in the wider community with our clubs and a lifetime of fishing fun, no matter what their circumstances. More exciting info to come …

This year sees a few changes at Board Level, the most significant of which is the retirement of Peter Campbell from the roll of Vice president that he has held for 8 of the 20 years he has been involved with the Council. Thanks Pete for your years of service to the council and your support during my time in this role.

We welcome Warren Maher into the role of Second Vice President. Warrens had a huge year taking on a lead role in the Opito Bay Scallop Restoration Programme and as the inaugural chair of our Youth Programme Steering Committee.

We also have Ross Lucas who retires this year after 5 years on the board as the Zone 8 representative. He’ll be replaced by Heyden Johnstone from the Whakatane Sport Fishing Club, welcome aboard Heyden!

We’ve also been hugely blessed with a large and highly capable contingent of non-board members voluntarily supporting the Communications, Youth and Fisheries Management committees. We’ll thank those individuals over the next couple of days because there’s too many to do them justice here.

Finally thanks to our Executive team CEO Steven and Administration Officer Helen, and Fisheries management contractors who have been up to their ears in delivering all that and more to come.

So please join me in a standing ovation to recognise the tireless work your board, executive, supporting volunteers and contractors have into providing value for our members and helping us to be everything that is the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council!