

Hansard transcript

Briefing into fisheries

Primary Production Committee

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Members

Steph Lewis (Deputy Chairperson)

Hon David Bennett

Mark Cameron

Anna Lorck

Marja Lubeck (remote)

Ian McKelvie

Tim van de Molen

Witnesses

Ministry for Primary Industries

Dan Bolger, Deputy Director-General Fisheries New Zealand

Emma Taylor, Director Fisheries Management

Anne Wietheger, Manager Fisheries Policy

Eugene Rees, Principal Adviser, Fisheries Policy

Dr Rich Ford, Director Science And Information

Fiona Duncan, Director Food, Skills & Science Policy

Thea Wallace, Manager Skills & Regulatory Stewardship

Dr Shelton Harley, Principal Adviser, Fisheries Management

Lewis Good morning. [*Internet problems*] We'll get under way. I think there might be a couple more people joining us. I'm Steph and I'm chairing today's meeting. Thank you very much for agreeing to join via Zoom at short notice, in the circumstances. So just a reminder that we are livestreaming this through our Facebook page so it will be viewable by the public. The floor is yours, so I'll leave it over to you to make your presentation to us, and then I know that the members are eagerly awaiting the opportunity to ask questions. Thank you. [*Internet problems*]

Bolger So apologies for that, and thanks to the committee for the opportunity to be here. If I can maybe just quickly introduce our team and make some kind of comments at the start—we've sent through a written briefing and [*Inaudible*] the discussion. So we should have—I can't see them, of course, on my screen—Emma Taylor, who is director of fisheries management and Shelton Harley from her team; Richard Ford, who manages our science team in Fisheries New Zealand; Thea Wallace and Anne Wietheger from MPI's policy team, and James Brown, who manages MPI's international fisheries team. So that should be who we have.

What I thought I would run through quickly is some—just quickly sort of on the [*Inaudible*]

Lewis Sorry, Dan, I'll just let you know that it appears that two of the team that you have introduced aren't with us at the moment.

Bolger OK.

Lewis Yeah, Richard Ford—it doesn't look like he's managed to successfully join yet.

Ford Sorry, I am joined. I just can't turn my camera on.

Lewis OK, that's quite all right.

Bolger Thanks, Rich. And thank you. So what I thought I might just run through quickly is the framework, just briefly recap on how we manage fisheries and some of the things that are on the go there—the current status of fish stocks and some of the protected species issues, some of the issues facing the fishing industry—and touch on the Minister's recent series of announcements.

In terms of the context, though, I think the creation of the oceans and fisheries portfolio by the Government sort of reflects the broad and integrated nature of the oceans. Our EEZ is huge. It's kind of like a square kilometre for every Kiwi. It really is a big area, and it really matters to a lot of communities. It matters to the economy. It's a critical part of the environment for New Zealand. It matters a lot to iwi—and partly to iwi for kind of customary reasons as a taonga and partly because they have major commercial interests. Round about 40 percent of all the fish quota is owned by Māori, one way or another, and much of it through Treaty settlements.

Wild caught fisheries is about \$1.4 billion exports; last year, 8,500 people employed in seafood. So it's significant. The central legislation is the Fisheries Act, as you would all know, and that's a sustainable utilisation framework—so utilisation while maintaining sustainability. And it's got a lot of tools in it. There's a lot of things you can do under the Fisheries Act, but the central thing is the quota management system and the setting of catch limits under it. So twice a year we have a cycle. We commission science—about \$22 million worth a year. We engage with iwi, as required by the Act. Our Act requires input and participation of iwi, and we do that through ten forums around the country. We kind of form up proposals for catch limits, consult on them, the Minister makes decisions, and then they're operationalised.

Two things I'd say about that is we've been increasing the numbers of stocks that we've been reviewing each year, and we've also been seeking to take more holistic approaches to doing that. There's a big operational function, so it doesn't stop when the Minister makes a decision, obviously. There's a registry function that tracks who has what and that's run by FishServe, an industry-owned company.

Fishers have to report—they have to report their position, and they have to report their catch. And they have to do that electronically since 2019, which is an absolute goldmine of new data for us. We have observers—we have about 10,000 days of observers a year on vessels, a really challenging role—and we've really focused on the health and safety of those people in recent times and MPI has a significant compliance team, over 100 fishery officers. So that's the kind of system that we're running at a very, very high level.

In terms of the industry, in the 2019/20 year 860 vessels fished. On any given day, there could be a couple of hundred vessels out, so it's not that every vessels is out all the time. In the customary fisheries there's over 600 kaitiaki who approve customary take. And, recreationally, the latest data that we had: in a year, around 600,000 people went out fishing, so it matters to a lot of people.

So how's it going? Right—there is an appendix in the thing that we sent through that gives a lot more detail on this. But there's over 600 stocks in the quota management system. Around about 400 of them matter and the other ones are kind of very, very tiny amounts, mostly kind of stocks for fish in areas where you don't really find that fish generally. So those stocks are a combination of a species and an area.

We manage to a target. Typically, that target is about 40 percent of what we call unfished biomass—so the amount of biomass of fish that would be there if there wasn't any fishing. So, typically, the target is around 40 percent. And then beneath that, we've got what we call a soft limit at 20 percent where we would absolutely take action. We would take action before that, but we would absolutely take action if something hit 20 percent. And if something gets to 10 percent, which we call our hard limit, then we would consider closing that fishery; generally, we would close that fishery.

So in relation to the soft limit—that's the 20 percent one—we know the status of about 68 percent of the fish that are caught. So there's about 30, 32 percent of fish caught that we can't confidently say with full scientific backing: what's their status against that soft limit? So that's an ongoing challenge and opportunity for us. Now, of the ones we do know, 131 stocks representing 91 percent of the fish are above that limit; 28 stocks, so 9 percent of the fish, are below it. And then about three-quarters of the ones above the soft limit are also above the target. So that's the kind of status. So, you know, in the round, we'd say that's pretty reasonable, but there are individual fish stocks that are in trouble and do need attention and we're very focused on that.

For protected species—seabirds, because obviously, fish, you know one of the—

Bennett He's gone.

Lewis Has he dropped out? Looks like we've lost Dan. [*Internet problems*]

Bolger Apologies for that. We'll keep going. I was just about to talk about seabirds. Did you hear anything on seabirds?

Lewis No.

Bolger OK, right. So we'll pick up there. The Government's national plan of action is to move towards zero bycatch of seabirds from fishing. So, you know, that's quite a serious goal. That plan of action came out last year and currently there's around 3,000 a year—seabirds caught by fishing. That's our best estimate. It is a scientific estimate. So that's been slowly declining. A lot of the focus from here on will be individual vessel plans, which will be kind of audited by the Government so the best practice is happening vessel by vessel.

Sea lions has been a major focus in the past because they were being caught in significant numbers, particularly by people fishing for squid. That has largely improved, actually. So, in the year just gone by, five sea lions were captured—we have very, very high observer coverage on those boats so we're confident in those numbers—and the year before that, none. And that's because of technology, actually. There's a thing called a sea lion exclusion device that's been developed that goes at the front end of a fishing net. I personally think that's a real success story.

Dolphins—obviously Hector's and Māui dolphins are the dolphins that we're most concerned about, in particular Māui, where there's probably around 63 left. So the decisions that were made last year greatly increased the closures of fishing. So set-net closures went from 17,000 square kilometres to 31,500 square kilometres closed to set netting to protect Hector's and Māui dolphins. Trawl closures also increased from 11,000 square kilometres to 13,000, and there will be further consultation this year on more measures in relation to Hector's dolphins. So there's quite a lot of action being taken there.

So, I've talked a bit about the status of the fish stocks and protected species. I just wanted to turn now to some of the issues facing the industry in particular. So in the early days of COVID, the fishing industry was hit quite quickly with demand falling away. Rock lobster was kind of a very early issue. And a lot of the demand issues have been because seafood goes into food service, in restaurants. So when countries weren't feeling like going out much, that obviously bites.

The bigger issue now has turned to logistics: the supply chain; the ability to access containers, get shipping, get into ports, all of that. As we know, the whole world's disrupted there and that's a significant issue for the seafood industry at the moment and we're continuing to talk with them about that and figure out if there's anything that can be done to help.

Workforce issues—so, you know, a significant number of overseas fishers came in last year. The Government's set out a pretty clear aspiration to transition to a workforce that is more New Zealand-ised and we'll work with the industry on that. And it will be, like for many other industries, an ongoing challenge for them and I guess, you know, our framing of that is it's a transition, and we want to help work with them on that.

And, finally, in a moment I'll talk about the rules that have been changed. The flipside of that is technologies have to keep developing in order to fish with more precision, and we want to keep working with the industry on that. So, finally, just turning to the announcements the Minister's recently made: cameras extending to 300 vessels in the inshore, roughly prioritised based on protected species, but we will end up covering 85 percent roughly of the catch from the inshore. We've learnt a lot from the proof of concept in the west coast, North Island, and we're going to be out consulting later this year on the detail of exactly what boats and when and how and who should pay. And also in parallel with that, starting the procurement process to actually buy the kit.

Rules changes—tightening and simplifying landings and discards. Those rules are a bit complicated, but also don't necessarily create the right incentive. The Government's goal is very strongly to incentivise people to avoid fish they don't want to catch rather than catch them and discard them. So that's the framing for that. Because we've got cameras out there coming, we'll be able to see people more often if they don't do the right thing—and so a more graduated penalties regime reflecting that and also an ability to make decisions more responsibly. So that's the kind of package of rules.

And then the final thing is, this week in Auckland, Minister Parker and Minister Verrall announced proposals for the Hauraki Gulf, and that's the Government's response to the Sea Change plan. From our perspective, one of the things is a fisheries plan just for the Hauraki Gulf. It's the first time we've had an area-based plan like that. There is a draft plan there. There'll be significant engagement with mana whenua, with iwi, and with stakeholders over the coming year, and the goal is for that plan to be finalised by June next year. And then we're also working with our colleagues at the Department of Conservation on a significant increase in marine protection in the gulf.

So those are the things I wanted to run through. Apologies again for the technology problems and happy to have any discussion, questions, comments.

Lubeck Thank you for your presentation and for telling us about all the good work that is going on. You talked about the environmental pressures, especially in regards to fish stock. And so, no doubt, you are aware of the proposed landfill for the Dome Valley up in the north of Auckland. Mana whenua, whom you mentioned in your presentation, were against that building of the landfill. I know that early on in the piece, Fisheries New Zealand did express some concern over snapper spawning habitats in the Kaipara Harbour. Can you just let me know if all your concerns with regards to the proposed landfill were addressed when it comes to the Kaipara Harbour being a very crucial part of our snapper stock and this landfill being built right on top of the waterways that end up in the Hōteio River, the third-largest waterway in New Zealand, and then end up in the Kaipara Harbour?

Bolger I will make a general comment and then I'll ask if any of the team know the answer to your specific question, because I don't. I apologise. But in general, yeah, we're really mindful that a lot of the pressures on some of our fisheries actually are from land-based effects, from things washing down rivers, whether it's things from cities or whether it's sediment. The Minister is also very focused on that and we know that the Kaipara is a prime example of that. So we are quite focused on that and work with colleagues across Government on that. And most of the measures to address that would be things like from the Minister for the Environment's sort of freshwater work. But I'll just ask Emma or others, do you know the specific response around that landfill? Otherwise we can undertake to respond to the committee later.

Taylor I don't know the specific response around [*Inaudible*] around the Dome Valley landfill and that's something we can come back to the committee on. In general, we participate in the regional council kind of coastal planning

processes, but not typically around resource consent, but I can check up on that and come back to the committee with some written information.

Lubeck Yeah, it'd be really good, because I know that early in the piece I did write to the Minister about this and the Fisheries New Zealand boss. I was given the impression that Fisheries New Zealand would be submitting on the potential effects of this landfill on the waterways and, ultimately, the Kaipara Harbour fish stocks. So if you could provide that, that would be really appreciated, thank you.

Taylor Will do.

Cameron Hello, everyone. Mark Cameron from the ACT Party. I'm interested in how biomass moves everywhere. As you can well imagine, we're talking about the foreshore and oceans, etc., etc. Notwithstanding, I totally support the rationale for what's happening in the Waitematā and Hauraki Gulf with the areas that have now been sanctioned for no fishing activity. Can you then explain to me how there isn't a potentiality for the supply of fish stocks, the biomass, to be exhausted outside of that, withstanding that the biomass is constantly moving and that we are going to have a truncated, smaller physical area where those that can fish do fish and, by extension, exhaust the natural supply that is there? Because, I mean, you can see what's going to potentially happen is you'll get a whole lot of Aucklanders—there's a million and a half people that live in Auckland—going into the Kāwhia Harbour, going into the Manukau, going into the Kaipara and over-accentuating their fishing footprint in those areas and other areas around Auckland.

Bolger I'll make a general comment on that and then invite—if anyone from the team wants to comment in more detail on biomass. So the issue you point to in a general sense is very real. We refer to displacement of fishing. And if you restrict fishing in one place, you can certainly have people move and catch fish in another place. You think about it a bit differently, depending on whether it's the same biological stock of fish that is being caught somewhere else or whether it's a different biological stock of fish.

So the fishery scientist on the line will correct me if I'm wrong here, but my understanding with snapper, for example, is that snapper 8 on the west coast of the North Island is a different biological stock and, in fact, it's now very abundant having been in a very bad way maybe 15 years ago—heavy, heavy sort of reductions, it's now rebounded substantially, and we're consulting on that at the moment on an increase.

So if people moved from taking snapper in the Hauraki Gulf instead of taking them on the west coast of the North Island, that'll be a good thing, probably, moving from a less abundant stock to a more abundant one. But if there's a one stock that's moving in an area and we just move people within the area, then you're not going to make much positive progress. But, Rich, could I just ask, is there anything else you would want to say on that?

Ford Thanks, Dan. Yeah, I would agree with what you've said. I'd also add that even within a stock we know, for snapper 1, for example—so snapper in the Waitematā side of the North Island—that some fish are resident. They live

on reefs, whereas others are schooling within that stock. So it's quite a complex mix to try and figure out the exact implication of any one closure. So you've got to take into account a number of factors there. So, yes, the closures will move effort and the implications of that for the stock will differ a bit in terms of place to place, depending on how much of the fish stock is resident versus how much is moving in and out.

Cameron Respectfully, Rich, if I may, the number one species we all catch is snapper. I think everyone around the table would agree with that overwhelmingly. I understand your argument if you're talking about terakihi; that's a real concern. That's been decimated in many places. But again, I would be concerned whether the language was right in terms of restricting where people went versus restricting the number and the size of fish that they caught. Do you see those two arguments and how the net result is that we protect the fish stock in that way? This is a question rather than a statement.

Ford I guess the announcements that have been made recently are—you know, it's a spatial planning framework. It's not just about the fisheries. There are also other considerations that are taken into account in terms of some of the spatial network. You might say from a purist fisheries perspective, if you protect the number of fish that are taken, then you are fulfilling your role. But I think what we've seen from the announcement is that the announcements are serving a number of purposes, not just fisheries, not just the purist fisheries approach, and, therefore, you've got these mix of measures that have come in.

van de Molen Good morning. Excellent. Good to see you. Thanks for that briefing. Just on those fish stock assessments as well, I'd love to get a bit more detail, if we can, around, firstly, how long it takes to do a fish stock assessment. I appreciate that may vary based on the stock, but also the budget, the \$22 million per year. How is that set? Is that determined by the number of fish stocks you are wanting to assess in a year? Or is it a Budget appropriation that's made by the Minister to say, "This is all that's available for fish stocks. Work within that."

So how's that number set and then really I want to come back on to some of those fish stocks that are not in the desired space at the moment, because we've touched on that exceeding the soft limit—the 28 stocks there—but we haven't touched on the eight stocks that have actually exceeded the hard limit and are considered collapsed, nor the 11 stocks that have exceeded the overfishing threshold and are outside that parameter as well. So, initially, the value, if we can talk on that and the time frame to assess, and then we'll delve into those hard limits as well. Cheers.

Bolger I'll lead off on the finance question and then pass to the team. And I'm just going to say to my team, since we've had these technical troubles, it would be good if Shelton was able to be on a screen as well, I think, for this one—if anyone's able to organise that. So, the budget is—the budget is the budget. We're appropriated a certain amount to manage fisheries and then of that we allocate a certain amount to research. It went up by a couple of million, I think, a few years ago, not many years ago. Over the last 20 years, it's been

roughly stable in real terms, once adjusted for inflation, and has fluctuated around a roughly flat line. It's gone up a little bit in nominal terms, obviously. And so, yeah, it's kind of—we try to protect it. So, obviously, it would be an easy thing to take money out of—you know, if you want to hire more staff or something—but we try to protect that budget and not do that. So it is the appropriation, basically.

In terms of how long it takes to do a stock assessment, I'm going to pass to Rich for that.

Ford Yeah, thanks, Dan. In terms of stock assessment, mostly they cover the range of sort of around about six to nine months for the shortest ones and up to 18 months for the longest ones. There are a couple of exceptions for that. At the moment, we're spending a lot of time and effort around the hoki stock assessment because how we've done them previously hasn't delivered the results that we had hoped. So we're going through a longer process with that. So there is the odd exception, but, generally, sort of nine to 18 months is the time period it takes for a stock assessment.

van de Molen And so the stocks you're choosing to assess, how do you make that determination—around which you assess?

Ford Yep, So there's a process of research planning whereby we propose what research we're going to do. We talk to industry. We talk and we get input and participation from iwi. We prioritise within not just the stock assessment but also the research that we want to do across aquatic environment areas and customary research and a whole portfolio of research possibilities. And then we come up with a list, which is the Fisheries Research Services document, which we then socialise again, because there are cost recovery implications for that, with industry and then we arrive at what we think we're going to do during the year. And then, as always, there's some sort of reactive things that come up during the year, which we need to react to. So, therefore, we reassess that during the year and think about if there's other things that need to come into that portfolio of research.

Lorck I've just got a supp on that question around the process. When you said that it hasn't been good before, what are you doing now that's going to make it better?

Ford Sorry, I didn't think I said it hadn't been good before. Can you—

Lorck Sorry, so when you talked about the hoki stock, and you said that you didn't have good—it wasn't substantial detail or wasn't good enough, and you said you were going back and doing it again, what are you doing that's different?

Ford Sorry, thank you for the clarification. Around the hoki stock there was a significant mismatch between what people were seeing on the water and what they're able to catch versus the estimates that were being generated by the stock assessment. So what we've done is we've gone back to a first principles approach and we've examined all the assumptions around that. And we've also got a different team, a broader team, together to try and relook at that hoki stock assessment. So we're going through a detailed process of many iterations of bringing information back to a working group process with a

broader group of people involved to try and relook at that and come up with a better estimate.

My understanding—I'm not intimately familiar with it, but my high-level understanding is that we're getting estimates that are more broadly agreed with across everybody involved through that process.

Lorck So how far out do you think the estimates were?

Ford I'm not the person who knows the best detail of this. I can get you some detailed numbers down the track. Off the top of my head, I think the estimates were around—the quota was set around 150,000 tonnes. In particular in the western stock, we weren't able to catch the fish that were allocated to be caught on that side of the island. But I can get you to the detailed numbers a bit down the track, if that's what you require.

van de Molen So with the fish stocks that have exceeded the hard limit, had they previously been assessed? How do we get to the point where we have eight fish stocks that have exceeded the hard limit and are considered collapsed? How do we get there?

Ford OK, so I'll have a first crack at answering this, but other people might want to chip in. Fish stocks will naturally fluctuate and sometimes you get some years of poor recruitment in a row and therefore the abundance naturally declines. And then on top of that, you've got a fishing mortality event that comes in. In terms of some other fish stocks that we know have exceeded the hard limit, sometimes these are highly migratory stocks that range across the Pacific and there are other factors at that sort of scale and other people fishing them, which can also help drive their abundance, which we may not have control over.

Equally, if you think about something like eels, there are habitat factors in terms of damming rivers and migration and habitat change that can also impact things that are not—so there are fisheries factors that will affect abundance, but sometimes it's not just fisheries factors that will affect abundance.

van de Molen Yeah, for sure—so scallops, for example, there's two fish stocks of scallops that are collapsed. Obviously, they're not quite as migratory as other species. Have we done assessments on these eight fish stocks that are exceeding the hard limit? Have they been assessed, and if so, when?

Ford I can't give you chapter and verse for each of those eight and when they were last assessed. I know we've provided some information to you through WPQs in this space. But yes, if we're saying they've exceeded the hard limit, then that is on the basis of an assessment. So that is informed by science. I think that might be all I can say on that right now.

van de Molen I guess what I'm trying to work out, then, is had they previously been assessed to determine that actually they were in a state of decline and could we have responded earlier or do we need to be seeing a bigger investment in fish stock assessments than the \$22 million to capture these before they collapse?

- Ford I'm a scientist, so I'll always argue for some more investment in science, of course. But, yeah, at the moment it is a bit of a balancing act between all the research needs we've got and the research budget we're allocated, and so we necessarily do that.
- van de Molen So science is great and it's important. But I've also heard from a number of commercial operators that they get a little frustrated that they're not able to provide anecdotal information that is taken into account in this fish stock assessment process. And these guys are out there on a regular basis catching the fish. They see the stocks being depleted and, in some cases, they've chosen to voluntarily reduce their commercial take, which is commendable. But that anecdotal information, I'm told, is not being taken into account in the fish stock assessments. My concern here is that it takes quite a long time to identify and make changes to these fish stocks. I wonder if that's the key issue here that we need to be addressing. How do we speed that up?
- Bolger I might have a quick comment on that one—sort of supportive of the direction of what you're saying, actually. We do hear what you hear as well, sometimes, and that hoki was an example, actually, where people on the water were saying, "Well, it's not like what your model says." They themselves took action and well done, actually, to them for taking action to reduce catch voluntarily and we then followed up with a catch limit reduction that was really based on that information.
- Obviously, when we go through the consultation process every year, then people submit and their submissions will be based on not just hard science, but their own observations and what have you. We do take that into account. It's a tricky line to walk, though, because we do want to make sure there's good scientific rigour underpinning the decisions. If we kind of walk too far away from that, then we'll end up in a bit of a no man's land, if you know what I mean, with just, you know, people exchanging opinions that aren't necessarily too grounded. And for everyone who's got an opinion that is grounded in a lot of on-the-ground observation, there'll be somebody who's got an opinion that's maybe less grounded. So it's a fine line, but we would like to take more account of things that don't require multi-year stock assessments and we are aspiring to find ways to use the daily data that we now get in better ways to get some information more quickly that we can use.
- Bennett Just that, Dan, just a supp on that. How much money do you need to actually do the scientific appraisals properly?
- Bolger You can buy a lot of science for \$22 million, actually. So I personally think that—you know, like Rich says, you can always spend more. But I personally think that there is a significant opportunity to do some things differently based on mining what's now—soon we'll have a few years' worth of time series of daily catch data and position data and I think that people will find ways to mine that—quite different to how we do science now—that we will be able to use in some cases.
- Bennett Have you asked the Minister for more than \$22 million?

- Bolger I'm just trying to think. Honestly, over the recent years, there would have probably been budget bids over recent years that included a science dimension. Not in the last year, there hasn't been.
- Bennett It's just that I looked at your reaction when Rich was speaking and I sort of felt that your face was telling me that, yeah, you needed more money to actually do it.
- Bolger I'll probably say what I just said before: you can buy a lot of science for \$22 million. I really think that, you know, you can spend more money on anything, but I don't think that's the primary focus for us here. The primary focus needs to be on how we make the most of it. And I really think there'll be ways that we can do some things differently.
- Bennett Well, I'd say that the primary focus is on making the right decisions and getting the right sustainability outcomes. It's not cutting back cloth to fit your budget, but making sure the budget is sufficient for you to do the end result. That's the bit that—I know you can't dob your Minister in but, you know, effectively it seems like a point that is there that that money might not be sufficient. That's why Tim's sort of point is that the industry is starting to do it themselves because they feel that that it hasn't been resourced enough.
- Bolger Yeah. One of the other funding dimensions here is that a significant portion of that science—basically the stuff that's about commercial fish stocks—is primarily, ultimately paid for by the industry through cost recovery.
- Lewis I'm just going to jump in here quickly, because we were scheduled to wrap up at quarter to but given the technical issues, I'm just going to let it run for another five minutes, because I know there are a few more members with questions. Mark's been waiting patiently with his questions.
- Cameron Yeah, hi, Rich and Dan. Rich, you alluded earlier about the revitalised Kaipara Harbour with its snapper fishery. Can you speak to what that was and what the changes that were brought about after, obviously, being so heavily depleted were? Was it catchment numbers, catchment sizes, you know, right down to centimetres of the snapper allowance that was caught, and physical sizing? And I am interested in pelagic species and what homework you guys are doing in that space, given that I see you've got a national plan for action on sharks that is actually being reviewed, and that's quite a significant catch in that part of the world, and what that looks like in real time.
- Bolger I'll just comment first on—and just a clarification. When I was talking about the snapper 8 stock on the west coast North Island, I wasn't specifically talking about the Kaipara Harbour; I was talking about—
- Cameron No, no, I appreciate that.
- Bolger Yeah, yeah—OK. And, really, that rebuild's being driven by heavy reductions in total catch limits for commercial fishing. That's the guts of what's driven that rebuild.
- Cameron Can you see the correlation to my very first question when I talk about the biomass moving, then? And perhaps the better way of looking at it is actually

minimising the size of the catchment numbers and increasing the size of the fish by physical size that are allowed to be caught.

Bolger If you're talking about snapper 8, then although there is a significant recreational catch, the commercial catch will be much, much bigger than that. And so with recreational catch, obviously, there's a capacity for people to throw back fish, and you can adjust the size requirement for recreational fishers. For commercial catch, our primary focus is on the total amount of fish caught, recognising that, depending on the fishing method and so on, survivability is not likely to be that high for fish being returned. And, in fact, the Minister's recent decisions push towards generally bringing the fish back. But, Rich, do you want to comment further on that and pick up the question also on the pelagic fish and the national—well, the pelagic fish, anyway?

Ford I guess I wouldn't disagree with anything Dan said. I'd also add in the fact that the climate has probably favoured good reductions of snapper in the last 20 years, which has probably helped in terms of the recovery of the fish there. Mark, would you mind repeating—

Cameron Yeah, can you just enlighten me—when you say “climate”, I mean, there's always been the assertions—the Kaipara and the Manukau and the Kāwhia Harbour have huge problems with sedimentation, and yet we've got this revitalised snapper fishery. What I'm trying to ascertain has that, by a natural extension, come about because the catch numbers were limited, the size of the fish when they were physically being caught was increased, so, therefore, the throwback was larger?

And the pelagic question was, you know, you've got this national review for sharks. Obviously, that includes such species like tope, which are quite heavily predated as a fishery themselves. What are you doing with things like sailfish, broadbill marlin, bluefin tuna, etc., in terms of understanding that biomass? So there were two questions in there.

Ford Yep, so I'll attempt to answer the one around the Kaipara. I might ask Emma if she is able to pitch in around the pelagic fish a bit more. In terms of how the climate favours good years for snapper, it's basically around recruitment, so it's around very small fish. They're the number of those that survive and come through to the fishery. And we know, for example, in Australia, climate change hasn't been good for their snapper fisheries, but in New Zealand, we know that we have had several very good years of recruitment, so where those young have survived and had strong cohorts into the fishery.

My understanding, and this is not just across snapper 8 but also across the east coast of the North Island and the top of the South Island, is that we've had a number of years of really good recruitment which have driven the recovery in that fishery, which may still be impacted by factors like sedimentation going into the Kaipara, but the conditions have been good enough to drive a significant increase in biomass in those fisheries. If I could hand on to you, Emma, around that pelagic question.

Taylor Sure, thanks, Rich. For pelagic species, some of those are managed under our quota management system under the Fisheries Act, and some of them are, as

Rich mentioned earlier, they are stocks which are caught across the Pacific, and they're actually managed through regional fisheries management organisations, as well. So we collaborate with other countries in the management of a number of our pelagic species.

And also, just to your question around the NPOA-Sharks—yes, that was actually set in 2013, I think, and we are doing a review of that this year just to make sure that we're updating the objectives and the management measures around how we manage the protection and fishing of sharks this year.

Cameron Thank you very much. I was just fascinated about the—obviously, they're apex species, most of the pelagics that I mentioned. Sailfish, broadbill marlin, and the sharks—they're sort of the apex, kind of the wedge, as it were, and we don't seem to know a great deal about many of them.

Taylor Yeah, I mean, certainly they're very important species in terms of the trophic system and the ecosystem. So that's why we do have particular attention and wanting to understand more there. I guess it's a little bit like the science question. There is a lot that we don't know in fisheries management, and our legislation then does enable us that we have to make decisions with the best available information we've got. But there is ongoing work in that area to understand sharks and their importance in the ecosystem.

van de Molen All right, a two-part question, both around the Sea Change and the Minister's response to the Hauraki Gulf report. So, great to finally see an announcement there. What assessment had been done and what consultation's been undertaken with industry so far on that, and what's your assessment of the potential economic impact of these changes for industry, particularly around the risk of job losses?

Bolger Emma, could you take that one, please?

Taylor Sure. So Sea Change, the Government's response to the Sea Change plan, has come with—there has been quite a lot of discussion, and you'll be aware that there's been a ministerial advisory committee, which has also supported Government officials in preparing the responsible Ministers to consider. So there's been quite a lot of consultation through the development of the original plan and engagement in forming the Government response, and what we're planning is moving now into a phase, with the draft fish plan having been released, where we move into a quite extensive period of consultation and discussion, including with the industry and mana whenua, on what that means for them.

I'm not aware of what work has been done around the specific economic impact that the measures may have. At this stage, we're really focused on understanding and working that through with the stakeholders. The general response from the industry participants that I've spoken to in the last little while has been pretty positive about the proposal for an area-based fish plan and to look at identifying and defining trawl corridors.

van de Molen OK, good, and there's some good stuff in there, absolutely, in terms of the protection space. I'm just curious, though, around the proposals for the

additional marine protection areas. This last four years under this Government's the longest period since 1990 in which no new marine reserves have been created. So I'm curious as to whether or not there is an issue within Fisheries NZ that is prohibiting the establishment of that, or whether it's just a policy position, because my concern is whether or not we'll actually see the implementation of these proposals.

Bolger I'll comment on that one. There's a lot of work under way, actually, on specific marine protection in two areas: in the Hauraki Gulf, as you've just been talking about, and also the south-east marine protection proposals. The legislation, in both the Marine Reserves Act and the Fisheries Act—and obviously Department of Conservation (DOC) are the lead on marine protection, but I'll make a comment, because we work with them. The legislation is outdated, and doesn't necessarily make it that easy to progress things, but we're working hard to progress things, so there's certainly no kind of policy thing going on in Fisheries New Zealand that would be attempting to get in the way of progressing marine protection. In fact, we're working hard with our colleagues at DOC in the two areas that I mentioned.

van de Molen OK, so it's just a Government decision.

Bolger Well, it's a process to work through, I guess, with very significant engagement with mana whenua and stakeholders.

van de Molen Yeah, sure, but the process hasn't got harder, and there were 11 established in the nine years prior to this Government, and we've seen none since, so yeah. I appreciated that.

Bennett Dan, there was a recent announcement that basically you have to keep all the catch, including the bycatch. Just for the public, do you want to just explain what would actually happen to that bycatch then, and whether that's counted as part of the quota, and what the options are that you considered around that?

Bolger OK, so I'll start with what we want to achieve, which is: currently, every year there's quite a lot of fish that get pulled up on to a vessel dead and then legally returned to the sea. What we want to achieve is that those fish are not caught in the first place. And so we want to create the incentive not to catch them. And we think that will be better for the ecosystem and the fishery. So that's what we're trying to achieve. There will be some more detail coming out on those proposals in the next couple of weeks, but at a high level—well, firstly, there'll be some more detail coming out, and nothing will change on 1 October this year, which is the start of the new fishing year. I just make that point, as well—there'll be a transition period.

But if a fish species that is caught is a quota species—it's in the quota management system—then it has to be recorded, and if it ends up dead, by any means, then it has to be counted against that fisher's quota or their annual catch entitlement. So, yes, that means they have to have annual catch entitlement or they have to pay a deemed value. They will have to return it to land, unless there's been a specific exemption for those circumstances issued by the Minister, and we expect those exemptions to be fairly limited. They'll

- have to return it to land, and then it's up to that fisher and their licensed fish receiver to determine what happens to that fish.
- Bennett But just with that, you know, you hear of those flashy nets that the fish can go through, and I guess that's what you're aiming to encourage people to fish with. But what about the small family fisher that might not have the technology, might not be able to get that patented technology around the net or the cost structure involved in transitioning to that? What's your plan for them? Because your rationale sounds all right for a big commercial enterprise that's already doing that, but what about the smaller family fishing enterprise that might not have that ability?
- Bolger Yeah, it's a really good point. We are seeing innovations at the small end, as well as the big end. There's a fisher in Hawke's Bay who has developed a different type of an end to the net that he says enables most of the small fish to pass through in a way that didn't with his old kind of net. So you're kind of getting innovations at both ends of things, and we will be starting a conversation with the industry about how we work with them to kind of foster those innovations and support the transition with technology.
- Bennett Yeah, so you'll look at a two-tier system sort of thing, for small and big companies.
- Bolger No, I wasn't really thinking about it like that. I think the rules will be the rules, but we will want to work with both big and small to try and find ways to enable them to make that transition.
- Lewis Thanks, Dan, and thank you very much to all your team for joining us today. That's all we've got time for, and I appreciate you all hanging on the line for a little bit longer to answer the members' questions. So that brings this hearing to a close. Thank you all, and have a great day.
- Bolger Thank you very much, and apologies for the technology issues.
- Lewis No worries at all.

conclusion of evidence