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Analysis of the Government's proposed Amendments to the Fisheries Act by New Zealand Sport Fishing Council and LegaSea.

Shane Jones, Minister for Oceans and Fisheries, has [proposed changes to the Fisheries Act](#) that threaten to privatise New Zealand's fisheries and erode the public's ability to influence how our natural resources are managed. If given effect, the changes will reduce public access to fishing for food and cause environmental damage that may be irreversible.

This is the first raft of changes to the Fisheries Act. We can expect more to come.

If there is insufficient public opposition, the proposed changes will be made into a Legislative Bill and there is little we can do once it reaches this point so it's vital people activate now to let the government know the risks of continuing with these amendments.

Submissions are due 11 April 2025.

Proposed changes to the Fisheries Act will:

1. Weaken environmental protections.

- a. The proposals seek to allow commercial fishers to carry forward any uncaught catch entitlements to the following year. More intensive fishing the following year could jeopardise an already depleted fish population.
- b. The proposals will remove the Minister's statutory duty to reduce catch limits when fisheries are depleted, voluntary reductions for commercial fishers may apply.
- c. Together these changes increase the risks of environmental damage and biodiversity loss that may be irreversible.

2. Reduce monitoring.

- a. The proposal allows commercial fishers to switch off onboard cameras at times, offering an unmonitored window when fish can be discarded without scrutiny.
- b. Restrict public access to footage under the Official Information Act, reducing transparency and eroding public confidence in management.
- c. A 2024 [Ministry for Primary Industries report](#) revealed a 46% increase in reported fish being tossed overboard after cameras went live on a portion of the commercial vessels, proving their effectiveness at incentivising reporting.

3. Increase wastage.

- a. The proposal seeks to allow for more fish to be thrown overboard so more valuable fish can be caught and kept, resulting in increased fishing pressure.
- b. Since the introduction of onboard monitoring cameras, reports of kingfish discards rose 950%, and snapper over 1000%. Interactions with dolphins,

seabirds, and other protected species are on the rise - albatross reports alone were up by 370%.

- c. [The 2016 Heron Report](#) quotes the Ministry of Primary Industries, Director of Fisheries Management, Dave Turner, who made it clear in 2014 that discards were *"the single biggest issue we face in our wild stock fisheries"*.

4. Jeopardise sustainability

- a. Catch reductions can be delayed due to the impacts the cuts might have on commercial fishers. This incentivises overfishing of a depleted stock.
- b. There is no reliable *independent* data to inform management. Current management relies on unvalidated, self-reported data from commercial fishers. This data can be skewed to maintain existing catch limits.
- c. In the past 20 years, public input has been the only voice advocating for conservative decision making, highlighting that excessive catch limits, destructive fishing techniques and land based runoff are threatening sustainability.

As a package, this proposed reform provides a platform which will enable the privatisation of New Zealand's fish into the hands of around 1300 quota owners. Note:

- a. Fish are a public resource, yet more than 90% of commercially caught fish are exported. There is little public benefit when much of the fish is sold for less than \$3 per kilo.
- b. Exporting this valuable protein source takes priority over having this fresh source of nutrition available for local consumption.
- c. Quota owners already charge excessive rates to commercial fishers on the water to access the Annual Catch Entitlements (ACE). In order to generate enough income to cover their overheads, this incentivises fishers to use low cost, bulk harvesting methods such as trawling and seining.

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More information

1. A 2019 [Horizon Research study](#) found 58% of New Zealanders thought bottom trawling that destroys fish habitats and targets small fish in the inshore fishery should be banned.
2. The same [Horizon Research study](#) found 70% of New Zealanders believed that fisheries needed to be reformed to ensure there is an abundant fishery. Not to deregulate the controls on commercial fishing.

3. Two Ministry for Primary Industries research projects, from 2016 and 2021, cover the operation of cameras to monitor catches aboard commercial fishing vessels. Reviewing 100% of all catch sorting and stowing for all vessels is not possible. There are limitations. Even with AI there is no way to determine from the camera footage the exact size of fish or weight of a bin of fish.

Even with cameras, management will need to rely on trust and the self-reported data provided by commercial fishers. Until technology and placement improves, cameras are no substitute for onboard human observers. Current rates of observer coverage of inshore commercial fishing activity is poor.

- a. Pria, M.J.; Pierre, J.P.; McElderry, H.; Beck, M. (2016). Using Electronic Monitoring to Document Snapper Discards and Validate Catch effort Data. [New Zealand Fisheries Assessment Report 2016/57](#). 38 p.
 - b. Middleton, D.A.J.; Guard, D. (2021). Summary and evaluation of the electronic monitoring programmes in the SNA 1 trawl and bottom longline fisheries. [New Zealand Fisheries Assessment Report 2021/37](#). 69 p.
4. A 2016 study found the total economic contribution of marine recreational fishing by residents and visitors was \$1.7 billion per annum, while taking less than 6% of the national catch. Recreational fishing contributes a conservative \$188 million in tax revenues to help keep New Zealand functioning, while generating full-time employment for over 8,000 people.
 - a. Holdsworth, J; Rea, T; Southwick, R. [Recreational Fishing in New Zealand - A Billion Dollar Industry](#). Produced for the New Zealand Marine Research Foundation. March 2016.

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