



Opportunity for Minister to win public support

Blue cod is an iconic Marlborough Sounds fishery so any mention of management changes evokes a raft of claims and counter-claims. LegaSea is pleased to have recently worked on a submission with four other national or local groups to promote an abundant fishery and improvements to regulations applying to both commercial and recreational blue cod fishing.

A combined response to proposed regulation changes was compiled by LegaSea, the Coalition of the Combined Clubs of Wellington, the Marlborough Recreational Fishers Association, the New Zealand Angling and Casting Association and the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council team. This joint effort was submitted on 30 June 2015.

This process has been an important milestone on two fronts: the cooperation achieved by these recreational groups working together on the joint submission, and because it has highlighted how fisheries managers can improve their communications with the public.

A lack of compliance in the Sounds has been attributed to the complex management regime, the perceived inequity in having different rules for recreational and commercial fishing, and the 'slot' rule that has resulted in additional mortality to the blue cod population.

Eleven recommendations were made in the joint submission, including the need to implement consistent rules over the entire top of the South Island, and any no-take zones (or times) to apply to both recreational and commercial fishing.

This is a highly prized fishery. Many years of commercial extraction and a closure to recreational fishing in 2008-11 demonstrate the need for a dependable stock assessment. Research of critical habitat and knowledge on spawning areas is urgently needed to underpin positive management decisions in favour of abundance.

Nathan Guy, the Minister for Primary Industries, is urged to take a precautionary approach when managing the blue cod stock due to a lack of reliable data.

The Ministry will consider all submissions and Minister Guy will make a decision before the recreational blue cod season reopens on 20 December.

Recommendations

Specific recommendations and comments from the submission include the following:

- Same rules to apply in Challenger East (Tasman) and the Marlborough Sounds.
- Abolish the slot rule and set a minimum legal size of 33cm
- Set the recreational daily bag limit at 3 per person, per day
- The recreational accumulation limit is 2 daily bag limits
- Abolish the transit rule
- Amend the finfish no-take zone around Maud Island and apply it to recreational and commercial fishing
- Amend the proposed Inner and Outer Sounds closure area boundaries
- Support fine scale reporting of commercial catch to improve management
- Apply standards that are consistent with international best practice ecosystem based management
- Support a targeted education campaign to improve fish handling techniques, reduce mortality of released fish and conserve fish for future generations.

Fishers in the Marlborough Sounds are increasingly aware of the need for precautionary management to enhance both the blue cod stock and the productivity of the surrounding marine ecosystem.

Let's hope the joint submission has convinced the Minister he can apply caution and win back the support of the local community. www.legasea.co.nz/bluecod.php

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LegaSea is a public outreach initiative of the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council. The Council has an experienced fisheries management, science, policy and legal team. On behalf of the Council LegaSea raises funds and provides public-friendly information about a variety of processes that are important to restoring abundance in our fisheries for future generations.