

NZSFC Fisheries Management Update 27

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What will the Minister's snapper decision mean for us?

Any day now we expect to receive the Minister's decision on the future management of Snapper 1. Reaching this decision will not be an easy task for Nathan Guy. On the one hand Guy is being reassured by the Ministry for Primary Industries that he can legally treat us, the public, as if we are part of the quota system.

On the other, he is getting a very strong message from the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council and our supporters that we are not part of the QMS and we will not accept a fixed, proportional share of the fishery.

Nathan Guy must lawfully allow for our current needs and enable us to conserve fish for future generations. This is a statutory requirement, not a discretionary matter.

Snapper 1 is rebuilding and despite its popularity recreational fishing between North Cape and East Cape is not the problem. Leave us alone!

Clearly the solution lies in monitoring and reducing the massive waste of juvenile fish by all sectors, and banning trawling and Danish seining from inshore nursery areas. Implementing these sensible measures will enable more fish to grow to adult size, producing more and bigger fish.

In 1997 the Minister set aside 2600 tonnes for recreational and customary interests, before he set the commercial catch limit. Later it was realised they had underestimated, by half, the number of fishers. Potentially the allowance could have been much higher.

No adjustments were made because there was widespread understanding the allowance was flexible, unlike commercial quota which is a fixed tonnage that is meant to represent the upper limit of commercial harvest.

Traditional fishing is a well established right enjoyed by people fishing for food not profits, so it was widely recognised that the public's interests would be considered foremost.

In 1997 it was okay for us to be sharing 2600 tonnes of snapper, even if it was an underestimate. Nowadays it is not okay. There has been an exponential shift northwards in the past 20 years and there are at least 30% more people with access to this fishery.

If we want to continue to enjoy a healthy Snapper 1 fishery then the Minister must set aside a realistic allowance that provides for our needs in 2013 and beyond.

Predictably the commercial submissions have all followed the Ministry's preference for proportional allocation, reduced bag limits and increased size limits, to lock us into the 1997 level.

By the time our kids or grandkids go fishing their ever diminishing individual right will see bag limits hitting extinction plus one, forcing them into a mean existence where they may not have enough fish to feed their own families let alone share their catch with loved ones.

This meanness is not what our predecessors fought for. They battled so that we might enjoy the freedoms and fruits of our labour.

Our fisheries resources belong to the nation and our future generations.

Proportional allocation is about transferring recreational catch to quota owners, increasing export values and risks the Minister breaching his lawful obligations.

The NZ Sport Fishing Council will defend the existing right of every New Zealander to fish to feed their family and provide for their social, economic and cultural wellbeing.