

Paua growth not for Southlanders - Cunliffe

COLLETTE DEVLIN

Last updated 05:00 24/04/2013

<http://www.stuff.co.nz/southland-times/news/8588573/Paua-growth-not-for-Southlanders-Cunliffe>

UNANIMOUS: Cunliffe said there was little indication that extending commercial paua fishing would benefit ordinary New Zealanders.

Southlanders were unanimous in rejecting the extension of commercial paua fishing, says Labour MP David Cunliffe.

Mr Cunliffe was in Invercargill and Bluff yesterday to meet with Southland business people and community leaders in his role as Labour's spokesman for fisheries, revenue and associate finance.

He visited the Sandfords processing plant in Bluff and met Awarua Runaka members and Maritime Union delegates, Invercargill Mayor Tim Shadbolt and representatives from Venture Southland and the Southland Chamber of Commerce.

He discussed fishery issues, the Bluff port, the Tiwai Pt aluminium smelter and the Southland economy.

Community members, local government and iwi, had all strongly indicated to him they were against opening up 25km of Southland and Otago coastline to commercial paua fishing, he said.

He could not blame the commercial fishermen for putting forward the idea but there was a unanimous backlash against it in the region, he said.

He did not see any public benefit in the extension of the area. There was a risk that paua would not be there for ordinary New Zealanders, he said.

He also called for more information on the Tiwai Pt smelter talks with Meridian Energy to be made public. It was of huge public interest but the public did not know what was going on, he said.

He had spoken to New Zealand Aluminium Smelters general manager Ryan Cavanagh on the phone yesterday.

"He confirmed talks were getting to the 'pointy end' of things but no-one knows what that means, which is of concern for Southland," Mr Cunliffe said.

It was not too early for people to be asking the "what if it closes" question, he said. "There is a need for a plan B. What are the alternatives uses for such a large amount of energy that could be of benefit to this region and the country?"

There was a potential need for careful government intervention regarding the Tiwai Pt aluminium smelter situation, he said.