

New Zealand Big Game Fishing Council

(Incorporated)

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23 April 2007

NZ Big Game Fishing Council Submission on Ministry of Fisheries Initial Position Paper, “Local depletion of hapuku/bass in the Central Fisheries Management Area”

NZ Big Game Fishing Council

1. The NZ Big Game Fishing Council (NZBGFC) was formed in 1957 to act as an umbrella group for sport fishing clubs and to organise a tournament that would attract anglers from around the world. Club membership has grown steadily and we now represent over 30,000 members in 59 clubs spread throughout NZ. We still run the nation-wide fishing tournament, which has evolved over time and remains successful.
2. NZBGFC compile and publish the New Zealand records for fish caught in saltwater by recreational anglers and are members of the International Game Fish Association (IGFA) who publish catches that qualify as recreational world records.
3. For a number of years NZBGFC has made submissions on fisheries management issues, particularly (but not exclusively) those that directly affect our members.
4. In recent years our membership has expanded beyond the traditional deep sea angling clubs to include many local clubs that fish for inshore and demersal species. In the Central Fisheries Management Area we have fourteen affiliated clubs, whose members all regard hapuku and bass as important target species.
5. This submission is in response to the Initial Position Paper (IPP) proposing broad scale regulatory changes to manage the local depletion of hapuku or bass at the Ranfurly Banks and popular non-commercial areas off Gisborne, in Hawke Bay, off the Wairarapa coast.
6. NZBGFC advocates for the sustainable utilisation of fisheries for the benefit of all New Zealanders often in conjunction with the NZ Recreational Fishing Council, the Hokianga Accord (the mid north iwi fisheries forum), option4 and other environmental and fishing

interest non-government organisations (NGOs) to achieve “more fish in the water/kia maha atu nga ika i roto i te wai”.

Introduction

7. MFish has released an Initial Position Paper on Local depletion of hapuku/bass in the Central Fisheries Management Area (CFMA), proposing changes to the rules that manage recreational take of hapuku and bass in the CFMA.
8. The IPP refers to “multiple reports of localised depletion of hapuku and bass” within the CFMA. These reports are stated to have come entirely from non-commercial stakeholders.
9. The IPP puts forward four management options for discussion. These are:
 - Option 1, the status quo;
 - Option 2, the introduction of a recreational maximum daily bag limit of 3 hapuku/bass per person in the CFMA;
 - Option 3, the introduction of a maximum boat limit of 15 hapuku/bass per vessel in the CFMA for recreational fishers; and
 - Option 4, the introduction of an accumulation limit of one daily bag limit of hapuku/bass per person for recreational fishers.
10. Submissions are due by 23rd April 2008. Any management changes are due to take effect from October 1st 2008.

Local depletion of hapuku/bass in the CFMA

11. The IPP is in response to claims of local depletion received by MFish, relating to several of the more accessible reefs and areas on the east coast of the CFMA. These claims have apparently been received from various non-commercial sources since 2005.
12. There exists no independent information to confirm the claims, but the IPP states that hapuku/bass have biological characteristics that make them vulnerable to localised depletion. Hapuku/bass also display a high degree of residency around particular reefs, which makes them easy to target. We accept that this may well be correct, because it has been identified as a problem in commercial target fisheries for some time, but have serious concerns about each of the proposed regulation changes.
13. There is no suggestion in the IPP that the fish stocks in question (HPB2 and HPB8) are being fished at unsustainable levels. The problems described are about achieving reasonable catch rates in areas that are accessible and have traditionally held hapuku or bass. On the other hand some charter boats are believed to be very successful and their high catch rates are said to be the cause of local depletion.

The options

Option 1.

14. This option would not change the current amateur fishing regulations or reduce the rights of fishers in areas not affected by local depletion. Hapuku and bass are different species, generally are found in different depth ranges (but have been managed as a single stock because commercial fishers have never been asked to separate them on their catch returns). The only way a meaningful stock assessment for hapuku or bass could be

undertaken would be to separate reporting for the two species at least for commercial fishers (Paul 2002a)¹. Also the QMA boundaries were chosen for administrative convenience, rather than stock assessment relevance (Paul 2002b).² It is not clear whether the local depletion is occurring on hapuku in the shallower depth range or bass, usually found out deeper. NZBGFC would support a more comprehensive review of hapuku and bass management in New Zealand. The issues raised about catch by charter and private recreational vessels need local area management solutions and tools to be developed.

Option 2.

15. MFish favours the second option, on the grounds that it would reduce the maximum fishing potential of all recreational fishers targeting hapuku/bass in the CFMA, and most effectively address the reported localised depletion. We do not consider this statement to be justified by any evidence presented in the IPP. If the localised depletion is being caused by charter vessels, it may actually be ineffective, as detailed below.
16. Most of the claims appear to relate to a reported increase in charter boat activity on particular reefs. Any reduction in personal daily bag limits will not in itself reduce the pressure on popular reefs by these vessels, even if the individuals on board each take two less fish daily. The presence of the charter boats themselves is likely to be the cause of much of the objection, since the current actual catch by these boats is not known. Very little information exists about the true level of catch from charter vessels. If they are not taking full bag limits already, there may in fact be no reduction in catch. The problem might simply be one of spatial allocation rather than catch level.
17. There is a need to improve information on the catch of hapuku/bass by charter vessels in all FMAs, not just in the CFMA. It is unwise to proceed with the proposed changes until better information is available, because of the possibility of flow-on effects into other FMAs. For example, there are already similar concerns being expressed in the Far North about the level of catches taken by visiting charter vessels from the Bay of Plenty. Large charter boats move north in autumn for charter trips to the Three Kings Islands and adjacent areas, reportedly taking large amounts of hapuku/bass, kingfish and rock lobster. Any changes that are not universal may simply shift the charter boat problem elsewhere.
18. Lowering the bag limit for fishers who use their own vessels may not reduce the catch either. Fishers could fish more days if they want more fish than a single daily bag limit.

Option 3.

19. The introduction of a daily boat limit of 15 hapuku/bass, is favoured by some affiliated NZBGFC clubs. It might work with larger vessels, especially charter boats. However, the current catch by these vessels remains unknown, so there might be little or no net benefit.
20. Fishing on charter boats is a legitimate way to access fishing grounds and provides economic benefits for many coastal communities. If the regulations are too restrictive charter operators will have to change target species or stop operating. A boat limit of 15 would act as a disincentive for large groups to charter a boat, because if some people catch two or three fish the 15 fish limit may be reached before others have their first fish. The number of bookings for multi-day charter trips may be adversely affected. A boat limit may

¹ Paul L.J. 2002a. Can separate CPUE indices be developed for the two proper species, hapuku and bass? *NZ Fisheries Assessment Report 2002/15*. 24 p.

² Paul L.J. 2002b. A description of the New Zealand fisheries for the two proper species, hapuku and bass. *NZ Fisheries Assessment Report 2002/13*. 47 p.

have little effect on those who can afford to charter a boat for just 2 or 3 people. This is not good public policy.

21. Part of the issue with some charter trips is the attitude of fishers that their purpose is “to fill the freezer” and to bring back fish in excess of the amount paid for the trip. Many experienced fishers, who have witnessed the fragility of some of our prized fisheries, view this approach to fishing as inequitable and irresponsible. There have been some major changes in attitudes of amateur fishers in New Zealand over the last 30 years. NZBGFC will be a significant contributor to changes in the attitudes of the next generation of fishers with school tours and educational material starting this year.

Option 4.

22. Again there is no information provided to indicate that removing the accumulation limit would directly affect the local depletion on accessible reefs in HPB2 or HPB8. The general perception is that this would have more effect on long range charters to Ranfurly Bank, White Island or the Three Kings area. A more comprehensive review of the management of hapuku/bass is required to address these issues properly. The Ministry has Fisheries Plan processes due to start shortly in some of these areas. Inclusion of this type of control would be better addressed in these fora.

General

23. It is good that the Ministry has responded to an issue raised by fishers, many from our own affiliated clubs. Included below are emails from a number of those clubs or their committees. There is a consistent view that there is a problem to address and there is a range of views as to the best way to deal with this. However, it is the role of the NZBGFC management committee to take a more strategic view of the proposed regulation changes in HPB2 and HPB8.

Limited tools

24. The Ministry is proposing quite significant changes to the catch entitlement of ALL amateur fishers in the CFMA because of depletion of some of the more accessible reefs in quite localised areas. These areas are nowhere near the lower west coast of the North Island yet all the proposals would affect fishers in those areas just as much. The NZBGFC does not support management of New Zealand’s recreational fisheries based on the lowest common denominator. Why should fishers on the other side of the county pay for the excesses of a few fishers on accessible reefs? Clearly local area management tools are most appropriate for addressing local depletion issues at this time.

Erosion of rights in areas where there is no local depletion

25. If a more targeted response is not possible, then this type of management response might be used whenever there is a local depletion problem in part of a QMA. The well settled common law rights of all New Zealand fishers should not be eroded in this way.

Local solutions

26. NZBGFC suggests that a mix of well thought out gear restrictions, such as the number of hooks on a dahn line, better communication with the charter boat sector and promotion of a more responsible attitude to fishing would be a good place to start. This could be accompanied by a full review of the hapuku/bass fisheries within a fisheries plan, better data on charter boat catch, and relative catch rates between HPB2 and other quota management

areas. With the right structures in place a temporary Rahui could be placed on depleted reef systems which would apply to commercial, charter and recreational fishers. The rather blunt tools of new bag limit restrictions should be saved for when stock-wide sustainability is the concern.

Role of commercial fishers

27. There is no data presented or analysis of the role of commercial fishers in contributing to local depletion. Members of the Hawkes Bay Sports Fishing Club refer to this saying that Post Office rock was *“once a thriving deep sea fishing spot until commercial set netting decimated it “*. They have also reported that there are now four setnet vessels working the deep reefs in their area, claiming to target warehou but taking large catches of hapuku. A recreational fisher fishing for hapuku got their anchor caught on part of a lost net that they could not get to the surface but could see that it had rolled up and had been ghost fishing for some time. MFish need to review the impacts of commercial set netting on deep reefs on the marine environment, resident reef populations and other stakeholders.
28. The fishers on charter boats in question catch their hapuku and bass from deep water on rod and reel, often while drifting. A commercial vessel using trot lines or set nets has a lot more fishing power and is entitled to fish on any of the reefs in HPB2 that are of concern. There is not clear evidence that recreational fishers are the sole cause of the depletion described.

Stakeholder management solutions

29. There has been some progress toward multi-stakeholder solutions to fisheries management issues. Recreational fishers are obviously concerned about the productivity and sustainability of fisheries in their area and are prepared to contribute where necessary. However, the timing of concessions could be critical. Negotiated solutions between recreational, customary and commercial fishers often require some give and take. If the amateur bag limits are reduced this year in CFMA this will restrict what recreational fishers can bring to the negotiating table in the future.

Input and submissions from individual fishing clubs NZBGFC Zone 5

Input from fishing clubs in the south east of the North Island follow. A number of the members of these clubs will have raised the issue of local depletion of hapuku and bass as a concern worthy of management action. Most have selected from the options presented by MFish in the IPP.

1. The clubs making up Zone 5 range from Gisborne (which has a base at Waihou Bay) to Wanganui and include;

Club	membership
Gisborne Tatapou Sports Fishing Club	3000
Mahia Boating and Fishing Club	616
Hawkes Bay Sports Fishing Club	1313
Akitio Boating Club	375
Wairarapa Sports Fishing Club	171
Pukemanu Boating and Fishing Club	196
Ngawi Sports Fishing Club	499
Wgtn – Twin Harbours Fishing Club	107
Tangimoana Boating Club	198

2. The matter Hapuku/Bass was discussed at a zone meeting on the 29th of March at which all clubs were represented, except Gisborne, and the following resolution was presented;

Localised depletion of Hapuku / Bass

“It was moved that we have more time to take back to clubs as information was only received 28th March.”

Moved Ian Warren / Alan Hoare all agreed

It was further suggested that, after their meetings to discuss the matter clubs should forward their decisions to Ed and George to write the submission.

3. As this has been the case, it is hard to get a complete consensus, although all clubs agree something needs to be done. It has come through very strongly that amore complete review of the Hapuku/Bass fishery needs to be done. We would like this review done as soon as possible and to that end would like to get the funding proposal in to the next round.
4. Although not agreeing to the proposal at this stage, a number of clubs have voluntarily imposed the restrictions on their members, while waiting for the results of the review. This point is made in the attached emails.
5. Our concern for the Hapuku/Bass fishery has come about from the fewer and fewer numbers of recreational fish being caught and the size of the fish.
6. The numbers, we believe, have been largely depleted by the charter boat fleet heavily targeting Hapuku on the off shore reefs. For example, off the Wairarapa coast these charters regularly have 10 to 12 paying passengers on board and come back with or near their limit of Hapuku. In other areas they are out with less paying passengers but for several days and aggregate their catch.
7. I enclose the emails from the club representatives giving their positions;

Tangimoana Boating Club inc.
Domain Rd
Tangimoana.
Membership no 198

We fully support the option 3 with the per day added or combine option 3 and 4
Best of luck.

Andrew”

Mahia Boat and Fishing Club

“Hapuku/Bass: Proposed Changes to Amateur Rules.

It was decided at a special meeting held at Mahia Boating & Fishing Club. Mahia Beach, East Coast, on the 23 March 08. 14 committee members present.

We consider Option 2, a good option, but for all areas. For eg: why has area HPB1 not been included, surely there would be a lot of charter boats fishing further north.

After all isn't that one of the problems we all want fixed. That's one of the reasons this has come about!

Jenny Hills (06) 8685582"

Hawks Bay Sports Fishing Club

Re: HBSFC views on Hapuku/Bass issue we had a meeting with our members on Wednesday 9/4/08 to discuss this issue. The meeting was started with Colin Murray and myself giving a summary of the situation to date. All agreed that Hapuku/Bass are getting harder to find and are getting smaller. It wasn't to long ago that you could get "pup" Groper (up to 10-12kg) out at the 40m line although the middle of the bay with spawning Snapper during November - December - not any more!!

Post Office Rock is another prime example after lengthy discussion it was decided that our club, the Hawke's Bay Sports Fishing Club is prepared to take steps to assist in the rebuilding of this fishery. A motion was put forward and unanimously passed that the HBSFC is in favour of Option 1 status quo with the following recommendations:

1. Club members be requested to take voluntary cuts i.e.: daily bag limit of three fish per angler, max 15 Hapuku/Bass per boat per a 24 hours period until a full review of Hapuku/Bass fisheries is undertaken. These measures to be reassessed when new information is available.
2. That an urgent review of the Hapuku/Bass fisheries be undertaken
3. Allocations for Recreational, Customary and fishing interests be included in the TAC
4. It was also noted that the practice of commercial set netting offshore reefs, Lachlan Banks, Lachlan Ridge and surrounding foul etc be seriously looked at to access the long term damage this could cause. There have been reports of lost commercial nets ghost fishing. One only needs to look at Post Office Rock, once a thriving deep sea fishing spot until commercial set netting decimated it.
5. Area of concern - the only area we know about is our fishing ground i.e. Mahia - Waimarama we can't comment on other areas as we don't fish there. Information from the North Island South East Coast Forum and the NZBGFC Zone 5 indicates the problem is from Gisborne – Wellington, (not in Area 8) they are quite happy.
6. It must be noted that the HBSFC members are prepared to take steps to assist this fishery. However it needs to be established if it is only Recreational causing the decline, we think not. It is also noted that the TACC (which is also the TAC) over the last five years has exceeded by an average of 2.2 tonne per year. This may not sound to much but at 12kg per fish tats 915 fish tat can't spawn.
7. It was also noted that all of our clubs supports the Kahawai Legal Challenge and what it stands for ie when setting TAC starting point is to allow for non-commercial catch, we don't want to step back on our rights.

Regards,

Wayne”

Gisborne Tatapouri Sports Fishing Club

“I totally agree on your comments about the review. My understanding from Leigh Mitchell at the last meeting that the recreational fisherman in our area was going to take a cut, this was not voluntary but was permanent on recreational quota. Gisborne Tatapouri Sports Fishing Club have a voluntary quota system for Hapuku/Bass at present, this is three per angler. This has been on for the last three years. So I hope a voluntary settlement can be done for recreational, until the survey on Hapuku/Bass is completed. Best of luck
Hilton”

“Hi Ed .

With regards to the Hapuku submission ,have checked with committee and some club members and everyone goes for the option of 3 Hapuku per person per day and a maximum boat limit of 15 per day .Feel we need to know more about commercial take ie size and weight of fish that they are taking to fill their quota .This information would help us to see if they are taking out fish that have not yet reached spawning age .

Regards Terry Liggett.”

From: Ngawi Sports Fishing Club and my personal view.

We support an urgent and total review of HPB.

We do not wish to concede bag limit reductions except on a voluntary basis until a full review is carried out.

We would agree to a voluntary bag limit of 3 hapuku per day with 15 per boat per day with no accumulation.

There is no allowance for recreational and customary take in the current HPB TAC.

Therefore any allowance for recreational and customary must come off commercial quota.

MFish seem to have a desire to reduce recreational bag limits - beware!

Regards George Ngawi (Wairarapa)

Input from fishing clubs NZBGFC Zone 6

This issue was discussed at a recent Zone 6 Meeting on April 2008. The clubs making up Zone Six are:

Club	Membership
Cape Egmont Boating Club	248
Dinsdale No.1 Fishing Club	50
Kawhia Boating & Angling Club	434
New Plymouth Sport Fishing	
And Under water Club	603
Raglan Sportfishing Club	807
Waikato Sort Fishing Club	290

The clubs directly affected i.e. Kawhia, Taranaki, and Cape Egmont are in the Central Fisheries Management Area and have a **agreement in place on voluntary bag limits this is working well and**

has been in place for many years. We need to separate by area East Coast North Island where a problem has been identified from the West Coast North Island which does not have a problem.

The NZBGFC Zone 6 clubs are totally opposed to the proposed regulatory changes. They feel that this is a problem of localised depletion. They would support a proposal for a review of the whole fishery, which is long overdue.

There is potential for fishing effort to be pushed north into areas off Kawhia and Raglan if different bag limits apply in QMA8 and QMA9. The Waikato, Kawhia and Raglan are also totally opposed to the reduction in HPB8 amateur bag limits.

Thank you for considering this submission from the New Zealand NZ Big Game Fishing Council

Richard Baker
President
NZBGFC