



Killing fewer fish is good for our wellbeing

LegaSea Hawkes Bay has worked hard with the Ministry for Primary Industries and commercial interests during 2015 to find a solution to restore fish abundance in the Hawke Bay and surrounding coastline. So far there has been no tangible outcome, but the opportunity to openly discuss problems caused by depletion and excessive commercial fishing effort has been useful.

LegaSea Hawkes Bay is a team of Napier locals and their affiliates from the NZ Angling and Casting Association, supported by LegaSea and NZ Sport Fishing Council, seeking to achieve more fish in the water.

It is obvious that the only solution to restore abundance is to kill fewer fish. How that reduction is achieved is the topic of debate.

Reducing the recreational daily bag limit would make no meaningful difference as harvest continues to decline. There are serious concerns about the low numbers of gurnard, hapuku, bass and snapper.

The Colin Murray-Hawke's Bay Sports Fishing Club ramp survey of over 16 thousand angler days shows snapper catch has reduced from an average 0.94 fish per fisher day in 2006 to 0.48 in 2014-15. In the same timeframe average harvest of the most popular catch, gurnard, has reduced from 2.19 to 1.02 per fisher, per day.

In response to local concerns and the lack of any official measures to constrain mortality levels the Hawke's Bay Sports Fishing Club has worked with the NZ Sport Fishing Council to develop a policy to rebuild the gurnard stock in Area 2, between East Cape and Wellington.

This multi-pronged solution includes measures to restore gurnard abundance to pre-1960s levels, to improve the yield from each fish that is caught, to account for the environmental impacts of fishing, and to provide abundance for future generations.

From our perspective, this rebuild can be achieved by applying a range of measures including:

- Reducing commercial catch
- Banning trawling inside the Bay, from Cape Kidnappers to Mahia, and in coastal zones to the north and south of the Bay; and

- Initiating a research monitoring program to develop a more comprehensive understanding of at-sea commercial catch.

Any measures to rebuild gurnard abundance are considered beneficial, over time, for other species in the Bay.

After many years of lobbying and effort by locals it is time the Minister delivered on his statutory duty to manage fisheries at abundant levels to provide for the social, economic and cultural wellbeing of the people of coastal Hawkes Bay.

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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.