



Purse seiners scooping schools of fish and bad blood

Purse seiners scooping up schools of skipjack tuna inshore inevitably creates conflict between commercial operators and recreational fishers due to their impact on a precious resource. Purse seining disrupts the availability of food, which attracts and holds the large pelagic fish such as marlin and tuna, and sustains bird and dolphin populations.

Again this summer, in the Bay of Plenty particularly, there has been competition between fishers seeking different benefits from the schools of “skippies”. Purse seiners use planes and technology to hunt and capture whole schools. Recreational fishers use diving birds, the skippy schools and bait balls they hold at the surface as signals that gamefish are nearby.

Baitfish species must be better managed and protected because they are an integral and essential part of the marine foodchain. Without these baitfish larger fish and birds would struggle to survive and rear their young.

LegaSea is promoting the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council’s Fisheries Management Area 1 policy, online at <http://goo.gl/brdybi>. This policy includes:

Objective 1. An ecosystem wide management approach is applied in Fisheries Management Area 1 to achieve the National Fisheries Plan’s environmental objectives of sustaining the capacity and integrity of the aquatic environment, habitats and species.

Strategy a. Biodiversity and the function of ecological systems, including trophic linkages, are conserved.

Advocacy is ongoing

In 2009 the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council, representing 57 clubs, spent many hours developing a draft Code of Practice (COP) with commercial skipjack purse seine fishers as part of the Highly Migratory Species Fisheries Plan. This draft COP detailed four areas in the Bay of Plenty and three on the North Island west coast that clubs wanted closed before and during fishing competitions. Commercial operators wanted agreement that the first boat (commercial or recreational) to a school of fish had rights to that school. The Council would only support this arrangement if commercial fishers agreed to the voluntary closures of the stated Bay of Plenty and west coast areas. The Code of Practice was not adopted.

Seven years later and the NZ Sport Fishing Council continues to request management action to reduce commercial purse seine fishing effort during each January and February. A meeting to update the Ministry's Highly Migratory Species Fisheries Plan is due this year. The Council will raise this conflict issue again and expect some effective outcomes. LegaSea will keep you updated on any progress.

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ENDS

Hot Tip

Seabirds are nature's fish finders. Please protect them from getting tangled in fishing lines, caught on hooks and trapped in nets, because if the parent bird is harmed or killed during summer its chick will die of starvation. More info at www.legasea.co.nz/seabirds.

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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.