FAQ – Why not apply a 'land-all catch' policy to recreational fishing?

November 2014

A 'land-all catch' policy is often promoted as a way of reducing recreational fishing activity and related mortality. This is based on the assumption that once the bag limit is caught the person will stop fishing.

LegaSea has previously offered discussion on the question of 'why not apply a land-all catch policy to commercial fishing?' Similar principles apply when the same question is asked in relation to recreational fishing.

There are many reasons why LegaSea does not support a land-all catch policy being applied to recreational fishing, including -

1. People will be required to kill fish that they would otherwise have released alive. This will increase fishing mortality and upset conservation minded fishers.
2. There is no way to 'police' the land-all catch rule on the water; it relies on voluntary compliance. If the fisher is dissatisfied with the size of the fish on the line then that fish can easily be discarded without detection.
3. Some people may keep fishing for other species after their bag limit for a common species is caught; they would do this by changing target species, or by claiming they are helping less successful fishers in the group.
4. A land-all catch policy for recreational fishing could mean no minimum size limit would apply to recreational catch for snapper and other species. Commercial fishers may also expect no minimum size limits to apply to their catch. Imagine the conflicts if there were no minimum size limits for other species like crayfish or kingfish!
5. Small fish can suffer fatal injuries if not handled correctly. Small snapper caught in waters less than 25 metres need not suffer high mortality if released correctly.

Conserving fish for the future

A land-all policy will result in more small fish being killed and harvested. Killing small fish keeps the stock size low and creates a demand for ever-decreasing sized fish. There is more yield to be gained from harvesting a mature fish with decent sized fillets than killing a juvenile fish.

We will not achieve abundance if we continue to kill small fish. We need to make sure management changes are reducing this waste, not legitimising it. If fishing in grounds holding high numbers of small fish the solution is to either move on or use appropriate angling techniques.

Reducing waste

Avoiding gut hooking is the priority.

If fishing for snapper recreational fishers can employ best practice techniques, including:

- Using soft baits or jigs that lip hook fish.
- When bait fishing, using large baits on large hooks, 7/0 or 8/0s.
- Using hooks with a wire appendage designed to reduce the capture and gut hooking of small fish.
- Using circle hooks.
- Fishing actively, by keeping in touch with your bait or jig to avoid gut hooking.
- Moving away from areas holding large numbers of small fish.
- Releasing fish in the water or using wet, cool surfaces when handling fish for release.
- Using new tools like release weights that quickly return fish to a comfortable depth and help avoid predators.
- Quickly killing and chilling in ice or slurry any fish being kept for eating.
- Using the FreeFishHeads.co.nz service to share unwanted heads and frames

Productivity increases as the fishery rebuilds because the average size of fish is expected to increase.

Education, encouragement and peer pressure is the preferred way to change fishing habits and culture.

What can you do?

Help us protect the future of fishing in New Zealand by getting on board with LegaSea-

1. Visit: www.legasea.co.nz
2. Sign up for our updates at www.legasea.co.nz/subscribe
3. Like us on Facebook www.facebook.com/legasea
4. Email: info@legasea.co.nz
5. Phone: 0800 LEGASEA (534 273)
6. Make a modest, regular contribution to LegaSea. www.legasea.co.nz/contribute

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LegaSea is the public face 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 provides public-friendly information about a variety of processes that are important to the sustainable management of fisheries for future generations.