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Make a decision about the fishing parks!

By Trish Rea, LegaSea Liaison

Given the conflicting messages from Wellington it is no surprise there are ongoing concerns regarding the proposed recreational fishing parks for the Marlborough Sounds and Hauraki Gulf. After five months of discussion it is still not clear what happens next, what species will be exclusively non-commercial and which ones will continue to have shared access.

We all need clarity, especially the coastal communities and small-scale artisanal fishermen operating in the Sounds and Hauraki Gulf. People are struggling with the confusion and resultant insecurity from not knowing their future.

Even more daunting is the prospect that only quota owners will be eligible for compensation if commercial fishing is forced out of the proposed parks. With few quota owners and even fewer jobs available in these smaller communities there are slim prospects for gainful employment or a prosperous future.

Looking after local fishers

LegaSea acknowledges the benefits of having small-scale fisheries operating close to home because much of the catch is sold locally, to a community grateful for this fresh, rich source of protein at a reasonable price.

A broader issue is the vast management area applying to commercial mullet and flounder fishing. In the north this area extends from northern Taranaki out west to Cape Runaway on East Cape. Having such a large area enables fishing effort to shift to areas of high abundance. When the fishery is depleted these fishers move on to the next harbour or bay, only returning when the fishery rebuilds thereby repeating the cycle of depletion.

This issue was canvassed in our March submission. We said, in part:

“The submitter’s representatives would like to discuss management options for these species [flounder and mullet] with commercial and customary fishers to see if there is a way of preserving the livelihood of local fishers but preventing an influx of fishing effort (as soon as catch rates improve) by any fisher with FLA1 [flatfish] or GMU1 [mullet] annual catch entitlement (ACE).”

Other reviews

Currently the Ministry is looking at what changes are required to the way the quota system operates, including how it responds to local issues. The plight of local artisanal fishers in the Marlborough Sounds and Hauraki Gulf will need to be addressed in this review, with particular regard given to the costs and benefits of any changes for smaller communities.

Moreover, the Hauraki Gulf Sea Change spatial plan has been under discussion for three years, and another process is underway in the Sounds. These planning groups have their own views on conservation and fisheries management that will need to be incorporated into future decisions.

The government cannot expect to throw artisanal fishers under the proverbial bus while compensating large quota owners who may or may not fish in the proposed parks.

From LegaSea's perspective taxpayer's money would be better spent on restoring inshore fisheries to abundant levels so people can provide for their own social, economic and cultural wellbeing.

Take action

It's easy to stand up for more abundant fisheries. Sign up to be a LegaSea Legend at www.legasea.co.nz/legend.

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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.