



Motivation for marine protection reforms

Speculation about new legislation for marine reserves has been rife for years. Earlier attempts stalled against a wall of opposition. The latest Marine Protected Areas proposals are fraught because they include two recreational fishing parks in amongst marine reserves, species sanctuaries and seabed reserves, all aimed at biodiversity protection.

First things first. The Government needs to clarify its objective, aside from fulfilling a pre-election promise to establish a recreational fishing park in the Hauraki Gulf and Marlborough Sounds.

A network of reserves

The proposed legislation will support the creation of a representative network of marine reserves out to the 12-mile limit, closing sizeable chunks of the sea to all fishing. The aim is protect biodiversity, but this will displace fishing effort and catch into neighbouring areas with potentially disastrous consequences for abundance and diversity in those areas.

A solution

LegaSea would prefer a near-shore zone up and down the coast established under the Fisheries Act, with consistent standards and controls on fishing designed to increase fish abundance and productivity. Marine reserves could be established within this coastal zone, if they have local community support.

If complete biodiversity protection is the goal then a marine reserve would need to be huge e.g. The Kermadec Sanctuary, otherwise biodiversity loss is best addressed by increasing abundance across all inshore species.

Fishing parks

The proposed recreational fishing parks will be ineffective if commercial fishing is permitted, current commercial catch levels are retained, and if compensation is given legislative support. No liability for compensation exists so why would the Government volunteer it and lock in that liability, in perpetuity?

Fishing giant, Sanford, has been vocal in their support for recreational fishers to report their daily catch in the Hauraki Gulf. Environment Minister Nick Smith has since ruled out mandatory self-reporting as a way of managing fish stocks.

It is incomprehensible why people who know better continue to ignore the world-class methodology now used by NIWA to estimate recreational harvest in New Zealand. Turning a blind eye will not make it go away, it merely raises questions as to their motivation.

Corporate chiefs have often highlighted the benefits, including higher profits, of gaining Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification for snapper stocks. But stocks can only be certified if there are tight management controls on recreational fishing. This marine protection debate may not be about biodiversity after all; it has been used as a vehicle to lobby for greater controls on recreational fishing.

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