

LegaSea Update

New Zealand Fishing World, February 2016



Restoring fisheries is hard work

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 New Zealand Angling and Casting Association, supported by LegaSea and New Zealand Sport Fishing Council, seeking to achieve more fish in the water.

After all the talk, it is patently obvious that the only solution to restore abundance is to kill fewer fish. How that reduction is achieved is the big question and topic of debate.

One of the hurdles is the lack of constraint on commercial fishing effort in a mixed finfish fishery.

Despite all efforts the annual catch limits for some species, such as flounders, john dory and trumpeter have never been reached. Gurnard falls into this category too, with the exception of one year (2009-10).

In this mixed finfish fishery there are a range of vessels, from local to large, targeting multiple species. When the quota for one species is caught attention merely turns to another species that is unconstrained, meaning trawling continues no matter what impact that effort is having on the marine environment or the juvenile populations of inshore fish.

These problems are not unique to Hawkes Bay, but it is an indicator that our fisheries management system is not responsive to local concerns.

On the flip side recreational fishers can make few reductions as their catches continue 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 LegaSea Hawkes Bay is promoting a policy, developed in 2013, aimed at rebuilding 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 inshore species in the Bay.

After many years of lobbying, effort and commitment 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. www.facebook.com - Building LegaSea Hawkes Bay.

Hot Tip

Seabirds are nature's fish finders providing fishers with a good indicator of the action hotspots. 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.

ENDS



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.

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