



An alternative to recreational fishing parks

Recreational fishing parks in the Hauraki Gulf and Marlborough Sounds have become hot topics due to the release of a government Marine Protected Areas Act discussion document.

The document drew a variety of responses to the proposed four types of protected areas:

- recreational fishing parks
- marine reserves
- seabed reserves
- species-specific sanctuaries.

The New Zealand Sport Fishing Council team worked through the documents and submitted a response by the March 11th deadline. LegaSea kept people informed via our online channels. We expect further opportunity for input later this year.

Sustaining fish populations

It was important for us to weigh up the costs and benefits of the proposals to determine if there were any conservation gains, and if it was likely that recreational fishing would improve.

On the one hand this process signals the failure of successive fisheries Ministers and Ministries to sustain fish populations at levels that provide for public use and expectations. This responsibility is now being passed onto other bureaucracies and this change is a major concern for recreational fishers because our fishing interests are protected by the Fisheries Act 1996.

It is also odd that a recreational fishing park is considered among measures for marine protected areas and the more you think about it, the more it seems to be about following up on a hasty 2014 election promise than delivering meaningful benefits to recreational fishers.

Purpose of a park

The park's purpose is described as being, "to enhance the enjoyment and value of recreational fishing in high-demand areas by reducing the impact of commercial fishing and enabling recreational fishers to take more responsibility for the effects of their activities in these areas and the sustainability of the fishery".

The Minister has a suite of tools in the Fisheries Act that could be applied to reduce

the impacts of commercial fishing; some are rarely used due to the influence that commercial fishers wield in the realms of science and management.

Trawling and Danish seining are already banned from the inner Hauraki Gulf and there is limited bulk harvesting in the Marlborough Sounds.

People in both these areas are concerned that ongoing commercial scallop dredging is reducing biodiversity by damaging the seabed and destroying critical juvenile habitat for vulnerable species, especially for blue cod in the Sounds.

Removing a few small-scale commercial fishers from within the proposed parks is unlikely to translate into more successful recreational fishing.

Taking responsibility

Recreational anglers in the snapper and blue cod fisheries have strived for many years to implement effective and voluntary measures to sustain fish populations. Despite this, recreational fishing is portrayed as a growing activity, increasing tension between sectors and putting pressure on inshore stocks and sustainability.

In reality, NIWA boat ramp surveys in the Hauraki Gulf show participation in recreational fishing has decreased and snapper catch has reduced by more than 50% since 2011-12.

If this government is serious about restoring inshore abundance and marine diversity action is required across the natural range of fisheries. Small pockets of parks and reserves are not the whole answer.

Legasea is promoting a pragmatic solution. A package of measures including:

- establishing an inshore zone with limited commercial fishing
- managing to higher environmental standards, and
- lowering commercial catch levels

This holistic approach is designed to increase fish abundance, improve catchability and provide for the public's expectations, and wellbeing.

Fishing Responsibly

Catching seabirds can be a hazard especially when strayline fishing. Most seabirds fish within six metres of the surface. If seabirds are present and are at risk of getting hooked add weight to your line so the bait sinks quickly. 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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