

## **LegaSea Update**

**New Zealand Fishing World, May/June 2015 edition**



### **Dumping fish is unacceptable**

Fish dumping and unnecessary wastage in our fisheries has to stop, and many of you have the handiest tool to stop it – your cellphone camera.

Several trawlermen recently revealed that dumping happens on every trawl. One skipper estimates 10-15 bins of undersized fish were thrown back dead after every trawl. The crew is required by law to discard undersized fish, but damaged or unmarketable fish get the flick as well.

Most of this wastage goes unseen because it happens over the horizon or after dark. Sometimes these activities have been witnessed during daylight and skippers have taken evasive action to stop dumping fish when recreational fishers start filming their actions.

In February Kerren Packer, an experienced fisherman, found a trail of dead gurnard floating off the Manukau Harbour, on the North Island's west coast. He was so concerned about his find that he stopped fishing and used his cellphone to film the floating fish while giving a commentary. This footage went viral on the internet and created a media work-up.

The response from the Ministry for Primary Industries was underwhelming.

Dave Turner, Director Fisheries Management, explained the dumping as "accidental loss" and confirmed the skipper had filled out the necessary forms. Not just for this incident, but for nine other events over the past three years. This settled the matter for the Ministry.

How can this be acceptable? The very existence of "accidental loss" paperwork signals the prevalence of dumping and the Ministry's sanction as long as all legal sized fish are counted against quota.

This is not good enough. Better information on what happens at sea is required.

In 2013 the Minister required increased coverage on inshore trawlers by observers and cameras. For almost a year commercial fishers on the northeast coast have been self-reporting the weight of undersized snapper discards from every trawl. No results have been released yet.

Our fisheries are a public resource that is there for us to enjoy and protect for future

generations. How can we nurture this resource when every day trawl nets are being dragged for hours across the seafloor?

Trawling within 100m depth has the inevitable consequence of catching small fish. These fish need protection, not a slow death-trip to the codend before being dumped over the side.

Unwanted species, unmarketable or uneconomic fish are also slipped over the gunnels without even the slightest of blinks.

### **Innovative solutions**

LegaSea has considered the issues of trawl damage and fish dumping and developed policy to address these issues. [www.legasea.co.nz/faqs-management.php](http://www.legasea.co.nz/faqs-management.php)

No trawling within the 100m contour resolves most of the issues, and would go a long way to enabling the inshore marine ecosystem to rebuild.

Protecting inshore benthic (seabed) communities and habitats from damaging bottom contact fishing methods is a priority, as this is where snapper fry and other small fish live, grow and hide from larger predators.

Another solution is to develop fishing gear standards that limit the catch of undersized fish. These standards need to apply to trawl and Danish seining.

If correctly applied we expect the standards will achieve the following outcomes:

- A reduction in the -
  - at-sea capture of juvenile fish
  - mortality of small fish
  - level of unintended bycatch
- A rehabilitation of nursery grounds
- An increase in yield per recruit i.e. bigger fish; and
- Increased diversity and abundance in the marine ecosystem.

There are several promising innovations underway. Two trawlermen from the Hawke Bay have taken it upon themselves to develop ways to reduce juvenile mortality.

Rick Burch on the Nancy Glen II has been trialing a square mesh net and light trawl gear to replace the diamond mesh that has been used to devastating effect on our coastline for more than 100 years. Preliminary results are positive, with fewer juveniles being caught, less bottom contact and increased fuel savings.

Karl Warr has been developing a sorting cage designed to enable small fish to escape before getting squashed in the net's codend.

LegaSea keenly awaits updated results from both trials.

## 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 the sustainable management of fisheries for future generations.

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