



Dumping and wastage must stop

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

Several trawlermen have 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 are dumped as well.

Most of this wastage goes unseen because it happens over the horizon or after dark. During daylight skippers often taken evasive action and stop dumping fish when recreational fishers start filming their actions.

In February experienced fisherman Kerren Packer found a trail of dead gurnard floating off the Manukau Harbour, on the northwest coast. He was so concerned about the wastage he used his cellphone to video the scene. 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, described the incident 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 at-sea information 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 national and natural resource, there for us to enjoy and protect for future generations. We cannot nurture this resource if trawl nets are being dragged, for hours, across the seafloor every day.

Trawling within 100m depth has the inevitable consequence of catching small fish, and unwanted species, unmarketable or uneconomic fish are slipped over the gunnels without even the slightest of blinks.

Innovative solutions

LegaSea has developed policy to address trawl damage and fish dumping issues. Ban trawling within 100m depth contour and rebuild inshore ecosystems.
www.legasea.co.nz/faqs-management.php

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.

ENDS

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LegaSea is the public face 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 provides public-friendly information about a variety of processes that are important to the sustainable management of fisheries for future generations.