



1.

Future management of Snapper 1

In November 2013 various groups were invited to participate in a Snapper 1 Strategy Group to formulate a plan for the future management of northern snapper. Snapper 1 extends down the east coast, from North Cape to the eastern Bay of Plenty.

The Strategy Group is comprised of three people from each sector, commercial, customary and recreational. The New Zealand Sport Fishing Council-LegaSea team has three representatives contributing to the meetings, although only two are permitted to attend each meeting. One NZ Recreational Fishing Council representative attends these meetings.

The Group has met on 16 occasions and a draft report to the Minister is underway. To be accepted as participants we had to agree not to publicise meeting discussions, so reporting on progress is limited.

These meetings have been helpful for our team as we develop a suite of documents and consolidate our thinking on a range of matters related to snapper and other species.

Not only that, lessons learnt and concepts developed during this snapper process could be applied to the management of other important species and ecosystems around our coastline.

Rebuilding inshore ecosystems

In our view it is not just snapper stocks but most inshore habitats in Area 1 that have become degraded and damaged by land and extractive use. Our goal must be to rebuild snapper as part of restoring abundance, diversity and resilience to the whole inshore ecosystem.

While it is easy to focus on snapper, there are many other species that exist alongside and are dependent, or associated, with snapper in the marine environment. These species and seabed (benthic) communities need protection and restoration too.

In alignment with our policy for Area 1, our team has been advocating that these associated and dependent species need to be reviewed so catch limits are reset to realistic levels; limits that recognise both the ecosystem importance of these species and the lack of information available about them.

For example, we have lots of data about snapper, but poor understanding of the interactions between snapper, at its various life stages, and other species in the same environment.

In reality, we have very little knowledge about most stocks, even for popular species like gurnard, john dory and scallops.

It is a legal requirement that where information is inadequate or uncertain decision makers must be cautious.

Protecting spawning habitats

Another consideration that is easily ignored, but is highlighted by our team is the need to identify, protect, and where necessary restore nursery and juvenile habitats.

The critical nature of particular habitat types as nursery areas, and the importance of the plants and animals that grow out of the seabed to provide food and shelter are becoming better known.

If there is inadequate habitat available it can create "bottlenecks" in the snapper life cycle, which will eventually reduce productivity and stock size.

Also, for years there has been debate around whether aggregations of fish gathering to spawn ought to be protected. This is a key concern for Maori. From a science perspective fishing spawning aggregations is considered benign, aside from the effects on the extracted fish; a dead fish is a dead fish and it does not matter when or where it is caught.

Ecologists are now questioning the wider consequences of allowing this targeted fishing on aggregations of large, old fish, which are less vulnerable when dispersed (during other seasons).

These mature fish are disproportionately important to spawning and settlement success, and their offspring are successful.

While the science is uncertain the Snapper 1 Strategic Plan needs to consider the costs and benefits of protecting spawning aggregations from all forms (commercial and recreational) of targeted fishing. This will not be a primary tool for rebuilding, but may offer a mechanism for reducing the exploitation rate of older fish.

Juvenile habitat protection

It is widely accepted that there has been a massive loss of hard shell bottom throughout the waters of Area 1, especially in waters less than 100 metres deep.

Repeated disruption from bottom contact fishing methods, such as trawling, alters the benthic structure, from hard shell bottom to mud. The loss of benthic structure

and communities associated with these hard bottoms is believed to have imposed a large cost on productivity.

As our team studies options for rebuilding inshore fish stocks the protection and enhancement of important nursery habitats becomes even more obvious and essential.

2.

Hauraki Gulf Spatial plan

For seven months our NZ Sport Fishing Council representatives were involved in the Hauraki Gulf Sea Change marine spatial planning process, in the Fishstocks and Biodiversity Roundtables. A Working Group is now developing the marine spatial plan, due out in July. Originally it was to be a draft plan distributed for public consultation. We now understand it will be a final document, as sent to Government Ministers.

Any outcomes from the plan will need to be implemented by the agency responsible, that is fisheries issues will need to be addressed by the Ministry for Primary Industries. All indicators point to more marine protection and marine reserves, and less fishing around the inner Gulf.

The fixed position of interest groups in the Roundtables was unhelpful in finding novel ways to improve the ecology of the Hauraki Gulf.

The core issues of declining water quality, degrading estuarine habitats, large-scale destruction of benthic habitat essential for carrying large numbers of juveniles, and excessive fishing pressure were largely overwhelmed by those that consider marine reserves a silver bullet to address the stress on the Gulf.

3.

Quick action required in Marlborough

Management of Blue cod in the Marlborough Sounds is being reviewed. If you have an interest in the future management of this prized fishery please share your feedback with officials by the 15th June deadline. Submissions can be sent to MSbluecod@mpi.govt.nz.

Blue cod in the Sounds are legendary, but due to a number of factors this fishery has been a source of grief for our Marlborough communities.

The Ministry for Primary Industries has recently worked with a multi-sector group to develop a range of options for the future management of Blue cod within the Sounds and around the top of the South Island. A public consultation document is expected in May.

LegaSea encourages you to make a submission so you and future generations can continue to enjoy this iconic fishery.

Officials will review all submissions made by 15 June and make recommendations to the Minister, Nathan Guy, on what regulations ought to apply when the new Blue cod season opens on 20 December 2015.

This is your first opportunity in four years to have a say. Please make the most of this process so Nathan Guy can take your views into account and an acceptable outcome is achieved.

Addressing local concerns

Groups representing more than 50,000 people have now signed up to support a raft of measures that ought to apply to recreational fishing of Blue cod in the Marlborough Sounds.

These groups include the Marlborough Recreational Fishers Association, the Coalition of the Combined Clubs of Wellington, the New Zealand Angling and Casting Association and the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council.

LegaSea is supporting this coalition's work as their recommendations:

- Offer sensible, durable rules
- Align with LegaSea Principles
- Recognise the public's desire to contribute to improved management
- Encourage higher levels of compliance
- Will help to reduce conflict.

A helpful summary, the Group's recommendations and background information are available online at <http://www.legasea.co.nz/bluecod.php>.

4.

What can you do?

Help us protect the future of fishing in New Zealand by getting on board with LegaSea-

1. Visit www.legasea.co.nz
2. Sign up for our updates at www.legasea.co.nz/subscribe
3. Become a LegaSea Legend by making a regular \$10 per month contribution. www.legasea.co.nz/legend
4. Check Facebook www.facebook.com/legasea
5. Email: info@legasea.co.nz
6. Phone 0800 LEGASEA (534 273)

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.