



1.

Opportunity for Minister to win public support

Blue cod is an iconic Marlborough Sounds fishery so any mention of management changes evokes a raft of claims and counter-claims. LegaSea is pleased to have recently worked on a submission with four other national or local groups to promote an abundant fishery and improvements to regulations applying to both commercial and recreational blue cod fishing.

A combined response to proposed regulation changes was compiled by LegaSea, the Coalition of the Combined Clubs of Wellington, the Marlborough Recreational Fishers Association, the New Zealand Angling and Casting Association and the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council team. This joint effort was submitted on 30 June 2015.

This process has been an important milestone on two fronts: the cooperation achieved by these recreational groups working together on the joint submission, and because it has highlighted how fisheries managers can improve their communications with the public.

A lack of compliance in the Sounds has been attributed to the complex management regime, the perceived inequity in having different rules for recreational and commercial fishing, and the 'slot' rule that has resulted in additional mortality to the blue cod population.

Eleven recommendations were made in the joint submission, including the need to implement consistent rules over the entire top of the South Island, and any no-take zones (or times) to apply to both recreational and commercial fishing.

This is a highly prized fishery. Many years of commercial extraction and a closure to recreational fishing in 2008-11 demonstrate the need for a dependable stock assessment. Research of critical habitat and knowledge on spawning areas is urgently needed to underpin positive management decisions in favour of abundance.

Nathan Guy, the Minister for Primary Industries, is urged to take a precautionary approach when managing the blue cod stock due to a lack of reliable data.

The Ministry will consider all submissions and Minister Guy will make a decision before the recreational blue cod season reopens on 20 December.

Recommendations

Specific recommendations and comments from the submission include the following:

- Same rules to apply in Challenger East (Tasman) and the Marlborough Sounds.
- Abolish the slot rule and set a minimum legal size of 33cm
- Set the recreational daily bag limit at 3 per person, per day
- The recreational accumulation limit is 2 daily bag limits
- Abolish the transit rule
- Amend the finfish no-take zone around Maud Island and apply it to recreational and commercial fishing
- Amend the proposed Inner and Outer Sounds closure area boundaries
- Support fine scale reporting of commercial catch to improve management
- Apply standards that are consistent with international best practice ecosystem based management
- Support a targeted education campaign to improve fish handling techniques, reduce mortality of released fish and conserve fish for future generations.

Fishers in the Marlborough Sounds are increasingly aware of the need for precautionary management to enhance both the blue cod stock and the productivity of the surrounding marine ecosystem.

Let's hope the joint submission has convinced the Minister he can apply caution and win back the support of the local community. www.legasea.co.nz/bluecod.php

2.

Reducing fishing waste

Catching and handling large numbers of small fish will inevitably lead to some release mortality and wastage. Commercial and recreational fishers need to do more to avoid catching and killing small fish before they reach their prime.

Selective fishing methods, which harvest mature fish with decent sized fillets, allow stocks to rebuild and are ultimately much more productive. This means better quality fish and fishing success in the future.

The best strategy for recreational fishers is to take steps to reduce our chances of gut hooking fish. Gut hooked fish have very poor survival rates, between 5% and 15% in most species.

In comparison, the survival rate for released, lip hooked fish is high. A pilot study in the Hauraki Gulf found the survival rate of lip hooked snapper that had the hook removed immediately was around 90-95%, for fish caught in depths between 14 and 20 metres.

Some fish, when brought up from deep, have their stomach protruding out of their mouth. An Australian study tested post-release survival rates of line-caught snapper in this condition. Fish tested were from depth between 37 and 180 metres. Researchers used a 16-gauge hypodermic needle to release pressure from the swim bladder (side venting) or to pierce the protruding stomach before releasing the fish. A high survival rate of 88% was observed for these fish.

If fishing for snapper recreational fishers can employ the LegaSea Fish Handling Guide (under development). It incorporates some best practice techniques, including the following:

- #1 Avoid catching small fish
- Move away from areas holding large numbers of small fish
- Use soft baits or jigs that tend to target larger fish, with a high proportion lip hooked
- When bait fishing use big baits on large hooks, 7/0 or 8/0s
- Use hooks with a wire appendage designed to reduce the capture and gut hooking of small fish
- Use circle hooks
- Fish actively, by keeping in touch with your bait or jig to avoid gut hooking
- If planning to release fish, keep angling time to a minimum
- Release fish in the water to reduce air time and stress on the fish
- If a fish must be removed from the water prior to release use a rubber net and place the fish on a wet, cool surface. Rubber nets will hold the fish with minimal damage to their eyes and skin
- Learn about and utilise new tools that quickly return fish to a comfortable depth and help avoid predators. Useful tools are release weights and weighted fish grips
- Any fish being kept for eating must be quickly killed and chilled in ice or slurry
- Use the www.FreeFishHeads.co.nz service to share unwanted heads and frames.

Fishing can be hard at times, especially when there seems to be no large fish around. As the fishery rebuilds the number of large fish available is expected to increase.

Changing the target species with the seasons can keep your fishing interesting and successful.

It will take time, effort and education to encourage recreational fishers to change their fishing habits and culture, to ensure there is a better fishing future.

LegaSea encourages all anglers to reduce the number of small fish caught and ensure a high survival rate for released fish. www.legasea.co.nz/faqs-management.php

3.

Kingfish monitoring

Yellowtail kingfish are one of the premier sports fish in New Zealand. The number of recreational fishers targeting yellowtail has increased in the last five years. Most kingfish are caught by rod and line from boats, but land-based and spearfishing methods also feature.

While many of the fish caught are released, the large size of the fish kept means that total harvest is significant.

In 2011-12 it was estimated that 64,700 yellowtail were kept by recreational fishers in New Zealand, for a total weight of 662 tonnes ($\pm 11\%$).

This puts kingfish at number three in the national recreational harvest by weight, for all species in the survey, behind snapper and kahawai. The 662 tonnes is much more than the national commercial catch of 235 tonnes for 2011-12.

This year recreational charter and private fishers around the upper North Island are helping to monitor the status of kingfish stocks. This Government funded project will provide a snapshot of the size and age of kingfish in the recreational catch. This target fishery catches a more representative sample of the kingfish population when compared to catch taken by commercial fishing methods.

Annual growth rings in thin slices of the otolith (balance or ear bone) are used to age the kingfish and estimate an exploitation rate for each area. This will be compared to the age data collected in 2010 during a similar project.

For the past five years the June Bay of Islands International Yellowtail Tournament has provided a valuable opportunity to measure a large number of fish at the same time every year. This helps monitor what is happening with the population in the years between ageing projects. This project is not Government funded. Recreational fishers fund the project through the support of the Bay of Islands Swordfish Club, New Zealand Sport Fishing Council and LegaSea.

It is encouraging the data are showing strong recruitment from successful spawning events nine or 10 years ago. This also coincides with the time that the Total Allowable Commercial Catch was reduced and the minimum size increased. It appears likely that these management changes have been successful.

Huge schools of juvenile kingfish (25 – 35 cm in length) were seen offshore in 2013 and we have received numerous, similar reports from throughout the northeast coast. If these fish settle into the coastal population it is likely that excellent kingfish fishing will continue for many years.

www.legasea.co.nz/research.php

Stand up

Become a LegaSea Legend by making a regular \$10 per month contribution.
www.legasea.co.nz/legend

Call 0800 LEGASEA (534 273)

Email us info@legasea.co.nz

Subscribe at www.legasea.co.nz

Read more at www.facebook.com/legasea



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.