



**1.**

**Restoring fisheries requires better information**

In 2014 the National Research Bureau produced a 140-page report for the Ministry for Primary Industries detailing the landed catch of recreational fishers by area, species and even down to the number of times we came home with zero, one, two or more of the same species.

Thanks to the good work of NRB, the Ministry, NIWA and Blue Water Marine Research we now have a better understanding of recreational harvest nationwide and in particular the popular Hauraki Gulf.

Science providers have told us they have better data on recreational harvest than any other sector because there is uncertainty around the levels of customary harvest, commercial discards and the amount of poaching.

Having such comprehensive data on recreational catch is good news, but if we want to rebuild our fisheries we need to go one step further and find out total mortality. That is, we need to know both landed catch and how many fish are killed in the process of fishing.

If too many fish are dying through wastage, poor practices or gear failure then measures to reduce that mortality need to be implemented.

In 1995 NIWA did a pilot study and found the additional mortality associated with fish caught and released by recreational fishers was between 3.6 to 7.5% of the landed catch.

Fast forward to 2015 and we are now fishing to a 30cm minimum size limit in a fishery where Ministry estimate that undersized snapper make up 40-50% of the total population.

With no new initiatives from Ministry to guide recreational fishing practices, we can assume that mortality associated with recreational fishing, especially in the inner Hauraki Gulf and Waitemata Harbour, has increased since the minimum size change.

Given the 25cm minimum size limit for commercially caught snapper there are also concerns about the wastage due to trawling and Danish seining in a fish stock that has such a high proportion of undersized fish. After all, it seems logical that more fish are killed when using bulk harvesting methods compared to rod and reel fishing.

An allowance of 10% of the commercial catch limit is usually made to cover fishing related mortality in a particular fishery such as Snapper 1.

Is that allowance enough?

Commercial fishers and MPI observers have been collecting new information on snapper since 2013. For there to be real transparency in management the Ministry needs to agree to release the raw data to allow some detailed analysis.

### **Information being withheld**

Our team has been asking Ministry for specific mortality information since 2014. Several Official Information Act requests have now been submitted to try and get that data.

In 2013 our team submitted an official request for a 1990s report detailing juvenile snapper mortality in Snapper 1, on the northeast coast of the North Island. Recreational fishing advocates first asked for that report in 1994. After several more recent requests, and delivery of other documents, we still wonder why that report was buried and now "can't be found".

### **Transparency required to rebuild fisheries**

If we are to restore abundance in our precious inshore fisheries we need to have more transparency in our decision making, science and monitoring processes.

We also need to acknowledge that the measurement of recreational catch is well known.

All resources now need to be focused on both supporting the 2016-17 repeat survey of recreational catch so we can validate the 2014 report. Then we need to acknowledge and address the fishing induced mortality of both target and non-target species.

The New Zealand Sport Fishing Council fisheries team acknowledges the potential wastage associated with the increased 30cm snapper minimum size limit and wants to assist recreational fishers. LegaSea has been tasked with developing educational material to address wastage and how we, as recreational fishers, can fish smarter. Further details will be advised in future updates.

## **2.**

### **Should we stop fishing during spawning season?**

A ban on snapper fishing during spawning season is often promoted as a way of allowing more fish to spawn, providing more eggs in the water and more fish in the future. While it seems like the right thing to do there is no agreed view from the

experts on whether this strategy would increase fish numbers or what months a ban should apply given that spawning can extend from October to March.

Before any change the objective for implementing a closure needs to be clear. Is the objective to reduce fishing effort just during spawning? Or is there concern about the year-round fishing effort or total catch? Is the concern more about commercial methods?

Other questions need to be addressed too, including would the closure apply to both commercial and recreational fishing? Where could you fish in the Hauraki Gulf during spring and avoid snapper? Would we need to close the whole Gulf to all fishing? Would pressure go on more vulnerable species such as trevally and kingfish?

Current science is inconclusive, but there is evidence to support a precautionary approach for some species with concentrated spawning aggregations (schools). Precautionary measures include leaving spawning aggregations to do their thing without fishing disturbance.

At the very least, removing bottom contact fishing methods such as trawling from inshore waters to protect the habitat for the early, critical life stages of snapper is long overdue and fits with LegaSea's Principle #2 - Stop senseless waste.

Given the lack of consensus from the experts the following information has been extracted from the Ministry's annual Plenary report:

"Fishing within aggregations of spawning fish may have the potential to disrupt spawning behaviour and, for some fishing methods or species, may lead to reduced spawning success. No research has been conducted on disruption of snapper spawning, but aggregations of spawning snapper often receive high commercial and recreational fishing effort.

"Areas likely to be important for snapper spawning include the Hauraki Gulf (Cradock Channel, Coromandel Harbour to the Firth of Thames, and between the Noises, Tiritiri Matangi and Kawau Islands, Rangaunu and Doubtless Bay, the Bay of Islands, eastern Bay of Plenty, and the coastal areas adjacent to the harbour mouths on the west coast such as the Manukau and Kaipara Harbours."

During the Sea Change Hauraki Gulf spatial planning process a spawning closure in the inner Gulf was discussed as a potential source of getting public support for the Plan. The proposal was dropped in favour of other ideas.

Quite clearly, any closure would need to apply to both commercial and recreational fishing and in the absence of any solid data it is most unlikely the politicians will stretch their thin popularity stakes for the sake of a few snapper.

### 3.

#### **What's Fishing Worth campaign**

Any day now we are expecting preliminary results from the New Zealand Marine Research Foundation's project to measure the value of recreational fishing in New Zealand.

It's exciting to think that after years of debate, trials and some failures we are so close to revealing the truth around our recreational fishing industry and what we contribute to the nation's economy through taxes, growth and jobs.

If overseas studies are anything to go on, we will be pleasantly surprised at how much a recreationally caught fish is worth, and ultimately what having more abundant fisheries could mean for our nation.

Back here we are seeing evidence of ex-pats arriving home to settle down with their families and enjoy the lifestyle and kai moana only available in Aotearoa.

The research is in its final stages and the next job will be to take the results out wide to the public and politicians so they know how important it is to have thriving fisheries and a healthy marine environment.

Having abundant fisheries is the key to our future fishing interests and potentially our nation's next growth spurt, as tourism interest in fishing and the outdoors grows.

To achieve success we need your support. If you haven't already donated, or if you're feeling a bit of pre-Xmas generosity, please donate again at [www.whatsfishingworth.co.nz](http://www.whatsfishingworth.co.nz).

All donations are tax deductible because the New Zealand Marine Research Foundation is a registered charitable organisation.

#### **Hot Tip**

If you see penguins or birds resting on the water go to leeward of the birds as they always fly off the water into the wind. Doing this simple manoeuvre will prevent many broken bones and dead birds.



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.