



1.

Are recreational fishing parks the answer?

A document discussing four types of Marine Protected Areas, including recreational fishing parks, has been released for consultation. This consultation process is a joint effort between the Ministers for Primary Industries, Conservation and Environment. Deadline for submission is March 11th, 2016.

The New Zealand Sport Fishing Council team is working through the discussion document and LegaSea will keep you informed of progress via our online channels. It is important we weigh up the costs and benefits of the proposals and double-check any recreational rule changes that may accompany the establishment of recreational fishing parks.

At first glance this process signals the failure of successive fisheries Ministers and Ministries to sustain fish populations at levels that provide for public use and expectations. This responsibility is now being passed onto other government bureaucracies and this change is a major concern for recreational fishers because our environmental and fishing interests are protected by the Fisheries Act 1996.

The inclusion of two specific proposals for recreational fishing parks in the Hauraki Gulf and Marlborough Sounds, before the bill has been drafted or legislation passed, is more about following up on a hasty election promise than good process.

The document describes the purpose for a recreational fishing park as being, “to enhance the enjoyment and value of recreational fishing in high-demand areas by reducing the impact of commercial fishing and enabling recreational fishers to take more responsibility for the effects of their activities in these areas and the sustainability of the fishery”.

Reducing impacts of commercial fishing

When making sustainability decisions the Minister is already obliged to consider the effects of fishing on the environment, people’s wellbeing and the needs of future generations.

The Minister has a suite of tools in the Fisheries Act that could be applied to reduce the impacts of commercial fishing; some are rarely used due to the influence that commercial fishers wield in the realms of science and management.

Several commercial fishing methods are more damaging to the environment than others. Trawling and Danish seining are already banned from the inner Hauraki Gulf and there is not a lot of bulk harvesting in the Marlborough Sounds.

Removing a few small-scale commercial fishers from within the proposed parks is unlikely to translate into more successful recreational fishing.

Non-commercial species

Recreational fishers target snapper, flatfish, kahawai, john dory, gurnard, tarakihi, trevally and scallops within the proposed Hauraki Gulf park area. It is proposed these species, excluding scallops, would be classed as non-commercial in the park.

There is no mention of classing other important species such as crayfish and kingfish as non-commercial yet these are two species that generate high economic activity when compared to the levels of recreational catch. If anything, these ought to be considered for non-commercial status too but have probably been excluded because any change would attract substantial compensation demands.

For the Marlborough Sounds, the document lists 12 finfish species, their estimated commercial catch within the proposed park, and notes that commercial fishers could continue to harvest paua, scallops and crayfish. Locals are most concerned that ongoing commercial scallop dredging is causing undue damage to critical juvenile habitat.

Taking responsibility

Recreational fishing is portrayed as a growing activity increasing pressure on inshore fish stocks and tension between sectors, and sustainability. In reality, NIWA boat ramp surveys in the Hauraki Gulf show recreational fishing effort has decreased and snapper catch has reduced by more than 50% since 2011-12.

Also, there is ample evidence that fishers in the snapper and blue cod fisheries have strived for many years to implement effective and voluntary measures to sustain fish populations.

If this government is serious about sustainability then the Minister, Nathan Guy, needs to fulfil his obligations and restore abundance across the whole stock.

We propose establishing an inshore zone with limited commercial fishing, managing to higher environmental standards and lowering commercial catch levels as the most effective package of measures to increase fish abundance, improve catchability and provide for the public's expectations, health and wellbeing.

2.

Are recreational fishing parks affordable?

A recreational fishing park has been proposed for both the Hauraki Gulf and Marlborough Sounds. It is important to examine this proposition to test if it is affordable and if it sets a precedent for the future.

The Government has signaled it has around \$20 million to pay compensation claims from displaced commercial fishing interests.

While the principles underpinning compensation have yet to be defined or discussed, there is a risk that the recreational fishing parks will need to be kept small and limited to a few, selected species simply to reduce compensation claims.

In the Hauraki Gulf the area being proposed for a park makes only a marginal change to industrial fishing (trawl and seine), and impacts mostly a handful of small-scale fishers dependent on large companies for quota.

In the Marlborough Sounds the proposed park matches the Blue Cod Management Area.

The main reason for limiting the park size to one that makes almost no difference to existing commercial fishing is the spectre of compensation – the government is wary of the price it may have to pay commercial interests to leave the park.

Alarm bells are immediately set off if the costs of establishing recreational fishing parks under the new Marine Protected Areas legislation means they can only ever be established in small areas seldom used for commercial fishing. It seems to lock in a policy whereby no further parks will ever be affordable, unless they are in areas of limited commercial interest, or affect few species as possible.

An expensive proposal

Offering compensation as a sweetener to successfully establish a recreational fishing park in the Hauraki Gulf and Marlborough Sounds might be politically expedient, but we need to think about other, less populated regions.

A recreational fishing park may never be affordable for Northland, the Bay of Plenty and Hawkes Bay because future governments may not be willing to use taxpayer funds to satisfy compensation demands from commercial fishers.

Aside from that risk, consideration also needs to be given to the effect of displacing effort into surrounding waters. For example, limiting commercial fishing in the Hauraki Gulf means effort is likely to move into waters off the Bay of Plenty, east and west Northland.

Given our understanding of current stock levels and limited fish movement between these areas it is unrealistic to think that the areas where recreational fishing is already poor could cope with an increase in commercial harvesting.

Clearly we need to stop and consider the costs, benefits and long-term effects associated with recreational fishing parks because the ultimate price may be too high.

3.

Is compensation realistic?

Threats of compensation claims have been an effective tool used by commercial fishing interests, against successive Ministers and Ministries, to maintain current Total Allowable Commercial Catches (TACCs). Compensation has again become a hot topic, this time in relation to establishing recreational fishing parks, but is compensation a realistic demand?

In our view paying compensation is neither obligatory nor sensible.

It is proposed to compensate quota owners when the impact of a park is deemed to be “materially significant”.

Reference is made to compensation available to commercial fishers displaced by marine farming activities. It is unclear how much, if any, compensation has been paid historically to these affected parties but it will be a question we raise with the Ministry over the next few weeks.

There are a lot of small-scale fishers that contract to quota holders. It is these people who would be most affected by a park yet they will receive no redress.

What’s more, if the quota holder is free to take exactly the same catch outside the Park then what precedent is being set?

Dishing out compensation to large quota shareholders for minimal change is a waste of taxpayer dollars, a taxpayer’s gift to the privileged.

New Zealand’s Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), its minerals and marine resources are the property of the State, and may be made available from time to time for commercial use, but cannot be gifted to others (NZ cannot buy Fiji’s EEZ).

If the Government wishes to establish recreational fishing parks, and in doing so displace or remove commercial fishing, it has the authority to do so.

If the Government decides to use our taxpayer funds to make such a transition acceptable to those being displaced then it is free to do so – but not on the basis of compensating for loss of property.

The Government is encouraged to think very carefully before establishing precedents on superficial advice, when these precedents risk preventing further changes in the use of New Zealand's inshore fishery.

LegaSea Principles

LegaSea and the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council team remain committed to restoring abundance to grow New Zealand's wealth, people's health and wellbeing by applying our 5 Principles:

1. Let's rebuild the fishery.
2. Stop senseless waste.
3. The public (NZ Inc) owns the fishery.
4. Equal size limits for all.
5. Value recreational fishing.

www.legasea.co.nz/5principles.

Hot Tip

Seabirds are nature's fish finders. Please protect them from getting tangled in fishing lines, caught on hooks and trapped in nets, because if the parent bird is harmed or killed during summer its chick will die of starvation. More info at www.legasea.co.nz/seabirds.



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.