



1.

Now we know what fishing is worth

After two years of planning and research we now know what recreational fishing is worth to the New Zealand economy. Kiwis spend a billion dollars a year on recreational fishing but the benefits don't stop at the fish on the end of the line.

This expenditure ripples through the economy generating 1.7 billion dollars in economic activity, supporting over 8000 jobs and contributing at least \$638 million to the New Zealand economy.

This research demonstrates how the economy around recreational fishing is responsible for enhancing the wellbeing of all New Zealanders.

Good news

These results must be welcome news for our decision makers and treasurers. At last, some positive news to counteract diminishing tax returns from the farming and business sectors being crushed by falling commodity prices.

Government policy makers also have something to celebrate. The recently released report: Recreational Fishing in New Zealand. A Billion Dollar Industry, provides enough evidence to support a recalibration of monetary focus - from low rent, bulk harvesting fishing practices to high value recreational uses of abundant fisheries.

For example, a fly fishing expedition targeting kahawai as part of a Lodge package must be more attractive and sustainable than wiping out entire schools to sell for a bizarre price, between \$1.30 and \$1.60 per kilo, whole frozen, no added value, no GST, to foreign shores. Add on a snorkeling trip, dolphin watching, a Maori cultural experience or local wine tour and we are getting into bonus territory of having high abundance and diversity in our marine waters.

Tourism is the fastest growing sector in the New Zealand economy. More people are arriving, they are staying longer and spending more. We need to be making the most of our opportunities to offer low impact marine recreation experiences for domestic and international visitors.

What's the hold-up?

The only handbrake is current fisheries management policy that tries to maximise catch and largely ignores environmental factors to maintain bulk exports of our fish.

Having information on the size of the recreational fishing industry and the jobs this supports will help to refocus the compass onto the best use of our marine resources. This change in policy direction will only come about if it is based on sound economics and renewable sources of income, and this latest report provides that evidence in bucket loads.

Regional benefits

Relative to spending on other forms of recreation, it's clear that people are willing to spend a lot of money on their fishing. For many fishers their boat is a major purchase, add on marina fees or a heavy duty towing vehicle and we have a convoy of money changing hands.

People also like to fish when on holiday. This activity drives money out of the main centres and into the regions, supporting much-needed jobs and businesses in coastal communities.

Last year a similar report showed that recreational fishing contributed AUS\$3.4 billion to the New South Wales economy, generating over 14,000 jobs. Australian politicians are now scrambling to maximise their voter appeal by announcing a range of projects to support recreational fishing.

One proposal is to spend \$35 million in NSW to phase out commercial netting, increase fish stocks, improve recreational fishing, boating and club facilities, and increase the numbers of recreational fishers by 25%, to one million by 2020. How good is that?

Recreational fishing is a winner on a personal, regional and national level. Adding a fishing experience to a tourist's enjoyment of New Zealand's other natural wonders, and hobbits, would be an easy sell. After all, New Zealand has been the reputed "Anglers Eldorado" since Zane Grey's book in the 1920s.

Ninety years later we need a government committed to restoring abundance and diversity so we can maximise the value of our precious marine resources.

2.

A community approach to marine protection

From a fisheries perspective it is very frustrating to watch the marine protection cum reserves debate occur without any intention to address the root causes of depletion – excessive fish catches, mobile bottom contact harvesting methods degrading habitats, and contaminants entering waterways choking nursery areas.

LegaSea supported the recent submission by the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council in response to the Government's Marine Protected Areas (MPA) Act proposals. <http://goo.gl/rEbXJf>

Highlighted in the submission is the need for a more integrated approach to marine protection, with different marine protected area categories to meet the specific environmental needs of an area, while taking into account existing and future values and uses.

We submitted that there was a risk in people interpreting the Government's objective as an intention to set aside 10% of the Territorial Sea, out to 12 nautical miles, in no-take marine reserves.

It is not clear how an arbitrary figure of 10% would work in each region, but setting aside 10 percent of coastal and marine areas would have a significant effect on all fishers.

What's more, there is a clear need to consider other categories of marine protection to enable other uses of marine waters, including non-bottom contact fishing methods such as trolling for marlin and tuna, which has minimal impact on biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Downstream effects of MPAs

Any proposal for an MPA needs a clear purpose and a risk assessment; to ensure that the downstream effects of a marine protected area does not nullify the perceived gains. Creating a domino effect with displaced fishing effort from protected areas is very real.

For example, as new no-take marine reserves are established fishing will be displaced, often into neighbouring areas, with potentially disastrous consequences for abundance, biodiversity and ecosystem services in those areas. This outcome would contravene both the UN Convention to conserve biodiversity, and the government's objective to enhance, protect and restore marine biodiversity inside and outside protected areas.

In the MPA proposals there was no mention of how displaced fishing effort will be managed. The frustration lies in the failure to acknowledge that the cumulative effect of MPAs will require catch reductions for some species, or method restrictions in certain areas.

The economic and biodiversity risks also need to be considered, as does the social impacts of serving one community's aspirations at the expense of another's access to healthy fisheries and marine biodiversity.

It is strange that no-take marine reserves are directed at biodiversity threats yet there is no process to either identify threats or consider mitigation options to address

those threats.

In our view, the best protection for biodiversity is to restore abundance across the entire inshore ecosystem while directing scarce biodiversity resources to protect species and habitats known to be at risk.

If the government is serious about restoring abundance, protecting marine biodiversity and ecosystem services it needs to start applying the sound environmental principles already included in the Fisheries Act.

Ultimately, no-take marine reserves can be part of a restoration programme for New Zealand's inshore marine ecosystems, but promoting them as the main defence against the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services is delusional.

3. Bouquets and brickbats for decisions

A central theme to the four recent management submissions to the Ministry for Primary Industries is the need for more precautionary management of our fish stocks.

The Minister's decisions, announced on March 17th, are a mixed bag, with cuts to commercial catch limits for selected scallop and crayfish stocks, and significant increases in surf clam catch limits around the South Island.

Nathan Guy deserves a bouquet for making a conservative decision in reducing the Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) applying in CRA4, the crayfish stock spanning Hawkes Bay to Wellington.

A 50% reduction in the TACC for Coromandel scallops will not constrain ongoing commercial effort as the average landings over the past eight years has been 47 tonnes. There is still no intention to ban the Victorian box dredges, the continued destruction of scallop beds is a serious concern.

A brickbat is appropriate for his decisions on deemed value rates for surf clams in the South Island, and for granting TACC increases of between 94 and 700% for four species of surf clams with little supporting information that these catch limits are sustainable over time.

In our submission we urged the Minister to hold off on any TACC increases until a management and research plan was developed to guide future management of deepwater tuatua, triangle shell, large trough shell and ringed dosinia.

While these species are unfamiliar to many recreational fishers they are an integral part of the foodchain and these stocks have suffered from ongoing, deliberate excessive commercial harvest.

This cynical harvesting strategy over the past few years is concerning local residents in Cloudy Bay, Marlborough. Many of these people are so intimidated by the constant to and fro of commercial harvesters in the surf zone that they no longer feel safe in fishing from the beach.

In his decision letter the Minister refers to the loss of amenity values and says, “these issues are beyond the scope of my consideration as part of the April 2016 sustainability round”.

We disagree and wholeheartedly support the people of Cloudy Bay.

The Minister is obliged to uphold the purpose and principles of the Fisheries Act 1996, to both ensure the fisheries are sufficiently abundant to meet future generations’ needs, and to provide enough abundance so people can provide for their current social, economic and cultural wellbeing.

The people of Cloudy Bay have been ignored in favour of a private enterprise that has cynically over harvested surf clams with no meaningful penalties for exceeding the legal limits. Instead they are rewarded with a catch limit increase, adding another casualty to the litany of mismanaged fish stocks in our fabled “world-leading” Quota Management System.



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.