



NZ Fishing World – February 14 Edition.

Time for change

By Mandy Kupenga

The experience of fishing reflects so many positive aspects of humanity. When gathering seafood we enjoy our fantastic natural resources while sharing time with loved ones or just chilling out. Gathering bounty from the ocean to share the gift of healthy fresh food with family and friends just feels good, that's why we do it

When doing so with respect, consciously caring for the environment, looking after the fish we release and the fish we keep, wasting as little as possible our connection with our surrounding natural world is fostered and grows.

This is a Kiwi heritage that's so important. Our contribution to ensuring our fisheries not only survive, but also thrive, is significant in more ways than you may think!

On the flip side of our recreational fishing experience there is another side to New Zealand's fisheries - the corporate fishing sector. Naturally the goals and philosophies of this form of fishing are different to ours. The nature of commercial fishing is to drive for business goals, such as maximising profit, shareholder returns and that kind of stuff.

It's in this realm that the more negative aspects of human nature tend to come to the fore. It's an unfortunate but sad reality. Greed, manipulation and perverse decisions that will ultimately lead to the demise of our fisheries must be kept in check - but by whom?

Unfortunately the Ministry For Primary Industries are aligned with economic outcomes. The stated mission they are committed to is "helping the primary industries to double the value of exports by 2025". That's right, double!

So again I ask by whom?

Who ultimately do the decision makers in Ministry and government answer to? According to our democratic processes, it's us, the people of New Zealand – but does it feel like that to you?

Change must be made in the way our fisheries are managed to prioritise the more positive benefits for everyone, not just the elite few. Social, environmental and cultural philosophies of sharing and utilising our resources must emerge at the top of the melting pot of agendas.

This is the change that LegaSea is dedicated to achieve. We are your conduit to calling for better decision making for the future of our fisheries.

When defending snapper last year we proved that our collective and united voice can be powerful and strong when the "pollies" are scared of losing votes. Herein lies our strength, herein lies the path to positive change, change that reflects the values of the people of Aotearoa, not the people in power

Right now our ability to catch crayfish is on the line.

As I write this in December 2013 the Ministry are due release proposals for the management of crayfish in area 2 that runs from Bream Tail in the north to East Cape, Bay of Plenty. For the public, this is by far the most important fishery for crayfish - yet is the worst performing of the crayfish fisheries. I'm sure many of you have experienced first hand the effects of struggling stocks.

Apart from the poor state of the stocks, of grave concern is how the stock levels are measured and the commercial quota allocated. In many cray fisheries the stocks are measured by reported commercial crayfish catch. The formula used basically looks at how much effort (commercial resource) fishing boats use to catch their quota and is called CPUE (catch per unit of effort).

If the amount of effort is satisfactory then the assumption is made that stocks are fine and new quota is set accordingly. So in essence each year's quota levels are determined by the amount of effort of commercial fishing and the resulting catch.

That's right commercial catch rates determines future catch limits, even though there is no independent data to verify their fishing effort! Anyone smell a rat?

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to know that technology has advanced a heck of a lot in the past 30 years. It's not unreasonable to think that since the commercial sector want more quota, there's a significant conflict of interest.

It's time for change. At the very least independent stock assessments are critical. We are facing quota increases in areas where local people find it difficult to gather crayfish for the table and the situation affects other areas around the country too.

In the Gisborne region, crayfish area 3, the commercial sector has special dispensation to take crayfish smaller than the recreational legal limit. This "short term concession" came in in 1992 when the fishery was struggling and was a step to help local operators continue to make a living – but 21 years later it remains, and ask a Gizzy local how they fare in the old cray spots!

We are concerned for the future of crayfish.

Change must be made in our fisheries management to prioritise the more positive benefits for everyone, for people, for the future health of our environment and not just the small number of quota holders.

The social, cultural and environmental aspects of managing our resources must emerge at the top of the melting pot of agendas otherwise we're allowing others to rob our future.

Remember, the stated goal of the Ministry is to double the exports of primary production by 2025. This is our current trajectory unless you want a different future.

If you do please, get on board with LegaSea. At the very least, subscribe to ensure you are kept abreast of the issues as they unfold. Or step up and make a real difference by establishing a regular contribution To find out more about this visit our website

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