



NZ Fishing World – Nov Edition.

Snapper fight is just the beginning.

By Mandy Kupenga

Rightio crew, let's do a bit of a review of the snapper situation. At LegaSea we've been living and breathing the future of snapper. It's been pretty intense, and at times pretty insane, the decision from Nathan Guy was disappointing in some respects, but also promising in others.

In other words, it's been a roller coaster ride... but buckle up team, this is just the beginning!

To quickly recap the situation, the Ministry for Primary Industries undertook a sustainability review for the snapper 1 fishery that spans East Northland, through Auckland, down the Bay of Plenty to the top of the East Cape. This was the first review since 1997.

New sustainability targets had been put forward for the snapper 1 fishery, and this was a positive move we advocated for. The prior targets were 20% (of un-fished biomass – which is the total weight of fish that would be in the water if there was no fishing) and the new targets are 40%. What this basically means is that the fishery will be managed to provide more fish in the water. Big tick. In order to reach this target all fishing activity by all Kiwis – commercial and public - would need to be looked at.

The Ministry for Primary Industries put forward their proposals to manage the fishery into the future and quite frankly they were a shocker. Huge and unnecessary recreational bag limit cuts were put forward for ALL options, nothing in the proposal addressed commercial waste, and all options sought to introduce proportional share (our worst nightmare).

In November last year our fisheries management team put a Snapper 1 Policy forward to the Ministry to give them perspective and options from the recreational point of view. We did this on behalf of our LegaSea supporters and NZ Sport Fishing Council members (32,000 of them).

Our fisheries management and marine research professionals crafted options to rebuild the fishery for the benefit of all in a logical and reasoned manner (because that's how we roll).

Firstly we asked the Ministry to construct a management strategy for snapper 1 (I know it seems ludicrous but there is no strategy presently for this and some other fisheries). With a clear plan practical actions could be put in place to reach the 40% biomass goal.

Next, look at the area where the potential of the fishery was being held back – juvenile mortality. One of the issues facing the fishery was that not enough young fish were growing to be adult fish. Reducing the number of young fish being killed prematurely (by both commercial and recreational fishers) would enable these fish to grow and breed and build stocks. Addressing commercial waste (which is unmeasured and unreported) would have a big impact. We know this because of overseas reports and the nature of old trawl technology.

Third, in line with the law, the Fisheries Act 1996, adequately identify and “allow for” the social, cultural and economic interests of the people of New Zealand. We offered to initiate research and consultation with Kiwi fishers to see what measures would be voluntarily embraced to contribute to our conservation of the fishery.

In essence it called for a thoughtful and balanced approach to managing the fishery, working together.

From what I could tell, the Ministry did not bother to read the policy. So much for an open-minded consultation process...

While the initial Ministry proposals were well wide of the mark the resulting decision had some positive outcomes, that would not have been reached without your support.

There is clear intent to monitor and reduce commercial waste (this will of course need effective implementation) but finally after nearly 30 years definite progress in this area with good potential gains for the fishery.

Mr Guy rejected the Ministry's proposal to introduce proportional share – phew! A stave of execution, but this will come up again, no doubt about it.

A new allowance, an increase of 500 tonnes, provides for a large part of current public needs, righting the wrongs of the 1997 allowance. How this will change with population growth has yet to be revealed.

Many were disappointed with the reduction of the daily bag limit from 9 snapper to 7, because (according to the Ministry's own reports) it will rebuild the fishery by less than the margin of error. It doesn't make sense as an effective conservation measure, and seems to me a way to placate the commercial sector.

The decision to increase the legal size for recreational fishers from 27cm to 30cm, which will reduce what fishers can keep, was received poorly by many, given the commercial legal size remained at 25cm.

So essentially the only action taken on the commercial sector was to clean up abhorrent waste (that was well overdue and is being half funded by tax-payer funds), while the people of New Zealand were once again adversely penalised with ever reducing bag limits.

The concern we have is that the continual rate of bag limit reductions over the last 20+ years will see our children and grandchildren reduced to 1 or 2 snapper. The commercial sector quota and profits are protected. In 1986 commercial quota was 4710 tonnes and today it is still 4500 tonnes, meanwhile we've suffered bag limit decreases of over 70% during the same timeframe.

It's important to remember that the reason the fishery was in a poor state to begin with was because of historic commercial overfishing. Our call is for balanced and fair decision making by the Ministry, and this decision had good aspects, but still ultimately penalised Kiwis and not the commercial quota holders.

If you add up all fish caught in New Zealand commercial fishing accounts for 98% of it, so they're certainly not hard done by.

What was truly inspirational during the course of the SOS: Save Our Snapper campaign was the passion of people to stand up and fight for their rights. Kiwis from all different backgrounds and walks of life were unified by one thing – their love of the priceless experience that fishing provides them, their families and communities. Many recreational fishing businesses came to the fore with support, and this support continues to grow.

We're up for the challenge, with your support we're building our resources and this is only the beginning.

Change is at the heart of what we seek. Change that gives effect to the purpose of the Fisheries Act, the law that governs our fisheries and was written to protect our rights.

The purpose of the Act is: *To provide for the utilisation of the fisheries resources while ensuring sustainability. Ensuring sustainability means – maintaining the potential of fisheries resources to meet the reasonably foreseeable needs of future generations.*

Continuing the woeful trend of cutting back the public while at the same time protecting commercial quota, a trend all too familiar with many fisheries decisions being made around the country, means the same mistakes are being made over and over.

This is not about being greedy and wanting to take nine fish every trip, this is about our right to be treated fairly by the Ministry and Minister in relation to the commercial sector, protecting the future experiences of our children and grandchildren.

Appreciating the impact the snapper decision has on some people is also important. While many families are happy to take a reduction to seven 30cm fish, a lot of people are not and have provided this feedback to us. It is on behalf of those people that we voice this concern.

Some 40% of people do not have the means to go out wide in bigger boats, they simply fish off the rocks, the shore or close to shore in small boats or kayaks. In some areas people have told us they rely on the 27-30cm size fish to take a feed home. This is not about greed, it's about the reality of the fishing experience some people now face around the snapper 1 region.

Again, the issue is about being treated fairly by the Ministry and the Minister in relation to the commercial sector. Not everyone has the chance to go fishing whenever they like. Other feedback we received is that many people go out once every few months, and they stock their freezer to feed their family until they can get out again.

From the torrent of feedback we've received it's clear there are a plethora of emotions, at all ends of the spectrum felt by those this decision affects.

While writing this update we're assessing our next steps. The Ministers and Ministry's full decision paper (161 pages worth) are being reviewed

(they were released weeks after the decision was made public). We will be exploring all options.

What we've all seen with snapper is the political nature of fisheries decision making. With the election coming next year, it is an opportune time to rally support for strong fisheries policy from all political parties – to guide the Ministry and Ministers - and exercise our democratic rights to put people in charge that will look after Kiwis and our marine environment while more effectively balancing export receipts.

The most positive aspect of this has been showing the decision makers in industry and government, that we will rise up and fight poor management of our fisheries. There are many issues in our fisheries that need to be addressed and we've shown through our united action we're not going to lie down and take it any more. This is just the beginning. Together we did make a difference to the outcome of snapper - the decision could have been much worse. Our public lobbying campaign had a very high media profile and this is something we will build on.

I'd like to thank the tens of thousands of Kiwis who stepped forward to help, who stepped up to the plate to say 'enough' and who will continue to fight with us to bring about change.

To find out the latest, go to www.legasea.co.nz/sos or www.facebook.com/legasea. Go there now!

As the public outreach brand of the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council we support and promote your interests for better management of our precious fisheries resources to ensure that there will be abundant fisheries for future generations of Kiwis. By making a modest monthly contribution of \$5 or more (that's one coffee or less than a bag of bait) we can apply the resources required to effectively lobby for better fisheries and management practices.