

Manifesto for New Zealand's marine inshore fisheries



For the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council, affiliated members, LegaSea supporters and aligned organisations.

New Zealand's fisheries are owned by the public of New Zealand and managed by the Crown on our behalf. The New Zealand Sport Fishing Council, LegaSea, and its supporters are opposed to attempts to privatise this public asset and believe we must take a stand to protect the public's access to their own fisheries.

About this Manifesto

This document outlines the policies required to restore New Zealand's inshore fisheries to abundant levels and return the marine environment to a more productive ecosystem.

Those policies are:

1. Establish a Royal Commission of Inquiry into fisheries management and the Quota Management System.
2. Amend the Fisheries Act 1996 to include an Allocation Principle.
3. Remove industrial fishing methods such as trawling, seining and dredging from the inshore zone.
4. Establish a separate, well-resourced Ministry of Fisheries.
5. Amend section 13 of the Fisheries Act 1996 to replace the minimum stock target of B_{MSY} with a minimum biomass target of $B_{0.5}$, that is 50% of the unfished stock size.

Introduction

LegaSea was established by the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council in 2012 to enable a broader cross-section of the public to become involved in fisheries managementⁱ. This engagement was enabled through developing educational material and mechanisms to encourage input and participation.

It is our collective view that New Zealand needs a full review of our current fisheries management system to better provide for both reasonable public access to marine fisheries and the ability to conserve marine resources for future generations.

Public confidence in the way our fisheries are being managed is plummeting. The ongoing reports of wasteful practices, widespread dumping, and high grading all point to a system with poor oversight and a Ministry captured by the very people it is charged with administeringⁱⁱ. Only a comprehensive review of fisheries management and the Quota Management System will enable us to truly understand the depth of mismanagement and the blockages that prevent the restoration of our fisheries.

Because there are several inshore stocks where the recreational catch has collapsed prompt action is required to rebuild our marine resources and the valuable ecosystem services they provideⁱⁱⁱ.

POLICIES



1. Establish a Royal Commission of Inquiry into fisheries management and the Quota Management System.

Review the Quota Management System to identify –

- a. The underlying objectives of fisheries management.
- b. Blockages to restoring inshore fish stocks to abundant levels.
- c. Structures that perpetuate monopolistic and rent-seeking behaviour by quota shareholders.
- d. Barriers to innovation in fishing methods and technology.

After 30 years and repeated examples of dysfunction including reports of widespread labour abuse, fish dumping, misreporting and institutional stagnation, the time is right to return to the basic principles of managing New Zealand's natural resources for the benefit of the nation^{iv}.

We need to redefine the purpose of fisheries development and establish institutions and instruments that achieve the environmental, economic, social and cultural benefits due to all New Zealanders from the use of our natural marine resources.

2. Amend the Fisheries Act to include an Allocation Principle

In June 1989 the then Minister of Fisheries, Colin Moyle, made the following commitment which is now commonly referred to as Moyle's Promise^v -

“Government's position is clear, where a species of fish is not sufficiently abundant to support both commercial and non-commercial fishing, preference will be given to non-commercial fishing.”

Given this earlier Government commitment we need to do the following –

Amend Part 2 of the Fisheries Act 1996 by inserting the following Allocation Principle –
Section 10A

- (a) For the purposes of providing for utilisation, the Minister will afford non-commercial users a clear preference in any allocations.

Doing so will:

- a. Encourage fisheries to be managed at higher, more abundant levels.
- b. Demonstrate a clear disincentive and consequence to commercial overfishing and depletion, while providing an incentive to maintain healthy stock levels.
- c. Guide Ministerial decisions so a more precautionary approach can be taken.

3. Remove industrial fishing methods such as trawling, Danish seining and dredging from the inshore zone.



Prior to industrial fishing the inshore zone was highly productive, providing nursery functions for dozens of species and supporting marine diversity through layers of ecosystem services^{vi}

A century of ever-expanding use of heavy, bottom contact mobile gear has transformed the sea floor from a thriving benthic community of organisms to a desert of fine silt^{vii}. This silt is re-suspended and distributed further each time mobile, industrial fishing gear is towed across the sea floor. Benthic (seabed) diversity and abundance need restoring, and the priority needs to be to remove all industrial methods.

A coastal zone where low-impact commercial fishing, customary and recreational fishing can co-exist will deliver more value to New Zealand and better protect biodiversity. A more productive inshore zone would enable coastal communities and businesses to rebuild through expanding employment and trading opportunities.

Overseas examples demonstrate that more value can be derived from encouraging high value, low impact recreational fishing opportunities from the use of inshore fish species compared to exporting fish for several dollars per kilo with little or no added value^{viii}.

4. Establish a small and tightly focused Ministry of Fisheries.

Managing New Zealand's fisheries is not like the farming of livestock or horticulture, in that fish are predominantly wild and require little or no maintenance by industrial fishers to exist. Fisheries suffer from neglect when folded into Primary Industries and clearly MPI's directorate is disinterested in fisheries.

Unfortunately, by lumping fisheries management in with other primary sectors, the current Ministry for Primary Industries attempts to manage a wild stock with the tools they use to manage farmed stock. This approach is failing both individual fish stocks, such as the northeastern rock lobster fishery^{ix} (CRA 2), and the broader New Zealand fishery in general.

The full, potential economic opportunities arising from having abundant fisheries are lost without policy being advocated in the national interest and implemented by a dedicated Ministry of Fisheries.

5. Amend the Fisheries Act to remove “maximum sustainable yield” as the management benchmark and replace it with a minimum 50% of the unfished biomass.

Currently, New Zealand's Fisheries Act requires the Minister to set a total allowable catch (TAC) that “maintains the stock at or above a level that can produce the maximum sustainable yield” (B_{MSY}), a phrase which is used in the Act.

In practice, the Ministry's goal of doubling export earnings for the primary sector means consideration of TAC cuts to rebuild stocks falls a distant second to the money that can be brought in from overfishing stocks.

Stock assessment models estimate B_{MSY} can be around 20-25% of unfished biomass for many species. It is widely accepted in New Zealand and elsewhere that fisheries data is not perfect, so the stock size management targets must be set higher to maintain a functioning ecosystem and reduce risk.



Legasea wants to see the benchmark for sustainable management set according to world's best practice, which is a bigger percentage of unfished biomass. We believe that stock figure should be a minimum of 50% of the unfished biomass.

To achieve success we need to amend Part 3, section 13, of the Fisheries Act 1996 to remove the 20-25% stock management target biomass that will support the maximum sustainable yield and replace it with a minimum of 50% of the unfished biomass.

Explanation

The spectacular collapse in the Canadian cod stock in 1992 and subsequent failure to rebuild is a widely accepted example of mismanagement^x. It provides us insight into the difficulties of managing the risk of disrupting the ecosystem by single species depletion.

The two contrasting examples are the Barents Sea cod stock recovery and the Canadian cod stock, which failed to recover -

- a. In the Barents Sea, Norwegian and Russian officials recognised the large catch that was coming from the stock was unsustainable and jointly agreed to rapidly reduce fishing pressure. The stock recovered quickly and now has a total allowable catch of 1 million tonnes per year and appears reasonably stable.
- b. In Canada, the true state of the stock was masked by relying on catch per unit of effort (CPUE) analysis that failed to account for increased efficiency in the catching vessels (this system is used today in New Zealand). In Canadaⁱ, the stock reduced to only 1 or 2 percent of the original biomass. In 1992 the fishery was closed. More than twenty years later there are signs of the beginnings of a recovery in the cod fishery but there is still no commercial catch.

It is clear that good yields from a functioning ecosystem require much higher stock sizes than B_{MSY} estimates give us. Stocks need to remain above 50% of unfished biomass.

ⁱ <https://www.legasea.co.nz/about/>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.nzai.auckland.ac.nz/en/about/our-research/new-zealand-catch-reconstruction.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/document-vault/4719>

^{iv} <https://mpi.govt.nz/protection-and-response/environment-and-natural-resources/sustainable-fisheries/independent-review-of-prosecution-decisions/>

^v http://www.option4.co.nz/Your_Rights/moyles.htm

^{vi} MacDiarmid, A.B.; Abraham, E.; Baker, C.S.; Carroll, E.; Chagué-Goff, C.; Cleaver, P.; Francis, M.P.; Goff, J.; Horn, P.; Jackson, J.A.; Lalas, C.; Lorrey, A.; Marriot, P.; Maxwell, K.; McFadgen, B.; McKenzie, A.; Neil, H.; Parsons, D.; Patenaude, N.; Paton, D.; Paul, L.J.; Pitcher, T.; Pinkerton, M.H.; Smith, I.; Smith, T.D.; Stirling B. (2016). Taking Stock – the changes to New Zealand marine ecosystems since first human settlement: synthesis of major findings, and policy and management implications.

^{vii} Baird, S.J.; Hewitt, J.E.; Wood, B.A. (2015). Benthic habitat classes and trawl fishing disturbance in New Zealand waters shallower than 250 m.

^{viii} <https://youtu.be/89x-62qboTY>

^{ix} <https://youtu.be/RwEO8WdCAAU>

^x <http://www.regimeshifts.org/item/585-collapse-of-newfoundland-cod-fisheries-northwest-atlantic>