

The recent CRA3 management plan developed by MFish has failed to acknowledge or include the concerns of the non-commercial representatives or any of their potential solutions.

CRA7.

In CRA7, Otago east coast, commercial fishermen are proposing that their season be extended and allow them to fish with a concession of 127mm tail length lobsters from April 1 until November 19 annually, while recreational fishers must fish by the national rules of 54mm tail width for males and 60mm for females. A 127mm cray, was described as being a fair imitation of a weta, and begs the question as to why we allow the continuation of differentials between commercial and recreational catch sizes.

Kahawai.

The Kahawai Legal Challenge is going to the Supreme Court as non-commercial fishers seek clarity on part of the Court of Appeal's judgment pertaining to the public's rights.

Since the High Court action it appears the fishing companies operating purse seine boats have been adopting a more responsible approach and only taking kahawai as a legitimate bycatch or in numbers they can process for acceptable markets. We are now seeing more and bigger fish in the water as recreational fishers once again can catch fish for food off beaches, in estuaries and river mouths. The Kahawai remains popular as smoked fish, and even finding favour in some shops as an alternative fish for fish and chips. One hopes the days when kahawai was treated as cheap crayfish bait are gone.

SNAB.

This North Island-West Coast snapper fishery is still well below BMSY (20% biomass sustainable yield) as a result of years of excessive commercial fishing. Data shows that there has not been any marked improvement in the area.

Set Nets

The plight of the Hector & Maui Dolphins remain a sensitive and emotional issue and unfortunately the Government, by introducing its set net policy, has failed to acknowledge some areas were already closed to set nets and that as a management tool to prevent dolphin mortality these were not working. One wonders how the Minister can make a decision with absolutely no scientific data, that bans recreational fishers using a 60 metre long net seemingly catching dolphins all year round, while commercial fishers with nets thousands of metres long will only be banned for three months of the year, and that somehow this ban will eliminate the decrease in Hector and Maui Dolphin numbers.

It should be noted that none of the few bodies of dead dolphins recovered show any marking or signs of having tangled in a net.

The Ministers recent decision has effectively turned most of the South Island and a large part of the west coast of the North Island into a marine protected area, and thus denying many who live in coastal communities the opportunity to fish and catch seafood for their families. For most of these non-commercial fishers the only way they can target such fish as kahawai, mullet, blue moki, butterfish (green bone) rig, trumpeter, flounder and the like, is with a net.

The Minister's decision has also crossed right over the path of many local management plans being developed for set nets.

Marine protected areas.

MPAs are another sensitive issue, which threatens to lock up huge tracts of coastline, much of which is on the public's doorstep. The RCF has a policy on MPAs, as they have on marine reserves. The RCF has supported more MRs than they have objected to. But the Department of Conservation and the eco-fanatic, want to establish MPAs or no-take areas right around the coast, without being open with their reasons or honest with the facts as to why they are needed. Some of the pro MPA brigade are prepared to go to the extent of and currying favorable support from young school children who may not even understand the real issues. These children in turn pressure their parents who feel blackmailed into supporting their children. They would do better to identify the risk or threat, prove the need, explore all options, and above all, communicate with the people most affected to seek a solution.

Southern Bluefin and Pacific Tuna.

Because MFish has not made a proper allocation for the recreational sector the public are at risks being excluded from this developing fishery. The RCF is working on ways of ensuring access to these and other highly migratory species.

Marlborough Sounds Blue Cod.

TAS Fish were commended on the responsible approach they have taken with public support in establishing the Marlborough Sounds as no-take blue cod fishery. It remains to be seen if commercial fishers will continue to pot blue cod or if voluntary agreements ensure that they don't.

Eels.

There seems to be support for making eels a non-commercial species only, given the level of uncertainty about the sustainability of native longfin and shortfin eels, and the fact that 95% of our eels are exported offshore to countries that have long since decimated their own eel fisheries. Given the relatively small size of the commercial eel industry, should it be allowed to continue to exploit our eel fishery. Eels are of huge importance to many New Zealanders as a food fish source. It is now time for MFish to take steps to preserve our eel fishery for New Zealanders

Shellfish Under Threat.

Shellfish beds are under pressure, particularly around Auckland, with either rahui or seasonal closures being applied, many at the community's request as management tools to ensure future sustainability. It seems with the recent economic downturn, we are finding more and more families in coastal communities and often in the lower socio-economic groups turning towards the sea as an affordable food source. Families are often pooling their resources to gather shellfish. This is especially noticeable in South Auckland, where both the east and west coast harbours are being targeted, and yes, there is considerable poaching by way of exceeding bag limits.

MFish has a responsibility to ensure that areas under pressure are managed sustainably and not being commercially fished

Shared Fisheries

After some fairly stormy exchanges following the public submission process on shared fisheries, the Minister refused to deal with a polarized result. The recreational sector has since established a joint advocate group with representatives from NZRFC, NZBGFC, option4 and a professional science and policy adviser; to make recommendations on how best the inshore shared fishery should be managed, and how fishing rights be applied. This has been made possible by a one-off contract for service funding with the Crown to ensure good, strong representation from the public sector in these talks. This matter remains a work in progress.

General

So like previous years there is plenty to occupy the mind, and the RFC board for the ensuing year. There is also quite a degree of frustration due to the number of issues that don't seem to ever get fixed. This is not a criticism of the RFC board but more a reflection of the attitude and lack of attention by MFish to what they refer to the recreational sector, and I call the non-commercial sector (it includes Maori customary fishing a well).

In an informal discussion with a couple of MFish senior managers I made a comment about this lack of attention, and I was a little surprised by their response. The discussion went something like this:

"Well we really only have one client – the minister"

"But the minister is more like the chairman of the board – he is your boss's boss, surely you are there like any other government department, to provide a public service".

"Oh no, that went out with the introduction of "rogernomics" - we are all kept pretty busy in cost recovery and reports and briefs for the minister"...

And that pretty much sums up why we don't get the attention we deserve.

Election of Officers

President:	Geoff Rowling
Vice Presidents:	Sheryl Hart & Derek Paul
Board:	Bill Cronin
	Ross Gildon
	John Friend
	Alian Jorion
	Ted Howard
	Keith Ingram (Immediate Past President)

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