

# Hokianga Accord

WELLINGTON  
RECREATIONAL MARINE FISHERS'  
ASSOCIATION (Inc)



WE RECOGNISE MANAGED FISHERIES

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**“More fish in the water/Kia maha atu nga ika ki roto te wai”**

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Dear Tracey

## **Draft North Island West Coast Finfish Fisheries Plan**

### **Submission:**

- ⇒ Whilst the draft North Island West Coast (NIWC) Finfish Fisheries Plan contains worthwhile long-term goals and principles, it does not address the key issues of reversing low abundance in important inshore fisheries, and rebuilding those fish stocks.
- ⇒ The NIWC Fisheries Plan must include a strategy, supported by measures and actions already available to the Minister in the Fisheries Act 1996, that can be immediately undertaken to restore and achieve sufficient abundance in important inshore fisheries to enable people to catch fish to provide for their social, economic and cultural well-being.

### **For these reasons:**

- ⇒ The priority objective for the NIWC Fisheries Plan must be to increase the health and abundance of important inshore NIWC fisheries;
- ⇒ The first priority of the draft NIWC Fisheries Plan must be to develop and implement measures that will enable Snapper 8 be rebuilt to the biomass that will support maximum sustainable yield (BMSY) within five years (20 percent of B<sub>0</sub>, original biomass) and 40 percent of B<sub>0</sub> within 10 years;
- ⇒ The NIWC Fisheries Plan must outline how the SNA8 rebuild strategy will be assessed and analysed before being applied to other West Coast stocks;
- ⇒ The NIWC Fisheries Plan must include strategies and measures that will enable important inshore food fisheries to be managed at 40 percent of BMSY; and
- ⇒ The NIWC Fisheries Plan must include a list of prioritised stocks that need to be rebuilt.

The joint submitters have analysed and discussed the draft NIWC Fisheries Plan and are disappointed that so much time and resources has been expended to produce an outcome that does not provide a roadmap to guide future management, nor is it designed to achieve abundance in important inshore fish stocks.

Although the development of the Information Brief has been helpful to identify specific information on various West Coast fish stocks, which will be useful in the future, we are unable to support the draft NIWC Fisheries Plan in its present form.

We look forward to being provided with the opportunity to have meaningful input into a NIWC Fisheries Plan that is designed to achieve "more fish in the water/kia maha atu nga ika ki roto i te wai".

We also acknowledge the input from all participants, including tangata whenua and other stakeholders, to reach some agreement, and that this process has been a useful exercise to get the various parties talking with each other.

### **Accountability**

Whilst the draft NIWC Fisheries Plan is a useful starting point, it is more akin to a list of objectives or goals, already expressed by the sustainable utilisation purpose of the Fisheries Act 1996, with a suggested process to find measures, already available, to attain the objectives.

The draft neither details nor explains how the effects of such actions, once implemented, will be measured against the objectives, the likely cost of implementing such measures, who will pay for the cost of implementation, and what further fisheries management steps or actions might follow as a consequence.

For example, Goal 1 is that "NIWC finfish fisheries are sustainable today and in the future". Objective C in support of that goal is "catches maintain NIWC stocks **at or above (BMSY)**". The Fisheries Act already empowers the Minister in the setting of the TAC and TACC to attain that goal.

Rather than providing a clear direction for future management, the plan appears to be a document developed in response to a directive to the Ministry of Fisheries to produce an outcome.

Arguably, a related concern arises from MFish's recent decision to centralise much of the fisheries management, research and science capacity to Wellington. This has the potential to compromise regional fisheries management initiatives. For example, once finalised, Auckland-based staff may need to be assigned to ensuring continued development and successful implementation of the plan.

### **West Coast depletion**

#### ***Snapper 8***

The draft NIWC Fisheries Plan does not provide any innovative measures to address the key issue of abundance.

For more than twenty years the West Coast Snapper 8 (SNA8) stock has been and remains a severely depleted food fishery, some areas being worse than others. Despite two Ministerial decisions (the first initiated in 1998) the fishery is still below an acceptable abundance level, being at only half the minimum biomass level required by the Fisheries Act 1996 to produce the maximum sustainable yield.

Given this historic failure it is either that the incentives within the the quota management system (QMS) framework do not provide sufficient tools to address serious depletion issues in important inshore fisheries, or the tools and mechanisms within the Act have not been applied as intended.

Urgency is required in developing and implementing measures that will enable Snapper 8 to be rebuilt to the biomass that will support maximum sustainable yield (BMSY) within five years, and doubled to 40 percent of original biomass within 10 years.

### ***Management issues***

#### **Low abundance**

Excessive commercial fishing reduced the SNA8 fishery to around five percent of its original biomass by the early 1980s. SNA8 remains at around 10 percent of original biomass and as such poses a potential environmental risk.

The NIWC Fisheries Plan, once finalised, must remove this potential risk for the health and abundance of SNA8 and for all other inter-dependent fish stocks and marine life species.

#### **Excessive fishing**

Overfishing and deeming in SNA8 has been a contentious issue for many years. The rate of deeming in SNA8 has decreased in the last two years. This could be due to the increase in deemed value for West Coast snapper, or increased dumping of unwanted snapper, or possibly both. Without sufficient surveillance on the West Coast it is hard to measure the impact that increased deemed value penalties has had on commercial fishing behaviour.

There is no mechanism in the draft NIWC Fisheries Plan that acknowledges the lost productivity due to this excessive commercial fishing, or any meaningful measures to ensure fishers have a balanced fishing portfolio to cover catch.

#### **Realistic management areas**

These issues are made more complex by an absence of effective fisheries management in such large areas. For example, SNA8 extends from Porirua Harbour (Wellington) to North Cape, and Flounder 1 extends from Tirua Point, northern Taranaki to Cape Runaway on the East Coast.

There are huge variations in snapper abundance in Taranaki compared to the Kaipara and Manukau Harbours. During the 2005 SNA8 review commercial and some amateur fishers in Taranaki were advocating for an increase in total allowable commercial catch (TACC) and a reduction from 15 to 10 in the northern amateur daily bag limit because there was an abundance of snapper in their region. Northern amateur fishers advocated for a reduction in TACC and maintenance of the 15 daily bag limit because some harbour fishers could not catch snapper of sufficient size or in numbers to satisfy their social and cultural well-being.

For these reasons the NIWC Fisheries Plan must provide options for the subdivision of Fisheries Management Area 8 (FMA8) with a view to balancing Individual Transferable Quota (ITQ) to abundance, and to provide special status to the Kaipara Harbour.

#### **Inflated TACCs**

Over-inflated total allowable commercial catch (TACC) limits for a number of important species, such as flounder and mullet, means that the TACC neither constrains commercial fishing effort nor importantly produces sustainable commercial fishing. This ongoing, unconstrained fishing has had a major impact on many local communities, including both commercial and non-commercial fishing interests, that traditionally relied on these fisheries to sustain them.

Important harbour fisheries, such as flounder and mullet, are not being managed at a level that will enable people to provide for their social, economic and cultural well-being. As a consequence sustenance fishers have been denied sufficient access to these food fisheries for more than twenty years.

The NIWC Fisheries Plan must include TACC reductions to rebuild depleted fisheries to levels that provide sufficient abundance to enable people to provide for their wellbeing.

### **Consultation, and input and participation – s12(1) Fisheries Act 1996**

A fisheries plan under section 11A of Part 3 of the Fisheries Act 1996, like the setting or varying of the total allowable catch (TAC), is a sustainability measure,

Under section 12(1), before doing anything in relation to those measures, the Minister must –

- (a) consult with Maori, environmental, commercial and recreational interests, and
- (b) provide for the input and participation of tangata whenua having a non-commercial interest in the stock concerned, or an interest in the effects of fishing on the aquatic environment in the area concerned –

and have particular regard to kaitiakitanga.

### **Environmental concerns**

There is lightweight consideration given to environmental issues in the draft NIWC Fisheries Plan. There is evidence of increasing sedimentation affecting all West Coast harbours, although the ongoing land-based riparian planting programme around Whaingaroa (Raglan) Harbour seems to have partially mitigated the adverse effects of land-based run-off.

Adverse impacts of sedimentation on fish stocks, both direct (mortality) and indirect (habitat loss) are a serious issue on the West Coast.

If information is uncertain when the Minister is considering a sustainability measure he/she must have particular regard to kaitiakitanga, consider inter-dependent species and the foreseeable needs of future generations in addition to taking a precautionary management approach. This is to ensure the sustainable utilisation of our fisheries and to protect the marine environment.

Moreover, the NIWC Fisheries Plan must recognise the various sources of marine knowledge.

In December 1999 the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, John Morgan Williams, published a document called *“Setting course for a sustainable future: The management of New Zealand's marine environment”*. In section 5, page 74, Adequacy of Environmental Information (5.2) Different kinds of information, he had this to say: --

*“However, in an information scarce environment like the marine environment, informal information will often be a resource that marine managers cannot afford to neglect or ignore.”*

Much of this experience and knowledge is held by local kaumatua, kuia, fishers and communities but it is treated as ‘anecdotal’. The truth is there is little hard data available for fisheries management, as evidenced by the raft of assumptions used as inputs into stock models and the ongoing debate that follows those decisions.

### ***Kaipara Harbour***

There are serious environmental concerns about increasing sedimentation, eutrophication in the Kaipara Harbour, and the potential adverse effects on fish stocks, shellfish and marine environment as a consequence of the recent approval given to install underwater power turbines at the harbour entrance.

It appears that almost all Snapper 8 stock spend a period of their formative years within the Kaipara Harbour. If true for snapper it is probable that other species also share this dependence on the Kaipara.

It follows that given the depleted state of many of the West Coast fish stocks a precautionary fisheries management approach is required, to reduce adverse effects on the Kaipara fisheries and reduce environmental risk.

In the report, “*A review of land-based effects on coastal fisheries and supporting biodiversity in New Zealand*,” Mark Morrison and others make the following statement:

*“Any negative impacts on the Kaipara estuary’s production of juvenile fish will cascade through into the much larger coastal ecosystem, ultimately affecting the abundance of fish several hundreds of kilometres away, and coastal snapper fisheries along the entire coast will be severely impacted. Such ecosystem linkages need to be explicitly incorporated into our management of estuarine and coastal ecosystems, including fisheries (Morrison et al. unpubl. Results).”*

The authors acknowledge the connectivity of habitat and warn that, “*without accounting for such connectivity, we will always be limited in our ability to identify the important factors driving variation in harvested species abundance in a given area, and where management efforts might be best directed*”.

This knowledge reveals the extent of the environmental risk taken by continually deferring remedial management actions for both fish and habitat within the Kaipara Harbour.

The NIWC Fisheries Plan must address the issues identified in this report and introduce meaningful measures that mitigate adverse effects to ensure the rebuild and ongoing viability of our West Coast fisheries.

## **28N rights**

The existence and impact of section 28N rights are not acknowledged in the draft NIWC Fisheries Plan, yet these rights impose confounding incentives upon the quota management system which are particularly evident in Snapper 8. This omission needs to be rectified as 28N rights have an influence on how the fishery is utilised and managed.

As of September 2, 2009 there were 933,300 Kgs of outstanding 28N rights in Snapper 8. In late 2007 two entities held around 96 percent of those rights.

The draft NIWC Fisheries Plan fails to address and advise on resolution to this very apparent aberration to the incentive-based QMS. If fisheries have not been rebuilt sufficiently, since 1986, to enable an increase in the total allowable commercial catch (TACC) that would fulfill 28N claims then perhaps the rationale underpinning 28N rights has been mis-applied.

## **Harvest strategy standards**

Harvest Strategy standards do not apply to any West Coast finfish fish stocks. If they are to be applied, stock data points will be required. However, it is a major concern that current stock size in relation to the biomass required to achieve maximum sustainable yield (BMSY) is only known for five of the 30 fish stocks discussed in the Information Brief.

If reference points are absent then West Coast fish stocks need to be managed to achieve the sustainable utilisation purpose of the Fisheries Act 1996, by applying the environmental and information principles of the Act. In addition, ongoing monitoring must take place to assess whether those fish stocks are sufficiently abundant to enable people to catch fish to provide for their social, economic and cultural well-being.

If there insufficient abundance to enable people to catch fish to provide for their wellbeing then appropriate fisheries management measures must be applied to enable this to occur.

## **Recreational only zones**

Since the election the Minister of Fisheries, Mr. Phil Heatley, has promoted the National Party's policy of recreational-only fishing zones, to recognise recreational fishing needs.

It is understood that some suggestions would exclude commercial fishing within five nautical miles from Port Waikato north to Baylys Beach. Such an extensive area would have a major impact on commercial fishers.

Irrespective of the eventual size of these areas, the draft NIWC Fisheries Plan must state whether such 'no commercial fishing' zones would be a fisheries management initiative or an area-based management tool, how these will be implemented over time and the relationship of 'no commercial fishing' zones with existing area management tools such as mataitai, taiapure, rahui and marine reserves.

## **Summary**

For more than a generation important West Coast food fisheries have not been managed to produce sustainable fishing and a healthy, abundant marine environment.

Our West Coast fisheries are a taonga (treasure) that must be conserved so the marine environment can sustain itself and provide food for future generations of New Zealanders.

To produce the dual benefit of reducing environmental risk, and providing sufficient abundance to enable people to catch fish for food, the NIWC Finfish Fisheries Plan must include measures to:

- ⇒ Reduce the adverse effects of commercial fishing on fish stocks; and
- ⇒ Increase and rebuild depleted fisheries to restore health and abundance.

The non-commercial environmental and fishing interests of the Wellington Recreational Marine Fishers' Association, option4 and the Hokianga Accord make the recommendations contained in this response to improve fisheries management so that we can all experience "more fish in the water/kia maha atu nga ika ki roto i te wai".

We appreciate the opportunity to have input into the draft NIWC Fisheries Plan and look forward to discussing the proposed plan in more detail with the Ministry of Fisheries.

Yours sincerely

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