

Hokianga Accord Update #36

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Accord wary of closed-door decision making forums

Despite the progress to accommodate Maori concerns at a national level there is a lack of goodwill being shown to mid north iwi within the Ministry of Fisheries' regional forum process.

Since February the Hokianga Accord has known of Ministry plans to reorganise the regional recreational fisheries forums. It was important to clarify how MFish would account for mid north iwi's amateur fishing interests within this new regime. After a string of correspondence the Accord is no wiser.

MFish has confirmed there will be six recreational forums to reflect the various Fisheries Management Areas, with four operating in the North Island.

Mid north iwi have a specific interest in the Area 1 forum, covering North to East Cape, and the Area 9 forum that encompasses the west coast from Tirua Point (Taranaki) northwards.

These recreational groups are in addition to the existing regional iwi fisheries forums.

Iwi forums will only deal with customary issues, but MFish says Maori are welcome to be part of the recreational forums. However, with limited membership opportunities Maori take their chances alongside other applicants.

In a bold but not necessarily correct statement MFish has identified that only a small portion of engagement between the Ministry and stakeholders is required by legislation, the Treaty of Waitangi or Settlement obligations. The Hokianga Accord disagrees.

The Crown has ongoing statutory obligations that need to be met to comply with the Fisheries Act 1996 and the Treaty of Waitangi (Fisheries Claims) Settlement Act 1992.

For example, section 12 of the Fisheries Act specifically requires the Minister to have particular regard to kaitiakitanga [guardianship], and must provide for the "input and participation" of tangata whenua into sustainability measures.

In the absence of any recent legislative change no amount of weasel words will convince the Accord that these statutory obligations no longer exist.

To achieve progress there are a variety of concerns that need to be addressed, including –

- ⇒ Both Ngapuhi and Ngati Whatua have agreed that the Hokianga Accord is their forum to discuss fisheries management issues;
- ⇒ The Accord has existed for five years but MFish does not support the forum;
- ⇒ The proposed Area 1 and 9 forums cover the Accord participants' main harvesting areas, but these forums do not have a mandate to speak on behalf of Ngapuhi or Ngati Whatua's considerable amateur fishing interests;
- ⇒ There are suggestions that Iwi Fisheries Plans will be developed by regional iwi forums, and the recreational forums will support the implementation of national Fisheries Plans. Will two plans then exist for the same fish?
- ⇒ These forums are designed to service MFish needs and not necessarily achieve "more fish in the water/kia maha atu nga ika ki roto i te wai".
- ⇒ Depletion of fisheries in traditional fishing areas is having a major impact on our smaller communities, hapu and whanau.

Our non-commercial interests are best served by having abundance in the places people normally fish.

Given the complexity of issues that exist in the northern region, the foreshore debate, population density, depletion issues and the detrimental impacts on people we need to ensure the Ministry remains accountable.

Discussion is continuing between the Accord leaders and Ministry officials. The Hokianga Accord will not passively standby while MFish promote decision-making behind closed doors.

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