

A TIME TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

BY KEITH INGRAM

I never cease to be amazed how we cannot agree to disagree among ourselves over the changes that will impact on our ability in future to fish for food or fun.

Likewise, it appears the Ministry of Commercial Fisheries (Billy Cooke's "quote") is hell bent on making sure the recreational sector remains divided and weak, so it may drive its own policies without fear of a major challenge from recreational fishers.

Now hold on a bit, maybe these comments are a bit harsh. Having just come from the Federation of Commercial Fishermen's conference in Tauranga, it is clear they would disagree with this comment and in fact have the opposite view. Recreational fishers say they are also being constantly shafted by ill-founded MFish policies.

We have two factions outside the recreational camp talking up a storm to create total mistrust because their existence evolves around having someone to hate. The sad part is they are now trying to drag the Maori Leaders Forum into a debate about them or us, when it should not be so.

It's all made sadder when the umbrella national organisation, the New Zealand Recreational Fishing Council, constantly finds itself trying to keep the peace and always ends up apologising for its behaviour, when all it is guilty of is defending the rights of its members and the wider fishing public.

The NZRFC has a clear and robust mandate, as it not only represents its individual members but also recognises its responsibilities to its member clubs, major affiliates and regional organisations.

This is not a responsibility the council takes lightly. It remains accountable to organisations like NZ Angling and Casting, NZ Underwater, the Trailer Boat Federation, the NZ Marine Transport Association, the sporting industry and many fishing and boating clubs, as well as some large iwi groups, and yet none of these groups is complaining. Well, I for one am over it.

The most recent example was the suggestion of establishing a professional national organisation with statutory recognition. The fear factor of the licensing boogie man was raised, yet the only ones talking about licensing recreational fishers are the NZ Sportfishing Council, option4 and sadly, more recently the Hokianga Accord, which appears to be transfixed on destroying any process that might improve the rights of recreational fishers.

Let's clear the decks for a bit. I have now been involved in recreational fisheries management advocacy, including being an active honorary fisheries officer, for over 26 years. During this time I have served as the president of the NZ Charter Boat Association, the NZMTA and the NZRFC and through my work as an HFO by maintaining contact with fisher-folk on beaches and boat ramps.

I believe I have served my apprenticeship in the school of hard knocks when it comes to recreational fishing advocacy. Our problem is most of my colleagues and I are starting to age, and fisheries' challenges facing the amateur sector continue to grow.

But the biggest problem is we no longer have young voices coming up through the ranks because time is now so precious. They just cannot afford the time to work for nothing, and what time they do have they want to spend with families or just go fishing. Who said our young ones today aren't smart.

Just what is the debate all about? In simple terms, I will draw a picture so we can grasp the situation before addressing the many questions and answers.

Picture sitting at a table enjoying a bottle of wine with friends. The cork or cap is the current NZRFC as we know it. It is expendable and will probably not survive this process if it does it right. The council is working to develop the glass and fill it with all manner of interested fisher-folk representing its member groups and the public.

If the group is of good quality it will develop a bottle of wine that will be the new, overarching representative organisation with the task of the professional role of advocacy, research and managing recreational fisheries.

The goal is to have this group recognised in statute to balance the playing field. The rights of commercial and customary fishers are clearly defined and recognised in statute. Only the rights of the recreational fishing public, who fish for food or fun, remain undefined and at risk of erosion.

Please note nowhere have I said the government will be expected to fund this statutory body, nor have I mentioned licensing. Granted, we will require some seed funding to get this process underway. This may come from a number of options, including a partnership with the Crown. Let's not be frightened to have the debate for the future.

What is wrong with the status quo? Why does the Recreational Fishing Council want to foster change?

Constant vigilance is required to hold off threats to recreational fishing and ensure abundance is ongoing. Commercial, customary and recreational harvesters share our fisheries and are vulnerable to impact from land use activities and overfishing.

The government certainly has a responsibility to provide for every fishers' wellbeing by ensuring sustainability. However, decisions of the past two decades have shown the Minister of Fisheries and his officials must be held to account for this responsibility.

Decisions are at the discretion of the minister. A lack of resources, a mandate or specific legislation has severely hampered recreational fishing organisations' efforts to influence the minister's decisions.

Instead, the fishing public is virtually forced to accept the outcomes of MFish's decisions. Despite the sterling efforts of recreational fishing advocates, who participate in endless submissions, there are numerous examples of local depletion and inequitable access to fisheries resources for recreational fishers.

Ask a Gisborne local about the size of the crayfish they can catch, ask a Marlborough local about access to blue cod, ask a South Island east coast fisher about the limitations on their fishing gear, and you will realise these are not isolated incidents. They are symptoms of a poorly organised and weak fishing sector which cannot stand up for itself when it needs to.

WHAT DOES THE NZRFC WANT FOR ALL FISHERS?

Fishers from the council want to be part of a strong sector that can stand up and be counted on its own terms. This means having a sector with the political clout and management capacity to add

value to fisheries management decisions. Only then will the vision of having guaranteed access to abundant fisheries be realised for fishers of today and the larger population of fishers of tomorrow.

The council wants to foster change towards establishing an independent statutory organisation that will provide truly effective advocacy for all fishers in NZ fishing for non-commercial purposes.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY A STATUTORY ORGANISATION?

A statutory organisation is one created by legislation that sets out details on its structure, functions and power. Being created by an Act of Parliament gives a permanent voice and a direct line to ministers that cannot be achieved by solely voluntary organisations. It enables mechanisms for self-funding and self-management.

HOW COULD IT ADD VALUE TO RECREATIONAL FISHING?

Having a strong national body with functions and powers specified in legislation would offer a path for fishers to actively manage their fisheries. The government would retain final responsibility for ensuring sustainability, and the national body would ensure the government provides for the wellbeing of the fishing public.

The statutory body would be better able to influence and have responsibility to support a quality fishing experience. Expenditure of stewardship revenue collected from fishers would be done on the basis of priorities set by the fishing public. Some options would be habitat and stock enhancement for the fisheries resource, and for the fishers: fisheries-related education, information and training. There could be a myriad of projects to improve fishing access and facilities, such as establishing fishing havens or filleting stations and platforms at top fishing spots.

WILL THIS UNDERMINE THE EXISTING LEGISLATIVE PROVISIONS?

No, that is absolutely not the intention of fostering change. A statutory organisation would increase choices and strengthen the recreational sector to participate effectively in fisheries management.

Section 21 of the Fisheries Act 1996 clearly states that the minister is responsible for heeding recreational interests when setting catch limits. The eventual outcome of the kahawai legal challenge further clarified this ministerial discretion to be absolute and that allowances must be reasonable.

It is not the aim to agree to a fixed proportional share for recreational fishers as a requirement for establishing a statutory organisation. Rather, it would provide expert advice to the minister and ensure he or she discharges their responsibilities under section 21 of the act.

The organisation will be a powerful advocate in ensuring more than reasonable allowances are made for recreational interests. In time, it may address the failure of the Fisheries Act to provide specific mechanisms for recreational fishers.

The other stakeholders have legislative tools for self-management, while recreational stakeholders need to go through a back door of dispute resolutions to get their particular interests served.

The farce over establishing recreational-only areas is an example of the lack of tools available to recreational fishers.

HOW WOULD YOU FUND THE BODY AND AVOID BUREAUCRACY?

Experience from overseas (Australia, the United States, Portugal and the United Kingdom) has shown the only options for a truly independent revenue stream for the recreational fishing sector involve developing partnerships with corporate sponsors and collecting money directly from recreational fishers. ▶

VIP/WB11

ALPHATRON

gives you power

*inverters
chargers
alternators
batteries
monitoring*



T: 1800 148 793 (AU)
T: +64 9 414 5520 (NZ)
E: sales@alphatron.co.nz

www.alphatrononline.com



MEPC
107(49)
Certified

OILY WATER SEPARATOR

- Flexible configuration to fit in small space
- Completely Automatic Operation
- Continuous Performance reporting
- IMO MEPC 107(49) Approvals
- US Coast Guard Certified
- ABS Type Approval
- Simple Design
- Very low Maintenance
- Self Priming
- Max coalescence
- Min power requirements
- Laminar flow



Distributed in New Zealand by:

 **So-Pac**
marine

PH 09 448 5900 | info@sopac.co.nz
www.sopac.co.nz

VIPS82

Figures of between \$20 and \$50 are bandied about as an appropriate fee to collect from fishers. This need not be so, as there are many options for future sustainable funding.

Details over who should pay, who would be exempt (eg children) or how they would pay would be fully discussed with the fishing public.

The bureaucracy would need to be managed, with administration costs being capped at a set percentage of total revenue collected.

AREN'T KIWIS ADAMANTLY AGAINST PAYING FOR OUR FISHING EXPERIENCE?

We already pay every time we buy tackle and bait, fuel the car and the boat, take a day off work, buy food and drink for the day's fishing, pick up a fishing magazine, pay boat ramp fees and so on. A few Kiwis also pay to join a fishing club or organisation.

A recent New Zealand Fishing News survey of 3500 respondents showed a significant percentage would pay a licence fee compared with the popular understanding that no fishers would pay. There is a growing awareness from people, including fishers, of the impact our actions have on the environment.

Linked to this is our growing willingness to contribute to stewardship actions for the fisheries to ensure its ongoing abundance. Paying a fee to a statutory organisation that will effectively influence fisheries' decisions and improve the recreational fisher's experience provides a chance for the fishing public to fish smart.

WHERE DOES LOCAL FISHERIES KNOWLEDGE FIT?

Fisheries management in New Zealand is diverse, with each region and sub-region having its own features and issues. For this reason, the wealth of knowledge held by locals and often gathered over several generations is invaluable and irreplaceable.

A statutory recreational fishing organisation would support local fishing issues and channel their knowledge to where it would be most beneficial.

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN TO EXISTING FISHING ORGANISATIONS?

By establishing a statutory body with an advocacy role, fishing organisations will be able to focus on their core business, be it diving, sportfishing, casting and so on, while the national body will benefit from the economies of scale.

National fishing organisations wholly focused on advocacy, such as the NZRFC, would become redundant. Local and regional fishing organisations would continue their role and be strengthened by the support of the national body.

HOW WILL I GET A SAY?

It is crucial for you to have your say. This is a chance for recreational fishers to design a system for the fishing future of you and your grandchildren.

To get from here to there, the government needs to set up a committee of savvy fishers and other experts with the resources to develop proposals for a statutory body and discuss them with the fishing public. Get involved and help design the right model.

Until there is an establishment committee, the Recreational Fishing Council will promote this process and communicate with its members and the fishing public via its website and media forums. Tell us what you think.

WHAT ABOUT WORKING WITH OTHER STAKEHOLDERS?

The council is firmly in favour of collaborating with customary and commercial fishers and environmental interests, and sees a national body taking a proactive role.

The ultimate future for managing our fisheries would have the users of the resource collaboratively managing their impact and the government retaining overall responsibility for standards and compliance.

I believe establishing a national statutory organisation for recreational fishing is the right step towards that future.

A POSSIBLE SOLUTION

The challenges we face are how do we get better information on recreational fish catches, how do we get better representation and how do we get the scientific support and professional advocacy that is sorely needed to ensure that the rights of the recreational anglers are listened to and acted upon.

It's a big task when nobody wants to pay. Once the new recreational advocacy group has statutory recognition, it is important to ensure the government, agencies and other stakeholders in our wild marine fisheries respect its voice.

This organisation in turn has to ensure it offers advice and bases its reports, questions and challenges on substantial evidence and reasoned argument.

Yes, there is a cost. Remember, I am not talking about the need to issue licences for folk to fish for food or fun. I suggest we can combine both needs – revenue and better information – into an achievable, robust and sustainable outcome.

This is where the carrot, or maybe you can call it bribery or just incentives, come into play. A huge industry is making money out of the benefits gained by the Recreational Fishing Council, and it will benefit more as the new organisation strives to ensure there are robust sustainable fisheries with guaranteed access for all to fish for food or fun.

One option might be to set up a recreational reporting system where amateur fishers register with this national organisation and pay a fee of about \$25 per year, let's say. Ministry of Fisheries' figures indicate 1.4 million New Zealanders go fishing at least twice a year. If only 100,000 register, they will raise \$2.5 million per year – not bad for a national organisation.

How could we encourage people to join? This is where the wider industry comes into play. We live in an electronic age. Recreational fishers who join would be encouraged to record and send information on their catch by email, internet, text or even the old-fashioned diary recording system.

Each week, those who fished or who even registered a nil fishing return would go into a draw to win rods, reels, tackle and other prizes. Likewise, all fishers who registered a return would go in the draw for a larger monthly prize, such as electronics, (fish finders, radios and so on).

At the end of the year, all fishers who had recorded their catch for the year would go in a draw for a major prize, maybe a fishing boat and outboard motor on a trailer.

Valued companies who sell directly to recreational boaties and fishers would sponsor the prizes and get advertising in the media and on-line. It would be a win-win situation, because our registered anglers or amateur fishers would be encouraged to support our sponsors and companies. By doing so they would be eligible for additional company discounts and benefits.

Now do you get my drift? Am I talking about licensing – no.