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EDITORIAL

INDUSTRY STILL FACES SAME KEY ISSUES

In producing this issue of *Professional Skipper*, we have just realised that this is the 10th anniversary of the magazine. My, how time flies when you're having fun.

It's interesting to note that when we did a quick review that some of the key issues of today are the same we faced 10 years ago. This tells me that either the industry has gone nowhere or bureaucracy moves slowly.

As I look around the industry over these past 10 years, we have taken significant steps forward and, unfortunately, when we've hit the bureaucratic wall, a few steps back as well.

Marine protected areas are still a key issue, and the ad-hoc establishment of marine reserves around the country still happens mostly by stealth. Wellington's southern coast, Taranaki and Great Barrier Island are hot topics at present. Surely the Minister of Fisheries and his colleague from the Department of Conservation should learn from their mistakes, especially if we are to learn from the marine reserve at north Gisborne.

Both locals and commercial fishermen resisted the establishment of this particular reserve, as it was producing 30 percent of the total allowable catch in CRA3. The outcome of its establishment has been a shift in fishing effort, causing local depletion of fish close to Gisborne and spatial conflict among sector users.

What the Minister of Fisheries should have said to his colleague in this case was, "If you want your marine reserve in that spot, buy out the 30 percent of the TACC from the commercial fishers and retire it into your marine reserves." This would have compensated the commercial fishers and eliminated the problems associated with shifting effort.

When we look around the country, this same problem exists in most other areas where marine reserves are being considered or proposed.

On another note, the issue of swordfish, more commonly known as broadbill, has come to the fore, with the realisation by commercial fishers that MFish has kind-of snookered them when it put the broadbill quota up for competitive tender.

While many fishers tendered in part for quota, a lot of them were not financially able to do so just then because of the recent restructuring of the tuna longline fleet, and the need to purchase quota or catch entitlement.

The tuna fleet today is but a shadow of its former self, when we had some 600 permits and around 136 active fishing vessels. Today we have around 28 vessels in the fleet. These committed fishers and the oth-

ers who have retired were primarily responsible for establishing the New Zealand tuna surface longline fishery and the by-catch history for swordfish.

As we go to press, we are still waiting for the ministry's response to our questions. Essentially, what we cannot understand is if fishers cannot afford to purchase broadbill quota at the moment, why hasn't the ministry just shelved it?

Instead, it would appear that they have sold in perpetuity some 500 tonnes to two Australian syndicates fronted by two ex-pat Kiwis. It is no secret that Kiwi skippers dominate the eastern Australian tuna fishery, which has been targeted and overfished to the stage where it is now bordering on collapse.

What happens now that the Australians have the rights to buy this quota, and New Zealand fishing vessels cannot afford to pay the lease values expected by the Australians? Will we see the Australian vessels crossing the Tasman Sea to fish our waters and exercise their right to take this quota? Something is wrong here morally, if not legally. How can this happen.

We understand that the bycatch landed from our current fishers in this fleet is less than one-third of the TACC. Surely, if MFish is concerned about sustainability it should have erred on the side of caution and just shelved the quota.

From a recreational position, the current situation has to be of significant concern. In the billfish agreement, commercial fishers were given the rights to take swordfish (broadbill) as a bycatch species only. That agreement and protocol will be destroyed with the Australians wanting to target it.

Another development is the downward movement of our dollar. While this is being viewed with mixed blessings, depending on whether you are an exporter or an importer, we understand that if anyone in the industry is considering building a new vessel or repowering their existing vessel, now is the time to be talking to your engine supplier, because current stocks of heavy marine diesel engines on the showroom floors will not last forever. New imports will be significantly more expensive.

On that note, enjoy this issue, as we continue to look forward to bringing a professional and informative publication to the industry.

Keith Ingram, Editor