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POACHING IS THEFT

Historically the term poacher has had an acceptable honour or ring of acceptance about it, as folk remember the likeable rogues of yesteryear who used to take game and fish for consumption and trade.

Unfortunately poaching in our wild marine fisheries in more recent times has got out of hand, and one only has to remember the Patagonia toothfish and the billion-dollar industry the poaching of this fish supports in both the United States and Japan.

The quota management system was expected to solve a lot of the problems associated with poached seafood, but clearly the Ministry of Fisheries' direction of managing our fish stocks by output controls is not working, as we are now experiencing poaching at an all-time high and rising, as more folk think it's acceptable to poach a few more fish for personal reward.

Times have changed as fish stocks become depleted by the unconstrained poaching activities of these deviants, to the level where the future sustainability of key fish stocks is now at risk. This means that you or I, the legitimate fisher, will miss out. This applies to all of us, whether we are quota holders or choose to fish for food.

Poaching is theft, no matter which way you look at it, and the unconstrained activities of these thieves is now impacting on the legitimate rights of all of us. So much so that a multi-pronged attack is evolving, involving the New Zealand Recreational Fishing Council on behalf of the recreational fishing fraternity, the commercial fishing industry, local iwi and the Ministry of Fisheries compliance team.

Heading the list is paua, with the minister recently announcing the introduction of two new paua-sniffing dogs to help identify and find illegally caught paua in transit.

At its recent conference, the NZRFC sought the total banning of private exports of wild-caught paua by non-New Zealand nationals. Basically, the council says that if you are not a New Zealand passport-holder, you are not entitled to take amateur-caught paua out of the country. If you are travelling on a New Zealand passport you will be able to take out a daily bag limit of 1kg of paua meat to treat your hosts to a feed, no problems.

We have to stop the trade routes for wild-caught paua to international markets, the conference was told. Hundreds of kilos are leaving our shores in the bags of short-stay tourists heading for the lucrative Asian market.

If they want to take paua overseas, all non-New Zealand nationals may do so by purchasing professionally packed paua from a licensed fish receiver or retailer, and carry the receipts of proof of purchase. No, it's not a

human rights issue, as we have many examples where non-New Zealand nationals are not entitled to the same benefits all New Zealanders enjoy.

Rock lobster is our second highest valued poaching product. The NZRFC is actively promoting the introduction of telson clipping of all non-commercially taken rock lobster which will identify these animals as "not for sale" rock lobster.

The telson is the centre fin of the tail fan, and by cutting this in half, using a pair of scissors or a sharp knife, once the taker has decided to keep the lobster, it immediately identifies the lobster as one that is not for sale. It therefore cannot be raffled, traded or sold to restaurants, fish shops, markets or anywhere else where it could be on-sold for profit. It costs nothing to implement, there is no imposition on the fisher and, given that you are going to eat the lobster, it in no way affects the taste.

Coupled to this, it would be an offence for commercial fishermen, fish receivers, fish shops, restaurants and the like to possess a lobster with its telson clipped as not for sale.

The NZRFC has also requested that the rock lobster industry consider introducing horn tags for rock lobster sold into the domestic market. This way, anyone caught in possession of a lobster not carrying a horn tag, or not having its telson clipped, is clearly identified as being in possession of a stolen rock lobster from our fishery. Then he or she may well be a fish thief, and should be identified as such and face the consequences.

In this issue you will note that political correctness has struck the accident reporting system of Maritime New Zealand when you read the now sanitised versions we are able to print. See page 61. The summary gives no information, says nothing, and offers no informative information to the seafarer. It is another example of precious political correctness by some complainants.

We are all required to report accidents and incidents or mishaps, but we don't want to see it recorded. Bollocks! If you would like to see a return to the way we presented these summaries in the past, drop us a line so we can take the matter up with Maritime NZ.

In the meantime, please enjoy this issue of *Professional Skipper* as we bring you the latest news and views. While it is fair to say that the industry is suffering from bleak times at present, there are still some exciting opportunities available for those who diversify.



Keith Ingram, Editor