

Editor:	Keith Ingram
Manager:	Vivienne Ingram
Editorial assistant:	Mark Barratt-Boyes
Contributors:	Baden Pascoe Barry Young Dee Pigenégy Hugh Ware, USA Kelvin Hieatt Lindsay Wright Mark Barratt-Boyes Mike Pignéguy Penny Browne Stuart Cawker Steve Punter Trevor Coppock
Advertising:	Hamish Stewart
Design:	Rachel Walker
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EDITORIAL

DRASTIC POACHING NEEDS DRASTIC STEPS

Poaching is thieving, whichever way you look at it, and we only have to look at the high value species of paua and rock lobster and the risks to future sustainability to understand the magnitude and size of the problem. In fact anyone watching Coastwatch recently would have been appalled at the amount of paua that so-called New Zealanders are blatantly stealing for the black markets in Asia.

To see this type of theft and to stop it will take drastic action. Sure the new paua dogs trained by the Ministry of Fisheries will assist in finding hidden caches in factories and sheds. But it won't stop the exports or the flow from the coast via the fish thieves, hence my call to ban the private export of all wild-caught paua by non-New Zealand nationals.

We have to stop the flow of paua leaving the country in the bags of Asian tourists or tour groups. These legitimate tourists in most cases do not know what is in the extra bags that arrive at the airport to depart as part of their group's baggage. In most parts they are innocent mules. This is organised crime – end of story.

So I say, if you are not travelling on a New Zealand passport, you should no longer be entitled to take out of the country a valued at-risk food source which most New Zealanders are being denied.

New Zealanders travelling on New Zealand passports should be entitled to take out a kilo of paua meat or their daily bag limit, no problems.

Let's face it. A kilo of paua meat makes a lot of fritters when you get to visit the whanau overseas. Anyone travelling on any other passport and taking paua should be required to show receipts of purchase from a licensed fish receiver or fish retailer.

Discrimination, yes! But drastic issues require drastic steps. And I don't buy into the discrimination talk, as we already have several areas in our laws where non-New Zealand nationals do not share the same rights as us. We only have to look at our health system to appreciate why we do in fact have discriminating rules for non-New Zealanders.

We must shut down the avenues for fish thieves to transport the stolen paua. By stopping the easy access to international black markets we will slow the buyers down and give our dogs and law enforcers time to find the hidden catches and seize them. It's just a thought!

As we lead into the summer season, the newly released shared fisheries discussion paper will be on the minds of all fisheries stakeholders. While I hear

many complaining noises from within the commercial fishing industry about reallocation and loss of jobs, we should remind ourselves that our fishing industry was built on a natural wild marine fish stock that belonged to the people of New Zealand.

Equally, we do not need to remind ourselves of the damage we did to these wild fish stocks by often wasteful fishing practices during the uncontrolled fishing period of the 1960s and 1970s to a state where many fish stocks could no longer sustain the level of harvest. Clearly the quota management system, or QMS, was instrumental in saving our fisheries and stopping the destructive decline in most fish stocks.

It also gave the commercial industry a right to harvest a share of the fishery contained within the total allowable commercial catch, or TACC, after the Minister of Fisheries had allowed for Maori customary, recreational non-commercial and all other mortalities associated with fishing.

The public was promised in the 1980s that they would see a rebuilding in our fisheries within 10 years. And yet after 20 years of the QMS, the fishing industry has yet to deliver this promise to the public.

One can understand why the non-commercial and recreational fishing public is now starting to make a noise. Because of this, the minister has taken this bold step to address the many issues recreational fishers feel aggrieved about.

The fishing industry should be working with other stakeholders to ensure that the public's future rights to a reasonable share are secured in law. If this means a reallocation of some key fish stocks of importance to them, we as a fishing industry should be ensuring that there is adequate provision of compensation and get on with life, instead of trying to deny the public its rightful share.

At *Professional Skipper* magazine we have now shared 10 Christmases with our readers. As we move into 2007, we wish everyone in this diverse and dynamic marine industry the very best for the festive season. May the next year bring you the rewards you have rightly worked for.

A very Merry Christmas from the team at *Professional Skipper*.

Keith Ingram, Editor