

BRAT PACK

FRUSTRATES MINISTER

BY KEITH INGRAM

The Minister of Fisheries, Jim Anderton, gave fishers a straight message, "Get on the boat or miss out," at their conference in Wellington.

"Anyone who thinks there are short-term solutions to the issues is telling tall fishing tales. We need to do better at pulling together to achieve both development and sustainability. Everyone has to give something," he said.

"When I say I want everyone with a stake in fishing to work cooperatively, I mean everyone, not just the industry. And those who don't are not being responsible and are not helping anyone, not even themselves.

"I would like to be able to report constructive cooperation around discussions on shared fisheries," Anderton said. "But what I have actually found is defensiveness. The commercial sector, and others, needs to wake up."

Yes, the minister is including us, the people of New Zealand who fish recreationally. "Let me make this clear," Anderton said. "The current management of shared fisheries

is unsatisfactory. It has to get better. As part of the process of making it better, I have invited you to be in the boat. The alternative is that you won't be aboard. The ship will still sail." What part of this message is unclear, I ask.

Clearly, the current shared fishing management system is not acceptable, otherwise why are we going through all this grief. There is a lack of guidance. There is uncertainty about allocation decisions, and uncertainty about providing for recreational and Maori customary take.

Shared fisheries proposals are not designed to take anyone's rights away, but to clear up uncertainty. "I am yet to hear anyone tell me why it's a good idea to leave important issues in a state of uncertainty," said Anderton.

Uncertainty threatens investments by the commercial sector. It discourages conservation efforts, and gets in the way of constructive cooperation among stakeholders. And uncertainty creates disenchantment among the public who only want to fish for food for the table.

The shared fisheries submission process shows that there is considerable support for change across the areas identified in the public discussion document. So if you accept that, then you accept there is a need for a better system. And therefore we should be able to resolve it, but it needs everyone to come out of their corners and contribute meaningfully to the debate.

Recently, we have seen in the media the strong position taken by Maori who are objecting to the shared fisheries discussion and consultation process, citing that any reallocation is eroding their treaty rights, their commercial rights.

Yes, they are suggesting that their commercial rights should be equal to their customary rights over and above the rights of other commercial fishers and the public of New Zealand. Somehow they have forgotten that their commercial rights start and end with a share of the total allowable commercial catch, the TACC, the same as every other commercial fisher. Nothing more, nothing less!

This does not detract or erode their customary or recreational rights. Effectively the Maori Party, along with a vocal portion within Maoridom, is now saying that they want to put their commercial rights above everybody else and above the sustainability of the fishery, and to hell with the rest of New Zealand, including those Maori who only fish for food for the table.

Well sorry, that's not how it works, and to be fair to Jim Anderton, he is trying his damndest to maintain a balance to ensure that all New Zealanders may enjoy the benefits of our natural marine fisheries.

The minister noted this in his speech when he said, "I know some industry figures took exception to my observation that some of the reaction to shared fisheries had been 'hysterical'. "For their benefit, let me again repeat my view that the outrageous analyses of shared fisheries proposals I've seen have indeed been 'hysterical'. I went to considerable lengths to ensure that compensation was the benchmark for any reallocation.

"On many occasions I have reiterated that any reallocation should be on a willing buyer-willing seller basis." Anderton said he was disappointed, however, in the reaction to discussion on shared fisheries. "What I have actually found is defensiveness. The current management of shared fisheries is unsatisfactory. It has to get better. This is not about undermining the Deed of Settlement. This is about future-proofing the settlement and safeguarding the resource for our mokopuna."

Jim Anderton also referred to his proposed amendment to the Fisheries Act, saying that his intention was to clarify the law and provide clearer direction to those making fisheries management decisions where information was inadequate.

"My amendment will make clear that where information is uncertain. Fish left in the sea are fish in the bank. To keep on taking fish when you don't have a good idea of how many are left is, in my view, like robbing the bank.

"When the act is amended there may well be constraints in short-term utilisation of some fisheries. But those short-term inconveniences will help to ensure a more sustainable base for the fishery in the long-term."

In summary, we have a Minister of Fisheries who is willing to show leadership in trying to resolve the many key issues and past grievances of the recreational fishing community. This includes all of us, including Maori who fish under the Amateur Fishing Regulations, only to be faced with a pack of squabbling, greedy brats who are putting their commercial fish dollar above the rights of all New Zealanders, including Maori, who fish for food.

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