



TALKS HALT INDUSTRIAL ACTION

Discussions between the Ministry of Fisheries and two unions, the PSA and the National Union of Public Employees, averted industrial action by fisheries officers over the Christmas holidays.

"I am pleased that we have reached agreement on a way to re-start bargaining," said the acting chief executive of MFish, Stan Crothers. A number of claims still had to be resolved. "But the constructive discussions provided a framework for addressing those issues," he said.

BOATS AND VEHICLES SEIZED IN PAUA BUSTS

Ministry of Fishery officers seized four four-wheel-drive vehicles, 170kg of paua, four vessels and a flat-deck truck in the Wellington region during pre-Christmas patrols.

The four vehicles, valued at a total of \$25,000, had been fitted with special tyres so that they could traverse difficult coastline to get to fishing grounds. An MFish district compliance manager, Ross Thurston, said they were seized on December 17 after an operation targeting paua divers on a remote area of the southern coast.

Earlier, fishery officers watched a man dive into Wellington Harbour and shuck 27kg of paua, which he then carried on his vessel to another area. After secreting the paua the same diver drove his vehicle to that area to recover the paua. Fishery officers intercepted him.

Following that, a fisheries patrol saw a second, unrelated man dive and shuck 20kg of paua. He also took the paua to another location to be picked up by the diver's associate. A fisheries patrol intercepted that haul.

Late in November, officers seized two further vessels and a flat deck truck, along with 115kg of paua.

"While the incidents appear unrelated, a dent has been made in the illegal take of paua from our coastline," said Thurston. "A worrying aspect is the poor state of the vessels, and it is dumb for divers to put their lives at risk to steal paua."

SOUTHERN FISHERS WELL BEHAVED

Recreational fishers in Southland behaved well during the Christmas period, with fisheries officers finding few problems with catches.

A Ministry of Fisheries district compliance manager, Reece Murphy, said overall that fishers had stuck to size and daily catch limits, with only a couple of minor infringements.

One of the most common breaches was people failing to measure their catch. "They measure paua, for instance, using the palm of their hand. We encourage them to take a ruler with them, or some sort of measuring device."

MFISH SEIZES TWO KOREAN FISHING VESSELS

The Ministry of Fisheries has seized two Korean fishing vessel in Dunedin within two weeks.

On December 7, MFish officials boarded and subsequently seized the Korean fishing vessel *Melilla 203*, and on December 18 they also seized the *Melilla 201*.

Both vessels are owned by Dae Hyun Agriculture & Fisheries Co Ltd and have been fishing in New Zealand waters for several years. They were fishing under charter to the New Zealand company Trans Pacific Fishing Ltd.

The investigation concerns misreporting catch from one fishing area to another, a practice commonly known in the fishing industry as "trucking", investigation manager Mike

Green said. The main species involved is ling, with the alleged offending potentially involving hundreds of tonnes of fish. Further analysis would be required to determine the full extent of the alleged offending, he said.

While he was happy with the progress of the investigation, Green said he was disappointed that some elements of the commercial industry offended in this manner.

"The penalties for this type of offending can be heavy, but unfortunately it doesn't seem to deter some, who obviously weigh up the financial benefits to be gained by their actions and decide to take that risk."

SNAPPER FOUND FLOATING

A recreational fisher reported seeing over 400 snapper floating off the eastern side of Coromandel Peninsula, just outside Coromandel Harbour, to the Ministry of Fisheries on December 19.

The fish were all at least 300mm long and appeared to have only been in the water a short time.

Later that day, a quantity of snapper washed ashore at several coastal areas, including Oamaru Bay and Kikowhakarere Bay, north of Coromandel township.

Fishery officers who examined the fish said they were not recreational catch, as they bore no signs of being hooked, and their number and condition indicated that they had come from a commercial vessel.

This was the third time in 2007 that large quantities of snapper floating in the Hauraki Gulf have been brought to the ministry's attention. Fishers convicted of dumping face fines of up to \$250,000 and forfeiture of vessels used in the offending.

The Fisheries Act requires commercial fishers to return snapper under the minimum legal commercial size of 250mm to the sea immediately, and it is not uncommon to find small snapper floating.

Anyone finding quantities of fish floating in the sea, particularly snapper over 250mm in length, should contact the nearest MFish office. They should record the time, location, species, size, range and estimate the quantity involved. The names and registration number of any vessels in the vicinity should also be recorded.

CHARTERBOATS VITAL IN MANAGING FISH STOCKS

Charterboat operators from around the country are becoming actively involved with a Ministry of Fisheries project that aims to better understand the marine recreational charter fishing sector.

The project, part of the government's 2006 Shared Fisheries initiative, has shown that the charter sector has an important part to play in managing key fish stocks.

"We're looking into how the information that individual operators have could be used to improve management collectively at both the fish stock and local area scale," says Phil Kirk, who is leading the MFish charterboat reporting project.

Meetings are being held in the main charter fishing areas, including the Bay of Islands, Auckland, the Bay of Plenty, the Marlborough Sounds and Christchurch. They will build on information from Shared Fisheries submissions or received from individual charterboat operators who have registered their interest in this work.

"Charterboat operators have been replying from all over the country, telling us about their activities and offering suggestions on how the information they have access to could improve fisheries management," says Kirk.

"They're keen to be involved in future consultations, and the

experience and understanding that the skippers have is critical to the success of this initiative.

"I'd really like skippers to pass the word around their networks and encourage people to make contact with us. If you are a marine charterboat skipper we'd like to hear from you."

Kirk says a clear message from the sector is that there is a need for a system that increases overall value.

One example is the catch and release activity that many charter operators undertake where the focus is not so much on catching fish for the table as the enjoyment gained from the challenge of hooking and playing the fish. This work provides an opportunity to improve the advice provided to the Minister of Fisheries when making decisions, and what can be done to improve the sector's ability to be involved in collective decision-making.

A recent reporting trial in the West Coast tuna charter fishing fleet highlights another potential use of the information. This project, led by Graeme McGregor of the Auckland MFish office, has produced useful information from keen operators.

"I think we all agree that helping to widen initiatives such as this could deliver great benefits to the sector and MFish," says Kirk.

"The charterboat reporting initiative needs to be built on a solid understanding of the sector and first-hand knowledge of what is possible from a practical point of view.

Phil Kirk and his team have set their sights firmly on adding value to New Zealand's fisheries management regime.

Charterboat operators who want to be involved should send their details to charter@fish.govt.nz

DOGS SNIFF OUT PAUA POACHERS

Two paua detection dogs had their noses put to the test on their first tour of duty sniffing out illegal paua in the Wairarapa

on February 5. The dogs, described by one of their handlers as a "Labrador and an SPCA street special", have sniffed out paua in mail centres, cargo holds and airports around the country. They can even detect illegal capsules containing abalone powder.

The dogs accompanied seven Ministry of Fisheries officers as they began a two-day sweep looking for illegal paua snatchers on the eve of Waitangi Day on the coastline from Mataikona in the north to Western Lake in the south.

The dogs are cast in two roles, active and passive. Passive detection dogs pinpoint and sit when they discover contraband, while active ones scratch, bite and retrieve when they come across it.

Ministry of Fisheries' Wairarapa surveillance officer Adrian Patete reckons it was a learning curve for all involved, human and canine.

"They're good catchers and a good deterrent. When people are hiding their ill-gotten paua these dogs will find it," Patete said.

According to the dogs' handlers, people are much more compliant about giving up poached paua when they know the dogs will be searching their vehicles.

Unfortunately, for the dogs at least, there weren't too many paua thieves around on the first day of the Wairarapa operation due to inclement weather.

However, the dogs did get to shine as they performed for a crew shooting footage for television's Coastwatch programme.

The dogs were more successful a couple of days later when they detected paua in the boot of a car at Ngawi, said Patete. As a result, the three occupants of the vehicle are facing prosecution for excess and undersized paua and crayfish and possibly forfeiture of their car.

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