

Editor:	Keith Ingram
Manager:	Vivienne Ingram
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Contributors:	Carol Forsyth Michael Pignéguy Hugh Ware, USA Kelvin Hiatt Stuart Cawker Lindsay Wright Alan Moore R. Lea Clough Lynton Diggle Steve Punter Trevor Coppock Hayley Campbell Louise Dechan-Owen Andrew Stevens Bob McDavitt Rodger Grayson Dave Wooff Jo Bascombe
Advertising:	Hamish Stewart
Designer:	Rachel Walker
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EDITORIAL

## WHEN THE BEST-LAID PLANS GO AWRY!

Even with the best of plans we can stuff up, as has happened with the Ministry of Fisheries' introduction of charter boat reporting. Let's face it, we are talking about some 500 potential clients here, all willing to assist in giving the Minister of Fisheries, Phil Heatley, better information on amateur catches.

No, this was not some precursor for establishing catch history in preparation for allocation of quota to restrict charter boat activity. This was a vain attempt to get better information about the catch and landing of amateur fishers who use charter boats to get access to our fishery in the hope of catching a feed.

Historically, charter boat operators have offered their services freely to gather a wide range of amateur catch information for NIWA and MFish. So, why has it become so hard this time?

Clearly, when first mooted, Heatley was made aware of the operators' concerns and was supportive. Unfortunately, that was the day he cut up his credit card and his world all turned to pooh.

Arrhah! He survived, although sadly he is not the same man. As a minister he now lacks his former confidence as the ministry's bureaucratic system appears to be taking control. Whatever common sense practices we negotiated with the minister and his officials is now a figment of distant imagination, because what is now being implemented defies all knowledge of previous discussions, agreed or otherwise.

At present I am sitting on some 7000 words of letters to the editor on this one issue, which is unprecedented in the history of this magazine. With over 12 pages of solid type there is far too much to read. For the second time only, we have abridged the letters while hopefully retaining the intent. However, all these letters have been sent to the minister for his perusal.

As we go to press, I have had a number of calls from charter boat skippers regarding MFish officers boarding and inspecting them out on the water and checking for log books, asking if they have registered as charter boat operators, etc.

The officers were polite, as it was initially classed as "educational", but it has raised a couple of issues. One operator had his full complement of passengers when four fisheries officers boarded his boat and checked his clients. He was over his passenger survey limit for the 45 minutes they were on board.

How does this situation place the skipper of the vessel in respect of his Maritime New Zealand safe ship management certificate?

Another vessel who has been boarded several times now reportedly has been given a verbal warning and yet he has complained that to do the registration on-line still requires him to post by snail mail the relevant supporting information and he is flat out on his boat at sea.

Meanwhile, others are already complaining

of the time reporting is taking and that they have to provide stamps and envelopes to send in even nil returns. Plus, we note there is no address to send the returns to. This is probably on the stamped, addressed envelopes that have yet to be supplied by FINNZ.

This situation is untenable, as I am aware of a number of vessel owners who are either threatening to take their vessels out of survey or have notified their safe ship management company of this intent.

In this regard, for my own reasons I have notified my safe ship management company that for the meantime I will be operating my own boat as a recreational vessel.

I have several reasons for this decision. First, in my position as an industry commentator I should know what's going on and cannot say I did not know, sir! But sadly, even the "oracle" is lacking vital information in this regard.

Secondly, as a fine, upstanding pillar of society, a JP and all, I must maintain a fit and proper status and set an example, with this I am having some difficulty.

Last but not least, when filling out the registration forms they want to know personal details of partners – information I do not deem to be relevant or that they need to know.

Our boat is owned by a company and a simple search of the company's office will reveal who the directors are. For privacy reasons alone, I have no intention of giving FINNZ or MFish personal details of my partner or the details of passports and drivers' licences of our wives, who are also directors. This is just over the top, especially when MFish is trying to curry favour with the charter boat fraternity.

Hence, I am now in a very invidious situation beyond my control, which is not to my liking. Minister, I make a plea for common sense.

On a more sobering note, as we go to press with this Christmas issue our hearts go out to the families of the 29 miners lost in the Pike River coal mine. Miners lost underground may be likened to seafarers lost at sea.

The unknown and the uncertainty of ever getting our lost ones back when tragedy strikes is the same whether at sea or underground.

With this thought in mind, please take care and enjoy the fruits of one's labours with family and friends this festive season.

From the team at *Professional Skipper*, we wish you all a very merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Keith Ingram, Editor