

# COMPLIANCE IS VITAL FOR SUSTAINABLE FISHING

BY JIM FLACK

Fishing is loved by many and employs tens of thousands of New Zealanders, but a huge part of protecting the sustainability of our fisheries is ensuring that fishers stick to the rules.

The Ministry of Fisheries has a compliance strategy that covers all aspects of fishing – recreational, customary and commercial fishing, says the national manager fisheries compliance, Steve Stuart.

MFish has 10 district offices and eight sub-district offices spread from Kaitaia to Invercargill, including an office on the Chatham Islands. There is 180 compliance staff on the job, of whom 150 include full-time fishery surveillance officers, fishery investigators and analysts. Then there are 160 honorary fishery officers actively working in the recreational sector.

The over-riding goal is to get all fishers following fisheries rules by encouraging high levels of voluntary compliance and creating an effective deterrent. Television, brochures and pamphlets that explain the rules, educational programmes and fishery officers spreading the word, are all tactics that are used.

Promoting voluntary compliance is backed up by deterrents for those who contemplate breaking the rules, says Steve. That means putting people before the courts where they can be subjected to very large fines and forfeit their fishing vessel and equipment.

“We have a compliance working group with fishing industry looking at ways to make our activities the most efficient and effective. “All this allows us to focus our resources on high priority areas where we can have the greatest impacts.”

MFish’s manager surveillance services, Dean Baigent, says one of the key focus areas is poaching and blackmarket activity. Paua and rock lobster are the two highest priority species.

“They will always be high priority because they are very accessible to the public. Both fetch a high price for little effort. We continue to receive reports that New Zealand paua is exported overseas on the black market.”

In response to this, an anti-poaching campaign has been set up, including the establishment of the 0800 4 POACHER telephone line. This campaign was set up on advice from the working group, and has received huge support from paua and rock lobster industries. It has resulted in a steady flow of information that has contributed to a substantial reduction in the illegal take, but poaching continues to be a concern.

“Our ultimate aim is to disrupt the complete blackmarket



Fisheries officer Scott Bernie

supply and distribution chain,” Baigent says. Paua detector dogs are now also working at border exits, and have sniffed out a number of illegal paua exports.

Retaining the integrity of the quota management system is also an important aspect of compliance. That includes commercial vessel inspections to ensure that fish is being accurately recorded and reported, and analysis of fishing returns.

An emerging priority on the agenda for next year is shellfish, including pipis, cockles and mussels. “We’re seeing particular concerns in the Auckland region. It seems that where there’s a pattern of a growing population, there’s also a pattern of a depleting shellfish fishery.”

Project Protector is another initiative due to kick off soon. This involves several government agencies using seven new Royal New Zealand Navy vessels and Royal New Zealand Air Force to patrol New Zealand’s exclusive economic zone. Monitoring New Zealand’s fisheries will be a big part of that.

The upshot of all this activity doesn’t mean that MFish has everything covered, though. Steve says the biggest challenge comes back to a numbers game.

In particular, he cites 15,000km of coastline with over 1000 commercial fishing entities, numerous licensed fish receivers, hundreds of thousands of recreational fishers and lack of capacity to reach everything.

“Patrolling this is an immense undertaking, which is why we invest so much energy into promoting voluntary compliance and educating the public about the rules.”

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