

# Shared Fisheries – Working Towards Agreed Solutions

## Introduction

New Zealand's inshore fisheries face competing demands and different expectations from the commercial, recreational and customary sectors, all of whom have a share in the Total Allowable Catch for fish stocks. The allocation of fish stocks in shared fisheries is a challenge for fisheries management. Some of the historical allocations remain in contention. Unfortunately, current fisheries legislation does not provide a robust framework for resolution of inter-sectoral issues or a means by which we can move forward. This leads to uncertainty which in turn can lead to tension between the sectors. Conflict, however, is overstated. There is common ground between the sectors and cases where we work well together.

## Why change things?

Effective management is currently undermined by poor information on amateur catch, and uncertainty surrounding the process for allocating available catch between commercial, customary and amateur fishers. This situation needs to change to secure the future of shared fisheries in New Zealand. Doing nothing would simply ignore the environmental risks associated with management decisions based on poor information, the costs of ongoing contention and litigation, and the loss of value associated with inadequate incentives for all sectors to protect and improve shared fisheries.

The ultimate aim of shared fisheries management is to provide opportunities for New Zealanders to get the best value – the best mix of financial value and other values – from the use of our fisheries resources. As with all fisheries management, there is an overriding need to protect the sustainability of fisheries resources.

At present it is difficult to assess the value of fisheries to the customary and amateur sectors because there is too little information available about who is catching what, where and when. Lack of good information on catch makes it difficult to manage fisheries sustainably. One of the main objectives of the proposals and options in this paper is to produce better information about use of the fisheries and so strengthen management.

Management of shared fisheries will also be strengthened by improving how value is distributed. Where rules for allocation processes are not well defined, fishers from all sectors become concerned over the future of their access to fisheries resources. This uncertainty discourages both conservation initiatives and cooperation between the different sectors that use shared fisheries, because each group is worried that the benefits of its work will be lost to others in the allocation process.

So, another main objective of the proposals in this paper is to produce a better allocation process that is clear and takes into account different fishing values.

## Ministry of Fisheries process

In January 2006 the Minister of Fisheries announced talks on shared fisheries. He said that in order to get better value from our shared fisheries "we need people working together rather than against each other".

To that end the Ministry of Fisheries has held separate talks with recreational, customary and commercial groups about the allocation of shared fisheries. A discussion paper was released in August 2006 containing options for addressing issues of concern in shared fisheries. The stated aims of the MFish process are to:

- Improve certainty in setting and adjusting shares of the

## Total Allowable Catch

- Improve the collection of information on recreational harvest
- Manage commercial and recreational takes within their allocations
- Set a TAC that considers the balance between catch rates and yield to maximise overall value
- Enhance the management of recreational and customary components

The Ministry's discussion paper will be open for submissions for about four months. The Ministry intends to present a paper to Cabinet with recommended reforms by June 2007. This will be followed by a Bill in about September 2007. It is unclear whether the Ministry also intends complementary non-legislative measures.

## Discussions between SeaFIC, NZ Recreational Fishing Council and Te Ohu Kaimoana

The Ministry process has motivated three key non-government organisations who represent the commercial and recreational sectors to initiate high level discussions about shared fisheries. The customary non-commercial sector is not directly represented. We propose, however, that the input of the sector be facilitated through the initial dialogue with mandated iwi organisations who would be expected to work with kaitiaki.

Our aim is that dialogue between the sectors to identify issues and propose solutions is preferable to a government imposed solution. The process initiated by the Ministry of Fisheries is a one-off and represents a significant opportunity to move forward. We believe, however, that to get an enduring solution it is important to build on common ground between the sectors and to focus on finding answers to agreed issues. We want to make sure the issues are defined broadly enough and that the solutions are broad in scope as well.

Representatives of SeaFIC, the New Zealand Recreational Fishing Council and Te Ohu Kaimoana met on 23 May 2007 on a no prejudice basis to discuss at a preliminary level ways of resolving allocation and management issues for shared fisheries. We sought to identify common ground and areas of difference where further discussions and work might be beneficial. This paper is the outcome of that meeting.

## Purpose of paper

The purpose of this paper is to facilitate discussion on shared fisheries by constituents of the commercial, recreational and customary non-commercial fishing sectors. The paper identifies, on an issue by issue basis, areas where agreement between the sectors is likely as well as areas where further work and negotiation will be needed.

It is expected that constituents of each sector might use the paper to think about how they would like the issues identified in it resolved. Their views could then be brought forward into future discussions (or negotiations) between the sectors. An ideal would be to agree on a joint package, supported by constituents of each of the sectors, that could be presented to the Ministry of Fisheries that could feed into the process already underway.

## Issues

The issues fall into three broad categories:

- I Illegal fishing
- II Allocation
  - Sharing the Total Allowable Catch – setting and changing allocations