

Anger at Ministry Blue Cod Proposals (special report)

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Marlborough recreational fishers have rejected a Ministry of Fisheries proposal to close parts of the Marlborough Sounds to all hook and line fishing to avert a perceived blue cod crisis. At public meetings organised by the Marlborough Recreational Fishers' Association held in Blenheim and Picton in early April, recreational fishers made their feelings plain. Both meetings had big turnouts with over 300 in total.

David Scranney, scientist Ministry of Fisheries, said the proposals were based on relative abundance surveys and showed decline of 43 percent of "greater than 30 cm fish since 2004". Juvenile decline across all areas surveyed was on an average of 60 percent.

But a number of fishermen particularly at the Picton meeting challenged this saying the blue cod fishery was not endangered as the ministry claimed.

Ken Rowe said there are plenty of blue cod out while Steve George of Craglee Lodge questioned if there was a cod crisis?

"Last year was the best year in our bay for blue cod, the biggest being 62 cms. In August we were getting 40-50 cm cod regularly. I believe the fishery is in good heart.

Closures are not the answer or justified."

Ken Knight questioned ministry estimates that recreational anglers catch 159 tonnes.

He said working figures back, the 159 tonnes pointed to over 800 boats every day.

" The figures don't stack up right," he said. At Blenheim local angler Craig Bason questioned the validity of MFish's study of surveying three days of angler's catches over Easter when there were visitors from Wellington, Christchurch and outside plus increased numbers of locals.

"To use that as a basis for the year's catch is wrong The 159 tonnes MFish attribute to recreational fishing is highly exaggerated," he said.

Marlborough Recreational Fishers president Lloyd Hanson questioned the lack of consultation and the short time for submissions.

"Why is there such haste? Hurried law is not good law," he said.

Tony Orman supported Lloyd Hanson over the rushed consultation.

" It should be noted the Marlborough Recreational Fishers' Association organised this meeting, not the ministry. It is just 14 days - two short weeks- until submissions close. It is not good enough."

He described MFish's paper as poorly conceived and thought out.

" The research is flimsy based on one day's sampling at the wrong time when cod were spawning and there were no samples inside Dieffenbach Point, yet MFish proposes closing all of the Grove Arm and Queen Charlotte Sound inside Dieffenbach Point. By nature it's not blue cod habitat.

Lloyd Hanson said MFish had ignored the commercial cod potting off the east coast, the spawning area for Sounds cod, where 17 tonnes were caught in a week or two.

Mike Stoneley questioned how serious MFish was on consultation.

"I tried to talk to the local MFish office and got fobbed off and told to look at their website. Only one third of people have a computer. I pay taxes for a better deal than this. This is a rushed proposal.

The meeting decided to write to the Minister of Fisheries demanding the consultation process be extended by six months.

Another motion was to reject the Ministry blue cod paper as it lacked sound research and full consultation.