

Minutes of Public Meeting on Ministry of Fisheries Blue Cod Marlborough Sounds Proposals, held at Waikawa Boating Club, Thursday 10 April, 2008

Present: 120 people (estimated), chaired by Sturrock Saunders

Introduction: **Lloyd Hanson, president of Marlborough Recreational Fishers Association,** welcomed attendees and David Scranney of the Ministry of Fisheries.

The Marlborough Recreational Fishers had arranged the meetings to allow full public discussion. Consultation follows a process of a proposal, listening, considering and then a decision. It is important to have an open mind and listen and I ask you all to do that tonight.

Sturrock Saunders (chairman) congratulated the MRFA on hosting the meeting. He said he had no affiliations to any organisation, outlined the agenda and rules of debate and said the three motions passed at last night's meeting in Blenheim would be tested tonight.

Apologies: John B Henderson (Tory Channel), Ted Collins, Simon Chaffey, Glenys Payne, Murray Neal, Jon Wright, Joe Heberley

David Scranney, scientist Ministry of Fisheries, said the proposals were based on relative abundance surveys. We were dismayed to see from those relative abundance surveys to see a decline in blue cod. Short-term management remedies are needed now.

"Recruited blue cod greater than 30 cm, continued to decline in both the Pelorus and Queen Charlotte Sounds. East D'Urville Island showed a 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.

No blue cod were caught in the inner Queen Charlotte Sounds for the first time. The intention of the position paper is consultation. There is a wide range of possible measures, from strong to weaker. Nothing is written in stone. Community input is absolutely key to success.

The overriding issue is the recreational fishing pressure - we need to slow down the recreational catch.

What is the intention? There is no preferred MFish view. It hinges on a balance of minimal impact to the community and an ability to allow blue cod populations to rebuild. We need your input by way of submissions.

To be heard discuss your ideas with the Marlborough Recreational Fishers Association and/or Soundfish. Then write submissions, post or e mail, to Tracey Steel, MFish, P O Box 1020, Wellington or tracey.steel@fish.govt.nz

Lance Wichman, deputy chairman Soundfish explained the composition of Soundfish, formally constituted in January, 2007, as a multi-sector group embracing recreational, commercial and customary sectors. Soundfish was invited by MFish to contribute to the development of an IPP paper. Important was to create boundaries to work with in and create a Marlborough Sounds Management Area.

We have frankly been disappointed MFish haven't included a number of important points in our submission.

Soundfish considered closed areas had merit but need to be meaningful but that shore and jetty fishing would be allowed in those areas. There should be consideration to access to other species, e.g.

snapper. Based on the Fiordland model, there is room for involvement in research by the recreational public. Other Soundfish proposals included 6/0 hooks, preferably barbless, one hook per line, a bag limit of 3 with no accumulation and a size limit of 30 cms.

Discussion.

Mark Baxter:- I'm a charter boat operator but MFish don't know who I am. They've never consulted or contacted me. I do 200 trips a year. Previously I was away then returned to Marlborough and noticed there were many more fish in the Sounds than previously. And more particularly in areas such as Tory Channel which MFish proposes closing.

On consultation I tried looking up the proposals on the MFish website. It was difficult to find; in fact it's atrocious.

On closed areas it is interesting to note Double Cove which has been closed but has not benefited. So closure isn't necessarily the answer.

There are a few myths out there about blue cod. Tory Channel is not a nursery area. Cod spawn outside in the Strait and the juveniles come in. Another observation is the Sounds are not as heavily fished as they were 20 years ago.

Piero Rocco:- I have done scientific research in Mediterranean and Tasman Bay when I came to New Zealand. I "discovered" the spawning snapper in Tasman Bay. It is essential to know the biology and population dynamics of the fish. In 1991 Dr David Sampson (USA) was brought out by government to do research. He recommended the commercial fishing pressure needs attention, pointing out the commercial tonnage had tripled. Section 21 of Fisheries Act requires the minister(ministry) to consider recreational interests as paramount. Every Kiwi bloke has the right to fish. The Kahawai Legal Challenge told the government it was failing to consider recreational fishing in management as required by the Act.

Yet recreational bag limits have been reduced with no reduction in commercial quota. Another worrying aspect is the sex ratio imbalance with about 20 female for one male.

Ken Rowe:- I fish Tory Channel every day, taking just two fish. There are plenty of blue cod out there. There is insufficient information by MFish on the life cycle of the blue cod and the effect of commercial fishing.

Tony Cridge:- there is insufficient information on blue cod. Are MFish going to do more research?

David Scranney:- There is an intention to carry out more research with next summer the value of the fishery being assessed and on life cycles. The perennial problem is budget.

Dennis McManaway:- My problem with bureaucrats and MFish in particular is they don't listen. It must be remembered the Marlborough Sounds is only one part of the South Island's blue cod system.

Colin Sisson:- Why was the survey not done inside Dieffenbach Point, yet MFish have proposed closure inside that. I did not see MFish in Tory Channel or Curious Cove. Seals are right in the Sounds; they wouldn't be there if there were no fish.

One problem with habitat is sewerage dumped by ferries and cruise ships. When are you people (MFish) going to get off your backsides to deal with that instead of proposing ridiculous closures?

Lloyd Hanson:- 6/0 hooks are not the answer. I use circle 4/0 hooks and of some 200 cod, only one was not lip hooked. It's not hook size but hook design that's important.

On research I believe NIWA for MFish did a ramp survey of boats at Waikawa - 18 months ago. Why is that not collated?

David Scranney:- I've seen drafts; it was considered and it showed blue cod are the most targeted species, 40 percent at Waikawa and up to 70 percent at Okiwi Bay.

Mike Reeves:- Ferries have had a big adverse impact on ecology and fish stocks. MFish have a lot to answer for by inaction.

Seals are a major predator even eating paua from the shell and crayfish and fish such as butterfish.

Steve George:- Is there 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.

The NIWA researchers stayed at our lodge (Craglee Lodge). In conversation, NIWA told of an aerial count of boats. Wrongly they assume every boat was fishing. Closures are not the answer or justified.

John McCarthy:- On predation, shags are a major predator and there are many more compared to 30 years ago.

Ken Knight:- MFish say recreational anglers catch 159 tonnes. Working on 3 people per boat, that equates to 822 boats every day a year! The figures don't stack up right.

Graeme Ward:- In 35 years of fishing the Sounds, I have never been approached by a fisheries officer. Just how is MFish going to police these draconian measures they propose?

I have no faith in the Ministry of Fisheries.

David Scranney:- Compliance officers check 6,000 anglers/boats a year.

Mike:- How do North Islanders get a bigger bag limit than the Marlborough Sounds? If we went over there caught 20 and then came back to Picton we would get fined for more than 3 in our possession. It's wrong and stupid.

David Scranney:- The 3/20 bag limits is an anomaly. I've raised the matter. It's on the MFish agenda.

Unidentified:- How long will it take MFish? MFish have taken years now and got nowhere!

Gordon Lowe:- I love snapper fishing but under your proposals, your closure will prevent me fishing and the closed area is not blue cod country.

Piero Rocco:- A priority for research should be to tag blue cod in Cape Campbell area to ascertain their migration pattern - into the Sounds?

David Scranney:- That's the sort of feedback we want and ten to work in wit Soundfish and the Marlborough Recreational Fishers' Association.

Steffan Browning:- A major problem is dredging for scallops. A Foveaux Strait study showed undredged areas to have an increase in cod with juveniles able to rebuild. Yet we have commercial dredging in the Sounds. MFish know of the Foveaux Strait study too.

Unidentified:- I dredge commercially in Golden Bay and you can catch blue cod there. You're talking rubbish!

Unidentified:- Blue cod don't breed in sand; they inhabit rocky areas.

Des Boyce:- We've disagreed with MFish but talked to them face to face and have resolved some differences. The reality is to put your feelings and facts on paper in submissions. We're not in bed with MFish.

A major point is the boundary. Nelson resist because they didn't want to lose their 10 snapper limit on west side of D'Urville.

We are having public meetings here, but Nelson aren't. Thanks to Marlborough Recreational Fishers' Assn for local meetings both which have been excellent.

Bruce Lock:- In the Bay of Many Coves, shags are gobbling up released fish. It's a major problem. Due to that there's high mortality.

Shags and seals are recreational fishers!

Lots of people have come to the two meetings. Does MFish take notice of these meetings?

David Scranney:- Yes but you do need to write submissions in.

Alan Morris:-MAF did a mortality study, 20 or so years ago. There was not one death from released fish. I use 4/0 hooks and they come out easy. Nor can you stop kids fishing off wharves as you propose. The price of fuel will limit the fishing. But overall we're today catching bigger and better blue cod than before.

Lawrie Saunders:- It seems much more research needs to be done. I submitted on the Hector Dolphin/netting issue and never received any acknowledgement. Will verbal submissions on the blue cod issue be acceptable?

David Scranney:- Yes I agree we need more research. It is critical. I intend to acknowledge submissions. We think we have enough evidence to act. Practice is for no oral submissions, only written.

Piero Rocco:-The Marlborough Recreational Fishers Association has long advocated a six cod limit everywhere. When I suggested the 20 cod limit be 6 (everywhere), the Minister Hodgson said "they (Wellington people) would kill me."

So it was political not management.

The Minister told me to create a group and committee and work with MFish on that.

The Minister left whereupon the MFish officer said "over my dead body."

That arrogant attitude is what we have battled against.

However despite those instances it is important we mend bridges and get positive consultation, dialogue and constructive moves to management.

Chairman Sturrock Saunders then put the motions of the previous night's meeting to a show of hands.

Motion: That this meeting write to the Minister of Fisheries demanding the consultation process be extended by six months. (Stoneley/Dalliessi)

Passed unanimously except for a couple of abstentions

Motion: That the IPP Blue Cod paper be rejected in its entirety, and that the Ministry of Fisheries offer proposals for the blue cod fishery based on sound research completed over the entire Marlborough Sounds area after boundary adjustments and full public consultation .

(Hanson/Orman)

Passed with 75 percent support, 2 against, rest abstentions.

Motion: That this meeting supports in general the actions and proposals of Soundfish.

(Dalliessi/Sharon Smith)

Passed with 80 percent in favour, 10 abstentions

Meeting closed at 9.40