

Minutes of Public Meeting on Ministry of Fisheries Blue Cod Marlborough Sounds Proposals, held at Blenheim Bowling Club, Wednesday 9 April, 2008

Present: 170 people (estimated), chaired by Stuart Smith

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

"The Marlborough Recreational Fishers had arranged the meeting and the next night at Waikawa, to allow full discussion. Consultation follows a process of a proposal, listening, considering and then a decision. It is important to have an open mind and listen. I invite people to join the Marlborough Recreational Fishers' Association; without it there would have been no public meetings."

Stuart Smith (chairman) outlined the agenda and rules of debate - keep questions, comments brief with a limit of 3 minutes. One person entitled to two comments.

Apologies: Bob Marks, Ted Collins, John B Henderson, (Wellington) Rob Clarke, Kerry Wadsworth, Geoff Rowling.

David Scranney, scientist Ministry of Fisheries, said the proposals were based on relative abundance surveys. "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.

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.

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.

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.

Max George:- There should be no short-term closures, longer term is better. We need more long-term proposals. Some of the proposed closure areas are just not blue cod habitat and are therefore meaningless. Creating habitat with artificial reefs should be implemented by sinking structures.

Piero Rocco:- The Fisheries Act requires that recreational fishing has to be considered first. Instead there has been preference given to commercial. Commercial cod potters have fished the spawning areas near Cape Campbell and Ward, which by currents, "seed" the Sounds.

' The research last September was poorly timed when adult blue cod were spawning in deeper, mid water areas. Work by US scientist Dr Sampson pinpointed the commercial blue cod fishery as needing scrutiny. Excessive harvesting of larger males could have serious consequences.

David Miller:- Soundfish have come up with sound proposals. MFish should be considering these. What does MFish think?

David Scranney (MFish):- Soundfish proposals have good value in my opinion. But we do need to look at immediate measures.

Jean Hadley:- There is a need for research on blue cod reproduction. East Bay (Arapawa Island) study shows the zone, 200 metres from shore, is important habitat to blue cod. Funding is needed for research while any habitat enhancement must be linked to prevent juvenile mortality.

David Scranney (MFish):- There is poor information on blue cod spawning. Part of the problem is inadequate funding. Habitat enhancement will increase the "carrying capacity". It could be a valuable longer-term measure.

Des Boyce (Soundfish). Soundfish endorse the value of habitat enhancement.

Steffan Browning:- On the subject of habitat, dredging has an adverse impact. In one case studied over a 7-year period, an undredged area showed over a 200 percent improvement of habitat and cod compared to dredged areas. Scallop dredging should be stopped. Combine that with managed bag limits and the fishery would greatly benefit.

Craig Bason:- I question 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 erroneous. The 159 tonnes MFish attribute to recreational fishing is highly exaggerated.

Piero Rocco:- Research from the UK shows mussel farms destroyed plankton and fish eggs. There have been 25 years of mussel farms yet no research to examine the Marlborough Sounds predation by mussel farms on fish spawn.

David Scranney (MFish): The research at Easter was at Okiwi Bay with many presumably being Nelson boats. The commercial cod potting for D'Urville Island is about 11 tonnes. Mussel farms do take eggs, but then Queen Charlotte Sound has relatively few mussel farms.

Paul Anderson:- Bag limits are ridiculous such as five groper per person.

Lloyd Hanson:-From Dieffenbach Point MFish sampled no blue cod yet said none were caught in the inner Sound. MFish have closed all up the Queen Charlotte Sound into the Grove Arm yet generally it's not blue cod habitat.

The samples were only in several spots and were inadequate to base such sweeping changes. It doesn't make sense. Line fishing from the shore should be allowed. It catches few, if any, cod. Why ban it?

And on having to keep fish whole, why not allow filleting, but the frames have to be kept until landed. You can measure a fish frame. On limiting to 6/0 hooks, what if one wants to target tarakihi?

Why is there such indecent haste? Hurried law is not good law.

David Scranney: There were 44 cod pots used in study. Tarakihi have been caught on 6/0 hooks.

Tony Orman:- I back Lloyd Hanson on 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.

As to MFish's paper it is 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.

MFish have ignore the cod potting off the east coast where 17 tonnes were caught in a week or two. That's equivalent to 17,000 one kg fish taken from the main spawning area.

Mike Stoneley: I support Tony's views - in fact he's stolen my thunder. I question how serious MFish is 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.

The Marlborough Angling and Surfcasting Club, formed in 1948, had no notification. The Ministry has made its mind up.

I pay taxes for a better deal than this. These are rushed proposals.

David Scranney:-You shouldn't have been "fobbed off." But I encourage you all to write submissions.

Mike Stoneley:- Come off it. You never consulted the Marlborough Surfcasting and Angling Club with 100 members. What about other clubs? You've never been near them.

The time frame is too short. This meeting should write to the Minister and tell him so.

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

Martin Barlow (Tasfish):- There are undoubtedly too many cod being taken. There is a lack of research. I totally disagree with MFish's proposals to close areas. It's a sledgehammer to crack a nut. They're going to close down recreational fishing but allow commercial boats to continue.

The process is poor. The minister had data last November and they never presented it to the Top of the South Fishing Forum which I'm on. I'm wound up over this. I'm angry. I read in the paper MFish saying they consulted. What rubbish! They've shafted us. They haven't involved the public in the process. We must send a united message to the Minister about the poor process.

Why not just have "no take" blue cod areas. There may be some mortality on released fish but it's minimal, under 25 percent at the most. At least that leaves the 75 percent there.

Peter Kimber:-Wellington boats fish under a different limit bag, i.e. 20 per person and fish the Sounds with no penalty.

David Scranney (MFish):- We have no evidence of Wellington boats catching over their limit. (Loud laughter)

Piero Rocco: I witnessed a Mana boat take over 100 cod off Witts Rock. When I said something they gave me finger.

On the research side, I have with Marlborough Boys College conducted blue cod research with MFish's permission the first year. MFish refused to grant me a permit second year. Their research is scanty. Don't they want to have knowledge?

I invited - once again - MFish to come and see our research. MFish never came.

I emphasise Section 21 of the Fisheries Act requires the minister to look after first and foremost, recreational fishing.

On the alleged 159 tonne MFish claims recreational fishers catch, I keep a log book. It shows 403 cod caught over 56 fishing trips. If you use that, I estimate the true recreational catch to be 40 or 50 tonnes.

Jean Hadley:- How did the ministry arrive at the figure? We have never been approached on the water by a MFish officer.

David Scranney (MFish):- A science group with NIWA carried out a visual aerial count of boats over holiday time.

Ruffy Newman:- Fishing over 35 years, I can say blue cod have declined. But you become conservation minded and adapt. There's a need to target the city slickers who come to the Sounds and rape the resource four or five times a year. How do you police it?

David Scranney:- Compliance staff are limited in funding.

Speaker Unidentified:- If an area is closed, for a time who decides when it's ready for reopening?

Richard Drummond:- How about closing the Sounds every statutory holiday?

Dick Herkt:- I fished in Cairns and during spawning for coral trout, they closed the area up for a few months.

Roger Hamilton:- When you open a closed area up there'll be a mad stampede to fish it. And when you close an area like Tory Channel you'll add to pressure on the northern entrance to Queen Charlotte Sound. Closure is not necessarily the answer.

Lloyd Hanson:- It seems the meeting rejects the MFish proposals as inadequately research based, lacking an understanding of recreational fishing, and to be impractical in terms of compliance and of benefit to blue cod. Instead this meeting should call for sound research, full public consultation and measures both in education and regulation that will benefit blue cod, notwithstanding that an urgent readjustment of the outer boundary is needed.

**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 strongly

Lloyd Hanson:- On consultation, who has been approached by the Ministry"
(Five put hands up, 4 Soundfish, one Tasfish.)

Mortality is overrated. I understand on a study with cod put in survival tanks only one cod was lost. Design of hooks (e.g. circle hooks) is more important than hook size.

David Scranney (MFish):- This is a chance to do something for blue cod. I urge you to make submissions.

Martin Barlow: I agree with the motion just passed but MFish will go their own way.

Unidentified Speaker:- Sounding proposal was tossed out because people got together and fought it.

Daryl Crimp: MFish have put a proposal on paper. There's no meaningful intent. We know it's crap. Put in a submission.

Tony Orman:- One thing that hasn't been mentioned, is it's election year. The one-year out of three when politicians are likely to listen. It's no good being timid. Hit them with the motions.

**Motion: That this meeting supports in general the actions and proposals of Soundfish.
(Dalliessi/Sharon Smith)
passed with 4 abstentions**

20x noes on a show of hands.

Jean Hadley: Thank you to the Marlborough Recreational Fishers' Association for organising this meeting. I urge the association and you all to become more proactive.

Roger Randall:- Piero Rocco has done research yet MFish ignores it.

The meeting closed at 10 pm