

## **SUBMISSION ON PROPOSED MANAGEMENT CHANGES FOR BLUE COD IN THE MARLBOROUGH SOUNDS**

**TO: Ministry of Fisheries**

**FROM: Mr A R Meehan**  
**Onahau Bay**  
**Queen Charlotte Sound**

### **Introduction**

1. I make this submission as an owner of 15 years' duration of a property at Onahau Bay, Queen Charlotte Sound. My family and I are regular visitors to our property in the Sound from our home in Wellington; I estimate we spend 6-8 weeks there every year.
2. I am a recreational fisherman fishing from our property, by boat, throughout the Sounds, on average every second day during the six to eight weeks we are in the Sounds; and this over the last 15 years. 90% of the fishing I do throughout New Zealand is in the inner Queen Charlotte Sound, principally the Tory Channel area.

### **Opposition to M'Fish Proposals**

3. I strongly oppose the basket of new management measures proposed for blue cod by the Ministry of Fisheries set out in material published by the Ministry.
4. I am aware, and at this time am undertaking a careful consideration, of the Ministry's IPP (Initial Position Paper) contained within the Ministry's documentation *Review of Regulatory Measures and Other Management Controls for 1 October 2008* posted on the Ministry's website and with particular reference to the alleged "*localised depletion of blue cod in the Marlborough Sounds*".
5. I file this submission within the timeframes published, in particular the closing date for submissions, 23 April 2008.

### **Ministry undertakings**

6. I am encouraged that the Ministry has sought feedback from the community and has undertaken, as I read the Ministry's published material, to:

- Ensure any proposed measures are practicable, for fishers.
- Ensure the proposed fisheries measures have sufficient community buy-in.

### **My experience**

7. In my recent recreational fishing activities, in the calendar year 2007 for instance, there were more and bigger blue cod available for recreational catch than in any other year that I have been in the Marlborough Sounds. This is consistent with advice I have received from other recreational fishers. I understand that charter operators have publicly stated that 2007 fishing has been as good as any in the last decade.
8. Whilst I have yet to have an opportunity to consider in greater detail the IPP referable to the new management measures for blue cod in the Marlborough Sounds, I note that some of the conclusions drawn by the Ministry are dependent upon estimates only of recreational harvest based on “boat ramp interview” and “aerial overflight survey”. I do not accept these are reliable indicators (for they can be no more than anecdotal musings) and in 15 years I have never been interviewed.
9. Absent the quantitative information on recreational catch upon which sustainable management measures must, in my view, be based, there can be no integrity in the foundation for the Ministry’s proposals. This is, of course, also crucial if the proposed measures are to be practicable and to secure the support of the local community.

### **Property right**

10. It has long been argued, and I consider cannot be resisted, that recreational fishers have a property right safeguarding their access to the recreational fisheries such as blue cod in the Marlborough Sounds. This right of access, much treasured by New Zealanders undertaking sustainable recreational fishing activities, carries with it an opportunity for recreational fishers to invest in dwelling houses, boats and fishing equipment close to the resource, in this case within Queen Charlotte Sound. It is fundamentally wrong to deny or frustrate the exercise of this property right without compelling evidence.

11. I am particularly concerned to note that a so-called “**temporary**” prohibition for **all** hook and line fishing for three years is proposed inside a line from Bull Head to Ruaomoko Point to Otamango Point including the Tory Channel to East Head and West Head. This is as extreme a position as could possibly be contemplated by any reasonable right-thinking person. Indeed no right thinking person would consider something so draconian.
12. This will prevent children of all ages, even those still very young but old enough to hold a small fishing rod and fish off a jetty in the Marlborough Sounds, from fishing for the next three years. When I inquired of Ministry staff as to whether they understood these implications of such a closure, I was told that this was not really the intention of the proposed new management measures, although it seemed to be acknowledged that it would most certainly be the result. So the outcome is that generations of New Zealanders will be penalised over the next three years, being prevented from fishing from boats, by hook and line, but also as so many of them do, off the jetties throughout the Sounds. It will also prevent snapper fishing in the Grove Arm of the Queen Charlotte Sound (being the principal fishing zone for snapper) leaving Kenepuru Sound being the only remaining option with major accompanying travel and cost implications for fishers.

### **The science**

13. It is well known in the public domain that there is no reliable data as to the recreational take in fisheries through New Zealand. The Ministry has itself admitted that it does not have available to it anything remotely of the quality science and research such as is available from commercial fisheries management measures throughout New Zealand. It cannot be right to penalise recreational fishers if science and quantitative assessments of integrity are not available. Even as recently as the Ministry’s Annual Report for 2006/07, the Ministry identified that effective management of “shared fisheries” is compromised by poor information on amateur catch. Iconic species such as snapper and blue cod, which we fish for throughout the Sounds on a responsible and sustainable basis, are amongst those listed by the Ministry as those for which there is “poor information” on recreational/amateur catch.

14. I challenge the science and resist the conclusions the Ministry has drawn. I ask that the science and assessments that the Ministry has made be peer reviewed immediately and that you consult with me and others who are vitally interested in this matter about the peer review process necessary to ensure integrity of result.

**Consultation and the way forward**

15. I ask that you urgently call meetings of interested parties to debate and discuss the proposals you have published as new management measures for blue cod in the Marlborough Sounds. I have conferred with a large number of private property owners and recreational/amateur fishers in Queen Charlotte Sound. I have their support for this submission.
16. I am prepared to meet with Ministry staff in Wellington or Picton at properly convened meetings for such purpose.
17. I have also retained legal counsel to advise on steps available to us to prevent these extreme and draconian measures as proposed in the IPP, and other published material, being implemented by the Ministry. It would be a pity if recourse to the Courts was to become necessary. I would be hopeful that proper consultation (and by “consultation” I mean in terms of which the law provides) will be undertaken immediately and in good faith by the Ministry. I am confident that if undertaken properly, responsibly and lawfully, it will be clear that the measures proposed are unwarranted, unnecessary, unreasonable, impractical, and without necessary support from the informed community.

**DATED** at Wellington this 23rd day of April 2008.

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**A R Meehan**