

MARLBOROUGH RECREATIONAL FISHERS ASSOCIATION INC

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Marlborough Blue Cod Fishery A Blueprint for action

Introduction

The history of the controversial ban on blue cod fishing in the Marlborough Sounds shows it was ushered in by the previous government in most unusual fashion. The first proposal was to ban all recreational line fishing throughout the Sounds which was naturally, strongly rejected by the public. That proposal was then altered to ban all blue cod fishing in the Marlborough Sounds. The Marlborough Recreational Fishers' Association (MRFA), not convinced of the justification held two public meetings one in Picton and the other at Waikawa, near Picton, both which were extremely well attended and both which unanimously at one and by the vast majority in the other, rejected the ban.

The feeling is shown by comments from the minutes of those meetings.

A charter boat operator doing 200 trips a year: "There are many more fish in the Sounds than previously." A long time fisher: "I fish Tory Channel every day, there are plenty of blue cod out there."

A fishing lodge owner: "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 Ministry claimed on their research: that blue cod stocks had been decimated by recreational fishing. Their solution, ban all recreational hook and line fishing for the species. As Scott Williamson of Ministry of Fisheries, Nelson, put it the "best science available shows that this (blue cod) fishery is "in serious decline."

But was there a cod crisis?

What is the "best science available" that Ministry of Fisheries manager Scott Williamson claimed was used?

The NIWA study, oft referred to by the Ministry, in fact showed a contrary view to the Ministry claims. It said there had been increases in a number of the outer Sounds zones while in the inner Sounds, there had been no significant changes in blue cod number. In other words the fishery was stable.

The ministry's handling left much to be desired. Consultation was poor. For example, in discussing boundary lines for the ban, it failed to consult Marlborough people and talked to a Nelson person(s).

Dr Ian Henderson, a fisheries analysis scientist, questioned the ministry's assumptions.

"There is a lot about blue cod not moving very far and spawning on their home reef. But there is a lack of detail though to explain how they know this, particularly for the inner Sounds."

That underlines the lack of knowledge and the pressing need for research.

Many experienced commercial and recreational fishers consider Sounds blue cod do indeed go somewhere else to spawn, probably along Marlborough's east coast.

Dr Ian Henderson has publicly criticised the Blue Cod Management Group's nine point proposal. Opinion of the MRFA is that a number of the proposals are impractical, lack management meaning and the plan overall is too onerous.

The MRFA's committee have therefore formulated its own blue print for opening the fishery. On the committee or co-opted/consulted, are experienced recreational fishers, one member of the BCMG and very respected individuals like Dave Fishburn with a wealth of fishing experience encompassing commercial, charter and recreational.

The MRFA proposals are practical, economical and will allow the fishery to be "opened sooner rather than later."

Onerous regulations as proposed by the BCMG will be difficult to police, will achieve little and will occupy valuable time of Ministry compliance staff. We consider money would be better spent on research than ineffective and pointless compliance regulations.

MRFA BLUEPRINT FOR THE MARLBOROUGH SOUNDS BLUE COD FISHERY

1. **Marlborough Sounds to be a sub-zone** with primary management focus on the recreational fishery paramount.

Explanation:

Currently the Sounds are part of the area 7 stretching from Haast to Clarence River, east coast of South Island. Boundaries to be the "Soundfish" determined boundary starting at Cape Soucis (Tasman Bay) and finishing at Wairau Bar, (Cloudy Bay) and approximately 3.6 kms off shore. This would take in west side of D'Urville Island

2. **Re-open fishery** January 1, 2011.

Explanation:

Timing it as such will allow holidaying New Zealanders access to the fishery

3. **Retain current limit** at 3 cod per person.

Explanation:

In long term, subject to credible research, a bag limit of 6 applying to all the blue cod fishery should be the goal.

4. **Retain limit** at 30 cms.

Explanation:

Increasing size limit will increase mortality of released fish so reject proposal of BCMG to increase size limit to 33 cms.

5. **Strong educational programme (Code of Ethics)** with "Don't Kill your limit, limit your Kill" philosophy, use of large and barbless hooks, one hook per line, use of large circle hooks, handling and release techniques, e.g. tubes, moving to other site if catching small, undersized fish or presence of predators. limiting fishing during August/September spawning time.

Explanation:

At a meeting with Minister in March 2009, Nelson Marlborough fisheries manager Scott Williamson said "education is better than regulation." A regulation has to have a management reason otherwise its better to have a code of ethics system. BCMG have produced a code of conduct. However it and additional education, needs to be distributed by pro-active marketing.

6. Implementing a solid, credible research programme to assess:

- a. Pre-spawning movements (tagging) and spawning areas with particular focus on likely spawning area off Marlborough's east coast
- b. Egg and larvae drift
- c. A quest for knowledge via research. Encouraging all research and re-establishing rather than obstructing.
- d. An on-going, incentive based, voluntary diary scheme with anglers, to assess catch rates, size, etc.

Explanation:

Research is severely lacking. To manage any fishery a knowledge of population dynamics of species is vital. For example, once the spawning pattern of blue cod is established, then a closed season (two months) during spawning could be considered for the spawning area.

7. Caught Fish

- a. Possession of fish: No more than two daily bag limits of cod (i.e. 6 fish) may be held at any one time.
- b. Cod may be filleted "at sea"

Explanation:

Measurement of fillets according to Ministry compliance manager can assess original size of fish for compliance purposes.

8. Lower the 20 cod limit in Cook Strait adjacent to the Sounds to current 3.

Explanation:

Currently Cook Strait just outside the Sounds has, in effect, a 20 cod limit. It is all part of the same blue cod fishery. While the discrepancy between limits remains, compliance is difficult to enforce. Making it the "same limit" would give consistency for MFish compliance purposes and conservation, ie wise use of resource.

9. Cutting the commercial quota to a realistic level

Explanation:

Currently commercial quota over 70 tonnes is set for area 7. The catch varies from 25 tonnes to 53 tonnes so quota is set too high.

Commercial fishers should record catches within the designated Marlborough Sounds sub-zone.

MRFA believes that the blue cod fishery can be opened as outlined above, with the majority of the points 1 - 7 in place. Points 8 and 9 may take a little longer, but action should be taken on these issues sooner rather than later.