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Phil Heatley
Minister of Fisheries
Parliament
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Dear Mr Heatley,

Blue cod and Set Net bans on recreational fishers

At the recent annual general meeting of the Council of Outdoor Recreation Associations of New Zealand (CORANZ), the matters of two fisheries bans i.e. Marlborough Sounds blue cod ban and the set net ban on the South Island's East Coast were raised and discussed. The resulting unanimous decision was to request you to address these two unjust measures.

CORANZ is a forum for a number of national and regional outdoor recreation organisations with our primary focus being access to and management for outdoor recreation. This focuses on impaired access which may be because of physical constraints or government or other measures which in effect, deny rightful access to a recreational resource.

In the case of both the blue cod ban and the set net ban, there seems little or no justification. In the case of the set net ban, purportedly to save dolphins from net entanglements, it has been admitted by your ministry, there are no cases of dolphins being caught in recreational set nets.

We do understand this matter is before the court but irrespective of this, CORANZ requests you lift the ban on recreational set nets as soon as possible. This ban on the use of set nets effectively denies access by recreational fishers to traditional resources such as butterfish, moki, warehou and mackerel that are not caught, or not caught readily by other methods.

In the case of the blue cod ban, CORANZ requests you lift it as soon as possible. In addition research measures should be put in place as soon as possible.

1 Blue Cod Ban counterproductive because of bycatch:

Apart from the lack of justification in this case, bans are not necessarily sound management. What research that has been done, shows no reason for the blue cod ban. Indeed, the NIWA research (1) showed cod numbers had increased in some zones in the outer Sounds. In the inner Sounds there was little or no change, i.e. the fishery was stable.

CORANZ's examination of the issue indicates Ministry officers have indulged in some public emotive "scare mongering" e.g. one senior officer on national radio referring to blue cod becoming extinct whereas evidence and research points to the contrary.

One detrimental consequence of the ban is the serious and increased "catch and release" mortality in numerical terms, as anglers fishing for other species are forced by the ban, to return cod.

2 Adverse recreational fishing consequences:

We refer you to a very recent paper (2) in the international journal Fisheries Research, by Dr. Ian Henderson, senior lecturer in fisheries management at Massey University. The paper states that "the intended recovery of the population will therefore be very dependent on the level of catch and release mortality----." He referred to anglers "spending longer time fishing for alternative species than if they ceased fishing after reaching the daily bag limit of blue cod.

If this effect resulted in the catch and release mortality increasing to 50% then there would be no benefit at all from the present ban." He also noted that, based on yield-per-recruit modelling, the management prior to the ban was not far from optimal but could be improved by lowering the minimum legal size a little (thereby reducing the unacceptable, heavy wastage through catch and release mortality). In terms of a recreational fishery, the present situation is almost the worst possible. High mortality due to catch and release but no return for the angler.

Another effect of the ban has been to place undue fishing pressure on areas outside the ban area, particularly adjacent to the boundaries.

CORANZ is aware you have set up a Blue Cod Working Group. It was charged with compiling a comprehensive plan to enhance the blue cod fishery in the Marlborough Sounds. Unfortunately and not unexpectedly with a bureaucracy, little has happened. We understand the group met on one occasion, with the Ministry failing to attend. You have stated you want the ban lifted (before the four years), and "sooner rather than later." It is now over a year since the ban was implemented despite widespread public opposition.

The ban is seen as hollow when a 20 cod limit exists in Cook Strait, immediately adjacent to the Sounds. It would have been far more logical to reduce the 20 figure to six with the ultimate objective of having a six cod limit everywhere.

3 Need for research and data collection:

CORANZ is disappointed there has been no Ministry research or data collection initiatives. For example, it would have been advantageous, at little or no cost, to have immediately implemented some form of angler diary scheme perhaps on randomly selected anglers or volunteers. As it is, 12 months since October 1, 2008, no research is underway.

It is also disappointing that the ban only applies to recreational and not commercial (voluntary) or customary fishing. It is therefore **discriminatory against the recreational public**. CORANZ has noted commercial potters reportedly caught about 13 tonnes (equivalent of 13,000 legal cod) from an area that knowledgeable fishers, both recreational and commercial, regard as the likely spawning grounds for the Sounds blue cod, i.e. Marlborough's north eastern coast.

Another figure from the IPP was 25 tonnes (2006/7) in statistical area 017, which extends from D'Urville Island to Clifford Bay, which is worse!

Research is vitally needed to assess spawning migrations, spawning areas, egg and larval drift. CORANZ calls for a ban on commercial cod pot fishing in Challenger East until a migration and spawning study has been carried out.

Within the inner Sounds, anecdotal information shows by-catches of big and plentiful blue cod, within six months of the ban's introduction, **proof that the fishery was not at a crisis stage**. The cod had either migrated in or had been resident.

We do not criticise the Blue Cod Working Group. Indications are there is significant frustration at

the lack of significant and positive progress. **We urge you to give the matter urgent attention** as the public are unjustly being deprived of access to their recreation and seafood resource.

The blue cod fishery in the Marlborough Sounds is a limited resource and is vulnerable to overfishing because of increasing angler numbers. However, there is no scientific evidence that supports "pulse fishing" (periodic bans) as biologically sensible, or an equitable way of sharing this resource.

Yours faithfully

Dr Hugh Barr
Secretary

Copy to: Colin King MP, Kaikoura

CORANZ (The Council of Outdoor Recreation Associations of NZ) is the national association of seven major national outdoor recreation associations – New Zealand Federation of Freshwater Anglers, New Zealand Four Wheel Drive Association, New Zealand Deerstalkers Association, Option4 – Recreational Sea Fishers' Trust, Public Access New Zealand, New Zealand Bowhunters Society, New Zealand Salmon Anglers Association; Jet Boating New Zealand, and the regional Marlborough Recreational Fishers Association.

CORANZ member associations have approximately 20,000 members, and represent one of the larger membership alliances of outdoor recreation associations in New Zealand. CORANZ advocates for facilitating and fostering outdoor recreation, and the related common interests of its member associations.

References

- (1) **Blackwell, R.G.** (2009). *Abundance and size composition of blue cod in the Marlborough Sounds and Tasman Bay, September-October 2007. Final Research Report for Ministry of Fisheries Research Project BCO2006/01 (Revised). National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research.*
- (2) **Henderson, I.M.** (2009). *Optimising recreational harvests of blue cod: The effects of catch-and-release mortality and size selectivity. Fisheries Research 99: 184-195.*