

Kahawai Update #18

**New Zealand Fishing News
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What's The Case About?

Recent industrial action in the supermarket industry has left many of us unable to buy what we have traditionally bought off the shelves. People have had to resort to buying other products in the absence of their preferred items. Similarly, the non-commercial fishing sector (that's you and me) has had to put up with the effects of commercial overfishing on our ability to catch certain species, or what we need to feed ourselves and our families. Kahawai are one of the species that is now in short supply as a result of overfishing by the industry.

Where do Kahawai Come In?

Kahawai have often been called the "people's fish". But now, due to the development of bulk harvesting methods in the fishing industry, the people's fish has largely become a favourite ingredient of fishmeal, crayfish bait and other low value exports. The downside to the growth in exports has been the unavailability of kahawai to the ordinary New Zealander trying to catch a fish for a feed.

Traditionally kahawai was the expected catch of the small-boat or shore-based fisherman looking for something to put on the family dinner plate – a healthy substitute for takeaway burgers and fattening fries. What value do we put on an outdoor activity that can be enjoyed by the family and provides a genetically unmodified nutritious meal?

Not much it seems, as now the recreational sector has had to pool all its resources to fund a campaign to challenge the legality of decisions made on allocating kahawai and to look for a ruling on how recreational fishing interests should be met overall.

Other Fish Too?

The concerns are not just about kahawai. We are also questioning the process used to determine how much fish is allocated to the commercial sector, after the interests of recreational and customary fishers have been taken into account.

Future allocation decisions for many important inshore shared fisheries could all be affected by the outcome of this case. These fisheries include snapper, crayfish, paua, kingfish, blue cod, mullet, flounder and shellfish.

Kahawai Legal Challenge

November 6th is the day the Kahawai Legal Challenge team is due in the High Court to explain why the Minister's 2004 and 2005 kahawai decisions were so unfair to the non-commercial sector. What has added complexity to the case is a counterclaim by the commercial sector, which is also challenging the 2005 decision.

When you boil it down, the case is very simple. From a non-commercial fishing perspective, the people of this country come first. The law clearly states that the Minister must “allow for” recreational fishing and customary interests before setting the commercial quota for any species.

Current Catch

Non-commercial fishing representatives have been voicing concerns about the state of the fisheries for over 20 years. Catches have been declining as fewer fish are available and those we catch tend to be smaller than in the past. Surveys conducted at this stage clearly show the decline, but it is the action taken to rectify or improve the fisheries which is being disputed by the recreational sector.

Using the supermarket example, imagine a survey being conducted of the goods that had been purchased during the industrial dispute. Obviously, the survey would not reflect what would have been bought if the shelves were full. Imagine then the outcry if people were suddenly told that from then on, all they were allowed to buy was what they had bought during that survey, and those purchases would need to be cut back while the shelves were being restocked. People would not accept that.

This is similar to the way the Minister is using estimates of current use to allocate shares in shared fisheries. Commercial bulk fishing methods capable of catching thousands of tonnes a year deplete fish stocks. Amateur fishers find there are fewer fish and often they are smaller, so they change where and how they fish but still catch less.

When it comes to deciding what share of the fishery commercial, recreational and Maori will get, the Minister uses estimates of current use to allocate the total allowable catch between sectors. Then, if any reduction is required to help rebuild a stock, the Minister makes a proportional reduction to everyone’s share, regardless of the history of the fishery and who had caused the decline.

Up until now the Ministry and Minister of Fisheries have disregarded the concerns and the impact of commercial overfishing on people’s ability to catch a feed of fish. But now we have had enough!

The Challenge team is therefore seeking a decision from the court on how important fisheries should be divided up amongst the competing sectors. It is obvious to us that non-commercial interests are not being catered for in the current environment.

Public Support

While many perceive kahawai as not being as important as other species, it is hoped that a High Court ruling will give guidance and direction on the way future fisheries decisions are made by the Minister and his Ministry.

All around the country people are realising that the dream of taking their kids and grandkids fishing is fading, as commercial fishing is allowed to continue, at unsustainable

levels in some fisheries. But equally they understand that a rapid rebuild of kahawai and other important inshore fisheries will improve their chances of catching a fish for a feed.

The Kahawai Legal Challenge thanks all the people who have contributed to the campaign supporting the case. Ongoing support from Black Magic Tackle and these individuals is highly valued and appreciated.

The team needs your support. Collectively we can make a difference. There are a variety of ways you can contribute to your fishing future.

Trustees of the Challenge Fund include the NZ Fishing News.

Dial 0900 KAHAWAI (0900 52 42 92) to make a quick \$20 donation. This will be debited to your phone account.

Call 0800 KAHAWAI (0800 52 42 92) to order a snappy navy Kahawai Challenge t-shirt. \$20 each. Most sizes available.

Please call 0800 KAHAWAI (0800 52 42 92) if you require assistance or would like to know more.

The primary fundraising tool is the Kahawai Booklet. If you want to get involved and raise donations please call our help team on 0800 KAHAWAI (52 42 92).

Visit the website www.kahawai.co.nz to order your Booklet online and make a secure online donation.

Please send your Booklets and/or donations to:
Kahawai Challenge Fund
c/o NZ Fishing News, Freepost 131323, PO Box 12-965, Penrose, Auckland.