

Kahawai Challenge Team

Update #34, April 2008

Defending our way of life

There is nothing more 'kiwi' than lighting the fire in the backyard smoker and watching the previous day's catch as it is cooking. The smell of burning manuka with the hint of citrus leaves invariably attracts close neighbours and family. Even the not-often-seen people from across the road are drawn to the sight and smell of smoke as it wafts around the neighbourhood.

As the hours pass the anticipation of eating freshly caught and smoked kahawai, mullet or snapper increases. And the opportunity for everyone to be present at the obligatory 'tasting' sessions throughout the cooking process is a joy to share.

How then have we as New Zealanders reached a point where our lifestyle is being constrained by the need to supply the Australian crayfish market with bait?

Why are we using our very precious kahawai to supplement overseas bait supplies when kiwi families are struggling to catch a reasonable number of fish to feed their whanau?

Since 2005 commercial fishermen have earned 43 cents per kilo of kahawai landed. Of more significance is that more than half the kahawai caught commercially is exported for \$1.08 per kilo!

There is no comparison between the export value and the wellbeing derived from having the kids catch their first fish, excitedly take it home to cook and feed the family. It is priceless.

These and similar traditions are what the Kahawai Legal Challenge team have been trying to preserve throughout the two-plus years of legal action and appeal process.

It has been heartening for the team to receive letters of support from older folk who remember 'the good old days' when kahawai were prolific, in some cases a nuisance, but very often a staple part of the family diet.

Whatever consideration was given to kahawai they were always a reliable source of bait and far superior, and more affordable, than the boxed baits sold in dairies and service stations.

These historic factors were all part of the overall discussions during the High Court challenge to the Minister of Fisheries' 2004 and 2005 allocation decisions for kahawai. The High Court's subsequent ruling in March 2007 supported many of the arguments put forward by the NZ Big Game and Recreational Fishing Councils. Less than a month later commercial fishers challenged the High Court ruling and an appeal was scheduled for the end of February 2008.

Appeal hearing

The recent two-day Wellington Appeal Court hearing was fully utilised by the legal teams representing commercial fishers, Crown Law (on behalf of the Minister and Ministry of Fisheries) and Alan Galbraith QC for amateur fishing interests. The three judges are now considering their response and all parties eagerly await their decision.

Legal arguments aside, the wellbeing derived from a few humble kahawai and the opportunity to share fresh, hot smoked fish with family and neighbours is immeasurable. It is a tradition we want to share with our children and their future families. It is an integral part of our Kiwi way of life. Visit www.kahawai.co.nz.