

Kahawai Challenge Team

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Late summer runs of kahawai can provide an exciting day's fishing so it is encouraging to hear that some people have been enjoying recent opportunities to test their angling skills and take home a few for the smoker. But it is a sad reflection on the state of our kahawai stocks that such small schools of kahawai generate so much interest.

Prior to the introduction of kahawai into the quota management system in 2004 the Ministry of Fisheries issued a proposal paper which argued there was no scarcity of kahawai. That statement alone was enough to send old-timers who remembered the good days into a frenzy of protest.

When challenged about their claims of no scarcity, MFish went on to suggest that the reason there were no surface-schooling kahawai was that they were probably feeding on the seafloor!

How could MFish claim there was no scarcity when estimates indicated that over forty million kahawai have been scooped out of the water?

Kahawai were, and still are, the "people's fish". But they have gone from being plentiful to scarce, while those being caught commercially are now exported for crayfish bait, fishmeal and other low value products. As a result of commercial fishing pressure kahawai are now smaller and fewer.

Purse seiners and spotter planes

Kahawai were left out of the quota management system introduced in 1986. Industrial-scale targeting of kahawai schools by purse seiners, assisted by spotter planes, occurred as the fishing industry raced to catch as much fish as possible before quotas were set.

Strong objections from non-commercial fishers resulted in a limit being set for purse seine catch. Despite this, whole schools were still being taken every set. Unlike other more selective fishing methods, adult and juvenile kahawai all succumbed to this bulk harvesting method.

We argue that those who caused the depletion should take the cuts necessary to rebuild the fishery.

Catch reductions

The industry argues that it is the only sector to have reduced its collective catch, as it was required to do in 2004 and 2005. In the industry's opinion fishing continues unabated as amateur fishers can still catch kahawai within the multi-species bag limit of 20 per day.

However, the reality is very different. Over two thousand people responded to a survey in 2004 and said that, aside from the late summer/early autumn runs, there were less kahawai available and they were much smaller than in previous years.

A few years ago it took eight angling hours to catch a kahawai in the Hauraki Gulf and those caught were mostly juveniles. Without scientific verification these claims are treated as 'anecdotal' by the authorities and ignored.

The Kahawai Legal Challenge team is waiting on a judgment from the Supreme Court on the way the Minister should allow for non-commercial fishing interests. Whatever the outcome, the KLC has shown that non-commercial fishers want recognition of their rights and the need to consider their well-being in fisheries management.

Those who suffer most from the depletion of inshore fish stocks like kahawai are the very people who need them to feed their whanau.

Our priorities are askew if our fisheries are managed to feed crayfish in West Australia as opposed to feeding our own people.

If you want more fish in the water then please make a contribution to assist with the Challenge. Post a cheque to the 'Kahawai Challenge Fund', c/o NZ Fishing News, PO Box 12-965 Penrose, or simply dial 0900 KAHAWAI for a \$20 donation or visit www.kahawai.co.nz.