

**option4 Update #74 NZ Fishing News**  
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**Who Said History Never Repeats?**

In 74 monthly Updates the option4 team has presented the issues surrounding New Zealanders' access to fishing. The Ministry of Fisheries' Shared Fisheries Policy project is about to be launched upon us. We as nation, not just the fishermen among us, need to join together and present a united voice against a confiscation from us all – the ability to “fish for a feed”.

**It's All About Money**

The Shared Fisheries project aims to address ‘conflict’ in fisheries where all sectors have an interest, commercial, recreational and customary fishers.

What has not been explained in the project's preliminary documents is why the fisheries are in such a poor state.

The bare truth is that too much quota was given away in 1986, at the outset of the Quota Management System (QMS).

In the early 1980's the Ministry of Fisheries recognised that many of the inshore shared fisheries were severely depleted through commercial overfishing. They needed to act quickly to ensure the sustainability of important fish stocks. Much effort went into determining what reductions were required to rebuild these decimated fisheries. To facilitate this, money was offered to commercial fishers to ease the impact of reduced catching rights.

Commercial fishermen were paid in excess of \$120 million as compensation for the loss of fishing opportunities they had previously enjoyed. Many of those same fishermen had that quota returned to them within a year, through an appeals process. The extra quota given back to the commercial fishermen was in addition to the catching rights they still held.

After spending so much time and effort calculating the sustainable levels of harvest you would have thought the Ministry would have stepped in and reduced catches to their original target levels. Alas no.

The Ministry of Fisheries failed to reduce the inflated quotas back to the previously determined safe levels and this is the reason why many of the important inshore shared fisheries are depleted.

**Reallocation of Fisheries**

As these fisheries have been fished down to all-time low levels New Zealanders have been denied access to healthy numbers of fish. There is no contest when bulk commercial

fishing methods can be used to slay as many fish as possible, whereas the family man standing on the beach, with a surfcaster in his hand, cannot catch a “fish for a feed”.

What rightfully belongs to all New Zealanders has been given to the fishing industry to earn export dollars with little regard given to the social and cultural well-being of all New Zealanders from a healthy marine environment and sustainable fisheries.

### **Fisheries Act 1996**

The Fisheries Act is very clear at what levels fisheries should be managed to. The law states that fish stocks should be “at or above a level that can produce the maximum sustainable yield”. Many of the inshore fisheries are well below this level and that’s why people struggle to catch a fish or two.

In addition, section 21 of the Act requires the Minister to “allow for” non-commercial fishing interests, both customary Maori and recreational, before he considers the commercial catch. Clearly the public’s interest goes beyond having enough fish to export.

The paramount thought in most recreational fishermen’s mind is to enjoy a day out fishing while landing a few fish for the family.

For many years non-commercial fishing representatives, both Maori and non-Maori alike, have advocated for:

- Less commercial fishing in important inshore areas
- Sustainable commercial catch
- Planning rights to conserve fish for future generations
- Free access to a reasonable daily bag of fish to feed the family

More recently that has been condensed to “more fish in the water”.

### **Hokianga Accord**

The Hokianga Accord, the Iwi Regional Forum of the mid-north, which includes the might of Ngapuhi, Ngati Whatua and several hapu groups, has “more fish in the water” or “kia maha atu nga ika i roto te wai” as its goal.

The trust amongst Maori and non-Maori participants in Hokianga Accord hui allows free and frank discussion on how to put “more fish in the water”; talk goes on into the night and the following day. A marathon effort in anyone’s eyes, but time flies. This is important work.

At the most recent Forum hui it was agreed that Maori and non-Maori would work together to achieve the best outcome from the Shared Fisheries project for all New Zealanders. After listening to the MFish presentation on the project and being told that there was still no confirmed date for the release of the public consultation document, many participants expressed disappointment with the Ministry’s effort to protect our interests in this process.

The Ministry's previous attempt at reforming recreational fisheries management was the Soundings process during 2000. The objective of Soundings was to cap (limit) the recreational catch and avoid compensation issues for the Crown. After six years the Ministry's objective does not seem to have changed.

For too long the Ministry of Fisheries has driven a wedge between Maori and non-Maori. After enduring the Soundings process, the Ministerial Consultative process the following year and more recently the Reference Group alone, it is heartwarming to know that we have the support of the biggest iwi in the country, Ngapuhi, Ngati Whatua and other tangata whenua groups.

There is a growing appreciation that unless we stand together the Shared Fisheries Policy project will be the bulldozer that sweeps away the collective interest of all New Zealanders in healthy seas and an abundant inshore fishery, both now and for future generations.

Please go online to [www.option4.co.nz](http://www.option4.co.nz) and register your details to be kept informed of developments relating to this process.

The Shared Fisheries Policy is online at [http://option4.co.nz/Fisheries\\_Mgmt/sharedfisheries.htm](http://option4.co.nz/Fisheries_Mgmt/sharedfisheries.htm)