

option4 Update #107

NZ Fishing News November 2008 edition

OCTOBER 2008

At least we can still catch fish. Or can we?

Impacts of the world's financial market nosedive are starting to bite in New Zealand, but at least living on a South Pacific island means we can still catch a fish for a feed. Or can we?

Poor fisheries management over a long period has meant that many traditional fishing possies have gone from being our money-shots to barren deserts holding a few juvenile fish. This is a result of managing our inshore fisheries below sustainable levels so Kiwis can access enough fish, of a reasonable size, for dinner.

Implementation of the quota management system was supposed to curb rampant commercial fishing and provide for the rebuild of severely depleted fisheries. Instead, our 'world-leading' management system has evolved into a maximum-extraction economic experiment, with little regard given to having enough fish available to enable people to provide for their social and cultural wellbeing.

Shore-based and inshore fishermen are particularly affected because as fish numbers decline their schooling range contracts and the average size decreases. For example, Snapper 8, the North Island's west coast fishery, has been below the legal sustainable level for more than 20 years. When the snapper fishery was healthy bag-limit catches of large snapper were common. Now, many people are constrained to feeding their family on a few just-legal sized fish, on a good day.

Around 90 percent of the snapper biomass (stock level) has been removed from the once-abundant west coast. This leaves commercial and non-commercial fishers competing for the remaining 10 percent, and we all know there is no comparison between trawling and hook-and-line-fishing off the beach.

This is the price we – and the fishery - all pay to supply the world with fish.

It seems the needs of a well-heeled diner in Europe are more important than every New Zealander's right to enjoy a healthy marine environment and sustainable fisheries.

Rebuilding stocks can take decades, particularly for long-lived species like snapper. The damage is not short-term. In addition, cuts are invariably made to the recreational allowance in reduced bag limits with no meaningful reductions to commercial quotas.

For people who do not fish the effects of our export-driven management system are even more severe. Retail price increases mean fresh fish went off the menu for many Kiwi families years ago and our kids are paying the hefty cost of focussing on a moneymaking regime.

While it is hard to realistically measure the effects of less fish in the water, we do know that diet related diseases are spiralling amongst many sectors of our population.

Unlike yesteryear, it is commonplace for our children to stay indoors in front of the television playing video games instead of spending a day at the beach fishing, swimming and collecting shellfish.

Depleted fisheries means family traditions may also become 'endangered' as more New Zealanders despair at their lack of fishing success.

Having access to healthy fisheries will become more important as the stranglehold on our economy tightens. Our priorities will have to change to more basic requirements – fish for food. We need to maintain our fisheries at higher levels so Kiwis can provide for their wellbeing.

option4 in conjunction with the NZ Big Game Fishing Council and the Hokianga Accord have committed to achieving “more fish in the water”. Relying on our fisheries managers to fulfil this role has clearly proven to be a fruitless exercise.

Visit www.option4.co.nz