

Kahawai 'under strain'

By KERI MOLLOY

A DECISION not to reduce kahawai commercial catch limits is a national shame, Te Runanga-A-Iwi o Ngapuhi chairman Sonny Tau says.

Recreational fishers have complained about a decline in kahawai numbers since the late 1980s and even went to the High Court to ensure more fish are left in the sea.

They say kahawai are worth more to them and the tourism industry than to commercial fishers and have called for commercial catch levels to be reduced to unavoidable bycatch only.

But Fisheries Minister Phil Heatley has instead slashed the recreational allocation by 60 percent and customary allocations by 48 percent. The move follows a review of catch limits for kahawai fisheries and took effect on October 1.

Mr Heatley attended a New Zealand Sport Fishing Council conference in Paihia two weeks ago saying kahawai are a traditional food source for customary Maori fishers, a popular fish for recreational anglers but also a target species for commercial operators.

"I carefully considered the best scientific and management information available, as well as submissions from customary, recreational and commercial fishers and the public before making these decisions," he says.

Ministry research suggests kahawai numbers in Area 1 – between North Cape and Cape Runaway – are about 30 percent larger than the sustainable level set out in the Fisheries Act:

"At current catch levels kahawai numbers are set to continue growing and give more fish for everyone to catch more easily," Mr Heatley says.

Mr Tau fears kahawai will be under strain as a consequence of the decision.

"Most important is the certain continued decline in the



Wishful thinking: Recreational fishers say kahawai numbers are down and a day surfcasting at places like Tauranga Bay doesn't guarantee food on the table.

availability of these fish to whanau who fish at the beach with mokopuna and kuia kaumatua.

"Most of our people do not have the larger vessels to fish offshore, the beach is the safest place to take young families fishing and with kahawai numbers well down on even four or five years ago their days at the beach will be without kai to take home.

"We sincerely hope that kahawai do not go the same way as toheroa."

Northland's tourism advantage is based on ordinary people being able to

catch fish with economy and ease, he says.

"Many of our coastal and nearby towns will find the struggle even more difficult in these recessionary times due to fewer visitors."

He says the role of kahawai in a balanced marine ecosystem has apparently been ignored, he says.

"These kahawai as a species sit right in the middle of our most valued and probably internationally recognised food chain. Phil Heatley gave up the chance of having a great non-commercial fishery by reducing the commer-

cial catch limit in Area 1 by 215 tonne."

The adjustment to the customary allowance sees it reduced by 60 percent from 495 tonne per annum to 200 tonne is a farce, Mr Tau says.

"The ministry and minister have merely manipulated the figures by toying with the customary and recreational allowances just so the commercial catch limits can be retained."

"Te Runanga a Iwi O Ngapuhi, which has interests in commercial fishing, has a policy that where their commercial interests clash with

the recreational and customary interests then the commercial interest will give way. The minister's decision demonstrates an absence of leadership and fails to provide for all New Zealanders' well-being," Mr Tau says.

Kiwi Party leader Larry Baldock tried to stop the kahawai quota going to commercial purse fishing in 2004. He says the minister's decision on the quota allocations shows disregard for the concerns of recreational fishers expressed in more than 1000 submissions and ignores scientific and

anecdotal evidence presented.

"He takes further steps in destroying the common law right of families to fish to put food on the table.

"He also endangers the future prospects for Kiwi kids to experience the thrill of catching their own kahawai in the inshore area," Mr Baldock says.

"Instead he allows for whole schools of kahawai to continue to be scooped from the water in nets, processed into cray bait and pet food and exported at low value. Shame on you minister."



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