NORTHLAND NON-COMMERCIAL FORUM

Date: 3 December 2007
Venue: MFish Whangarei
Time: 4.00pm to 8.30pm

Present:
Geoff Stone, Des Subritzky, Paul Batten, John Torr, John Holdsworth, Doug McColl, Simon Howard, Hamish Faire, John Taunton-Clark (MFish), Murray Bruges (MFish), Kaye van der Straten (MFish), Richard Civil (former forum member).

Apologies:
John Chibnall

1. OPENING THE MEETING

Meeting opened by Murray Bruges and round table introductions completed. Two new forum participants present – Hamish Faire from the Bay of Islands and Kaye van der Straten from MFish.

2. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

The minutes from the previous meeting were approved by all present. There was discussion about some members having difficulty accessing emails from the forum and how to rectify this.

Action
- Murray Bruges to provide John Torr with forum communications by telephone and post.

3. COMMERCIAL FISHING DURING THE SNAPPER SPAWNING SEASON

Murray Bruges outlined to the forum the current best scientific information on snapper harvesting during the spawning season. Snapper recruitment (the number of new fish produced per spawning season) functions independently from harvesting pressure. As long as a minimum level of spawning biomass remains, harvesting is unlikely to effect recruitment. Research has determined that recruitment is primarily related to environmental variables such as water temperature. Murray overviewed how MFish incorporates this information into fisheries management decisions, and that MFish is confident that snapper stocks are effectively managed under these premises. Forum members were asked whether they felt that this level of information and management was satisfactory.

Geoff Stone accepted the science that supports snapper stock management, but suggests that MFish should take care to avoid this argument entering the public arena.

John Holdsworth advised the forum that current stock assessment models do not factor in recruitment by spawning stock.

John Taunton-Clark noted that MFish is confident that the parental stock of snapper is kept at a reasonable size to provide some insurance against environmental impacts on annual snapper recruitment. John advised forum members that MFish are willing to discuss new ideas about snapper fisheries management with regard to spawning stock. If non-commercial fishers desire further management controls such as closed seasons or areas during spawning, MFish are keen for these to be introduced within the Fisheries Planning Group discussions. John suggested that testing a variety of different fisheries management options for snapper through a stock assessment
modelling process could also assist to identify likely options to assist sustainably utilised fisheries management.

**Action**

- Note for future North-East coast Inshore Finfish FPAG meetings.

### 4. GREY MULLET SPAWNING SEASON

Des Subritsky advised the forum that he has concerns about the sustainability of grey mullet fishing on the west coast during the spawning season.

John Taunton-Clark summarised grey mullet fisheries management and discussed how the parental stock of grey mullet is generally kept at a reasonable size considering spawning requirements (as for snapper). Forum members were asked whether, in their opinion, non-commercial fishers would support seasonal closures of grey mullet fisheries.

Des Subritsky felt that this would be probable, as non-commercial fishers of Northland generally do not target grey mullet particularly often (compared to snapper).

Geoff Stone felt that there are a substantial number of mullet fishers in the Bay of Islands, and he suspects that grey mullet are probably an important customary species in this area.

**Action**

- To request further information on the issues surrounding the Kaipara grey mullet fishery from the North-West Inshore Team, and present to forum at the next meeting.

### 5. DEEMED VALUES INFORMATION UPDATE

Murray Bruges briefed the forum about why fish caught in excess of the TACC are not subtracted from the following year’s TACC. Murray explained MFish’s position that this would only provide a disincentive to overfishing to quota owners. As it is legal to fish commercially without ACE or quota (all that is required is valid fishserve license and a correctly registered vessel), subtracting overcatch from the following years TACC would not necessarily affect the fishers responsible for overcatching the TACC. As such, MFish’s policy is that a properly designed deemed value framework is the best way to reduce commercial over-catch rates.

John Holdsworth questioned the use of deemed values to manage overcatch issues. Certain fish stocks (such as SNA 8) have been overfished due to low deemed values rates. John questioned the effectiveness of deemed values to address all fishery over-catch issues, and whether or not over-catch rates mediated by deemed values (which essentially measures willingness to pay on the part of commercial fishers) infringes on the rights of recreational fishers to fish under the Fisheries Act.

Murray suggested that there is a danger in setting deemed value rates too high – this can result in dumping and high-grading of fish catches. However, requiring fishers to hold ACE for particular fish stocks in advance of fishing is not practical as fishers do not always know what they will catch prior to fishing.

John Taunton-Clark outlined the deemed value review process that MFish is currently undertaking, and in particular, how MFish is keen to identify the meaning of ‘value’ from all fishery sectors. Ideas, examples and discussions such as these provide valuable input to the review process. John introduced another concept, where the size groupings of fish for sale by licensed fish receivers can also result in commercial fishers dumping smaller sized fish out at sea. There are a number of other issues on this subject (upper size limits, fish handling procedures, dumping and high grading, etc), and John Taunton-Clark suggests that these issues are of the type to be addressed within FPAGs.

Forum members expressed interest in the reporting requirements of commercial fishers if fishing
gear is damaged and catches are lost at sea.

Action

- MFish to provide forum members with reporting requirements of damaged gear at next meeting.

Note deemed value issues for future North-East coast Inshore Finfish FPAG meetings.

6. RECREATIONAL FORUM NATIONAL HUI REPORT

Paul Batten and John Holdsworth reported back from their attendance at the National Hui for Recreational Forums. John Holdsworth presented group members with a written summary of the National Hui. Overall, it was felt that the Minister of Fisheries is supported and respected by non-commercial interests. Participants at the National Hui found the meeting extremely helpful. A number of points were highlighted:

- The Minister has approved the development of an Amateur Fishing Trust group, and start-up funds will be available to launch this body. Ultimately the trust will function independently from MFish, will be self-funding and long-term trustees will be mandated and required to follow and accountable structure. The trust will aim to formally represent amateur fishers and act responsively to fisheries issues within New Zealand. This is an outcome of the shared fisheries debate and many submissions from various consultations.
- A new initiative was announced to increase funding for research into improving estimates of recreational catches.
- Charter boats will soon be required to report their catches.
- Shared Fisheries concepts were discussed, including the working group for the fisheries sector. This group contains representatives from SeaFIC, TOKM and the Recreational Fishing Council. Others may also be involved but this is as yet uncertain. Meetings will result in a final report which should be generated by the end of April 2008.
- MFish Chief Economist Ralph Townsend presented an interesting section to the National Hui about the potential value of recreational fishing, and accounting for the intrinsic benefits associated with the experience of recreational fishing. Figures were discussed in his presentation, with the overall summary suggesting that the value of recreational fishing may be quite similar to that of commercial fishing. Science funding for recreational value research may become constrained for a variety of reasons, and there is concern that this work may become less of a priority than other projects. National Hui participants felt strongly about the completion of ‘recreational fishing value’ research and are keen to see this remain a priority for MFish.
- There was a general consensus that the QMS works more effectively within New Zealand than similar systems have fared overseas. This is likely due to the high level of rationalisation within New Zealand fisheries with fewer commercial fishers now present in New Zealand compared with other countries.
- Neil Buckley from MFish addressed the National Hui members about enforcement issues within the recreational fishery and methods of promoting responsible recreational fishing. There was some discussion about MFish considering visiting schools to educate the younger generations of New Zealand fishers, and possible MFish support of responsible recreational fishing competitions.
- General consensus across the hui that action resulting from forum suggestions is not particularly rapid. Hui participants agreed that forums should not been seen as a method of formal consultation with MFish, but more as an advisory group. Forum members reiterate their role at present is not one of mandated advice from recreational/non-commercial fishers.
- It was apparent that both the Northland and Hawkes Bay forum function quite well in comparison to others, especially with regard to attendance rates. National forums tend to have long and overly complicated names, and calls/suggestions were made for all groups to come up with simpler and smarter titles for their forums.

Action
• The group formally thanked John Holdsworth and Paul Batten for attending the National Hui on their behalf.
• Group members to consider new name options for the forum.
• Suggestion that this forum could meet with neighbouring recreational fishing forums once a year to discuss regional issues and share information and ideas.

7. PROPOSED SCHEDULE CHANGES FOR FORUM MEETINGS

The group discussed altering the current meeting schedule to improve the responsiveness of the forum to current issues. Due to the success of other groups, there was discussion about a number of different scheduling options, including: forum meetings on weekends, four scheduled meetings plus one reserve on-call meeting to improve responsiveness, call meetings only as required, supplementary use of video conferencing / internet chat rooms, etc. The forum felt that the framework was needed to be flexible and responsive, and that the frequency of meetings should be dictated by the issues of the day and the requirement for advice from the forum. Some members were concerned that their remote locations could result in reduced communication and a reduced level of input (eg, rural dial-up internet connections that are unable to manage large numbers of emails, limited computer skills, etc).

Action
• Forum members to discuss further at the next meeting.

8. MANDATED FORUM MEMBERS

There was some debate within the forum about the extent to which forum members should be mandated, with some members feeling like they are mandated to a certain extent already. Group members also voiced that this forum has a strong desire to better incorporate the views/participation of iwi.

John Taunton-Clark advised the group that MFish does not require forum members to be mandated to attend a forum meeting, although MFish is supportive of members who do hold a mandate.

Action
• Geoff Stone will informally discuss the issue of mandated forum participants with members of the non-commercial fishery to gain some understanding of the general feeling, and will report back to the forum

9. REQUIREMENTS FOR CHARTER BOAT REPORTING

The forum discussed the types of reports that may be required of charter boats – one for the general activity of the vessel, and one for specific areas/species. In particular, the group felt that there must be a clear and specific purpose for the data that is collected from charter vessels.

Forum members were concerned that MFish has an inaccurate perception of the charter boat fleet within Northland. The group advised MFish that generating the number of charter vessels from Statistics New Zealand data will not reveal the number of actual working vessels within Northland. Many larger boats are listed as “in survey” and available for charter work for GST/tax purposes – however few of these vessels are functionally chartering and the majority of these are actually charted as little as once per year.

The group was also keen to advise MFish that of the charter vessels that are working, there may often be many changes of skippers on a single vessel within a fishing season, compared to other vessels which have been operated by the same skipper for many years. The group suggests that
MFish may be better advised to determine what qualifies as an amateur charter fishing vessel/fisherman before designing reporting requirements (part-owners, owner-operators, vessel in survey, number of charters, etc).

The forum was concerned about what type of information MFish might require from charter boats, and how it might be used in fisheries management. In particular, the group felt that MFish should ensure the data required of charter skippers is simple to collect and properly used.

The forum suggests that MFish take care when determining the size of the fleet in the Northland regions and to keep the issues and concepts above in mind when designing reporting requirements for charter vessels. MFish advised that issues such as these will be discussed, determined and refined through a formal consultation process – which is likely to occur in early 2008.

Action

- John Taunton-Clark will try to organise a member of the MFish Policy Team to attend a forum meeting to discuss charter boat representation in planning discussions.
- MFish to record these suggestions to pass onto the Charter Boat Reporting working group during the consultation process.

10. METHODOLOGY OF RECREATIONAL HARVEST ESTIMATES

The forum felt that current recreational harvest estimates are not particularly reliable or helpful to fisheries management. The recent method revisions using aerial support data have provided improved results, however kingfish and kahawai estimates from aerial methods are considered to be underestimates by the forum. There is also some concern about the inclusion/exclusion of boats that are mobile, and how to estimate land-based catch and effort (shellfish gathering, surf and rock fishing, kayaks and contikis, etc). Group discussion also included the effects of weather on the use of boats and therefore recreational harvest estimates. The group asked whether or not a methodological review might be undertaken for recreational harvest estimates.

Action

- MFish to report on recreational harvest estimates and provide information to forum at next meeting.

11. FISHING COMPETITIONS AND PUBLICITY

Paul Batten informed the group about recent publicity issues about recreational fishing within Northland. In the past few weeks two different recreational fishing tournaments, each of considerable size, have been promoted for the Bream Bay region. Paul Batten is concerned that there has been a lack of communication between tournament organisers and the local fishing clubs, and the recreational fishing community do not feel like they have been adequately consulted. The community is concerned that two large tournaments were run almost at the same time will remove an unnecessarily high number of fish from the local area. One of these tournaments has been profiled by a leading television fishing personality. Paul raises his concern that this could reflect badly on the communication processes, sustainability concerns, and general credibility of both the local recreational fishing community and MFish.

Paul also notes that some publicity effort has promoted the auction of tournament caught fish, with proceeds awarded to charity. Paul questions whether or not permits are required to auction fish, and what the conditions of such permits might be.

Action

- MFish to clarify whether or not permits are required to auction tournament caught fish and will provide answer to forum at next meeting.
Richard Civil outlined to forum members a new Mataitai application for the Bay of Islands. A handout was provided to all members that showed the proposed areas for inclusion as a Mataitai, which is provided for under the Kaimoana Regulations (KRegs). Essentially, implementing a Mataitai would result in strict restrictions on commercial fishing within the proposed area but would not change recreational access rights.

Overall, the forum was supportive of the Mataitai application. Discussion of the group centred on the likely unwillingness of some community members to accept a Mataitai application in the Bay. However, the group believes that this reluctance could be overcome if the community was to be educated about the Mataitai – particularly highlighting the fact that no changes would necessarily occur to non-commercial access rights.

Richard Civil stated that it is MFish’s responsibility to provide education to the general public about the availability and scope of use for fisheries management tools such as Mataitai. Richard was emphasised that MFish needed to provide community education, as iwi do not have the skills, resources or rights to advertise Mataitai.

Geoff Stone raised the issue of importance of gaining input from community members to the success of the Mataitai application and community decision-making process. To concentrate education on the message that customary fisheries management tools are also important recreational fisheries management tools.

Paul Batten queried whether or not there is provision for a non-iwi representative to attend the Mataitai working group panel?

John Holdsworth suggests the use of a primary education tool in the television program Coastwatch. Perhaps a section on “What is Mataitai?” etc.

Other suggestions included avoiding showing any maps or sectioned areas to the community until after an education drive has been implemented – the main aim is to allay community fears of restricted access/take regulations.

**Action**

- MFish to provide forum members with information about the Mataitai process.
- MFish to organise a member of the Spatial Allocations Team to address forum members about Mataitai and other fisheries management tools.
- Richard to discuss with Iwi representatives whether or not a non-Iwi representative can provide input to the process.
- MFish Inshore Team has offered their support to Richard and the other members of the Mataitai working group (John Taunton-Clark).
- MFish to pass on the advice of this forum to the Mataitai working group team.

**13. REGULATORY REVIEW**

Murray Bruges invited forum members to think about recreational regulations that might require review. Some suggestions included:

- Decreasing the size limit for paua on the North-East coast (MFish advised that compliance are reluctant to enforce this)
- Recreational scallop dredging concerns within the Bay of Islands (MFish advised that there is little scientific information to support this)

**Action**

- Forum members to consider other options and discuss in future meetings.
14. MEMBERS UPDATES

Des Subritsky:

Recent fishing competition in the Kaipara (150 entrants) resulted in 7kg snapper specimens and 11kg kingfish specimens. The community is relatively happy with the performance of their fishery. There are some community concerns about the proposed power station within the Kaipara, particularly with regard to the effect of the turbines on vessel and fish access in and out of the harbour. The community remains concerned about the current Hector’s and Maui’s dolphin TMP process. Many in the community favour an extension of the trawl fishing ban combined with compulsory set net attendance.

John Holdsworth:

No major issues or concerns are present, and the snapper have started arriving within the Tutukaka waters.

Paul Batten:

Labour weekend fishing efforts at Mangawhai Heads resulted in lots of fishers and not very many fish. Diving has also been slow, mostly due to difficult weather conditions. Some members of the west-coast community are concerned about non-compliant setnet practices and unsafe boating habits – there is a drive within the community to capture video footage of these practices.

Doug McColl:

Recreational fishing has been good, and many spawning snapper have been caught in recent weeks. There is some concern about the level of commercial trawl and longline effort off Tokerau beach, particularly after dark. Some members of the community have reported trawl marks at the king-tide low water mark. It is probable that community members could be mis-identifying boats after dark, the vessels are likely to be purse seiners. Doug is trying to re-educate these concepts within the community, although this is proving somewhat difficult. Doug also raised issues of concern about some recreational fishers taking more than the bag limit.

John Torr:

Whangarei and Bream Bay stocks seem to be performing well, especially snapper and trevally. There is some concern amongst the community regarding regional council AMA’s eroding access to recreational fishing areas.

Hamish Faire:

The Bay of Islands has been attracting very good sized snapper in recent weeks. The water temperature over winter was higher than normal, which seemed to result in more schooling fish arriving early in September. Kingfish, John dory and gurnard have all performed well for charter fisheries, although tarakihi catches have been down. Sedimentation issues have finally cleared in the Bay (two years post-bush clearing), and schools of piper are returning as a result.

Kaipara Scallop Survey:

John Holdsworth and Kim Walshe recently implemented NIWA tender research to survey 250 survey tows within the Kaipara Harbour to determine the status of scallop beds. John reports that overall the scallop beds continue to be quite patchy. Although a few beds exist that appear to be quite healthy, most are limited. There was very little evidence to suggest that any successful recruitment has occurred in the recent few breeding seasons.

John reports that the Kaipara hosts a large number of Asian date mussels on the seafloor. This is unfortunate, as these mussels tend to produce a ‘mat-like’ material that covers areas of the sea floor, reducing benthic suitability for scallop habitat. Asian date mussels may also
be competing with scallops for filter feeding resources.

This is the first scallop survey work completed within the Kaipara, and the methodology has been strictly controlled to enable repeatability. The results of this work will form the initial report for the status of scallop beds within the Kaipara Harbour, and this will provide the baseline values against which future work can be compared.

**DATE FOR NEXT MEETING:**

Early February