



The perils of perception

This week, the Ministry for Primary Industries released a report on New Zealanders' views of the primary sector.

The [148 page report](#) repeated the questions asked in a benchmark study in 2008 that explored urban and rural New Zealanders' views of the agriculture, horticulture, forestry, food, aquaculture and fishing industries.

Fishing did not fare well, with both urban and rural respondents having the least positive view of fishing compared to all other surveyed industries. Only 40 percent of rural respondents and 39 percent of urban respondents held positive views about the fishing industry.

No comparison on the previous study is available as fishing was not included in 2008 but the findings are no surprise. And nor were the reasons why. They believe we overfish, have a 'poorly-managed' quota management system, and have high rates of bycatch.

Seafood New Zealand is now in production for year two of the industry's Promise television campaign, which was specifically designed to address the public perception of the industry, gain trust and grow reputation.

Reputation is the number one issue facing industries and corporations globally. Without reputation and trust the so-called social contract to operate is diminished. Put simply, a negative public view of an industry will not only affect bottom lines - it also influences government policy.

The experts in reputational management will tell you that many factors are behind a surge in companies addressing trust and reputation. Foremost is the increasing reliance by the public to draw their news from social media and the

increasing use of social media to spread misinformation, or fake news.

It is a difficult battle to fight. Those same reputational experts will tell you that the public distrust three out of four institutions in New Zealand and that 61 percent of people believe search engines and social media over human editors (39 percent).

This week's MPI report did show that there are some in the public who acknowledge that negative media reports resulted in the full picture not being visible to the general public.

One respondent said; *"The media will highlight anything that is wrong and suddenly the Green Party go to town on it."* Another said; *"But then the other primary industries, the wineries, the sheep and cattle, the fisheries, they are all doing great things for the country and I think those farmers are doing amazing sustainable things but you only see them if you watch Country Calendar."* Yes, quite.

All of which reinforces the need for the seafood industry to continue the journey to turn the tide of public perception by telling our stories and telling them well. It will not be an overnight fix.

Last year's Promise campaign clawed us back a few percentage points and this year's will do at least that - but probably more. This needs to be a constant in the industry's planning for the future.

We know we are a more responsible, more sustainable, more innovative and more environmentally-conscious industry than we have ever been, but we need the public to believe that as well.

MPI's study points out that the participants in the study talked about the need for transparency and more accurate information to help guide useful conversations that were currently more influenced by partial and often negative information from media platforms.

That is why underpinning our Promise campaign with a code of conduct is essential. We should be living by the code – and most of us are.

The very last quote from a respondent to MPI's study says; *"I think my overall attitude is that I really like our primary industries but I really want them to do better. I don't want them to disappear, I just want them to be nicer."*

Wise words.



New technology deployed to prevent sea lion pup deaths

Scientists from the Department of Conservation (DOC) and Deepwater Group (DWG) say GPS technology and remote cameras are helping them better understand how to prevent New Zealand sea lion pups from dying on the subantarctic islands.

This season 1,792 pups were born at the main breeding ground in Auckland Islands, down slightly from last year's count of 1,965. At the second most important breeding ground on Campbell Island 734 pups were born, an increase on the 696 counted during the previous survey in 2015.

The rare New Zealand sea lion/rāpoka is listed as "Nationally Critical", the highest risk classification.

"Sea lions face a range of natural and human-related threats, such as disease, drowning and starvation from getting stuck in mud holes, being caught in fishing nets, environmental change, food availability and predation by sharks," DOC science advisor for marine species and threats Laura Boren said.

"Conservation staff, the seafood industry, and researchers are working tirelessly to find ways to prevent pups dying from disease and from falling in mud holes – the most significant risks for younger sea lions."

Boren said fewer pups died this season than in previous years, which was encouraging. Mortality dropped from nine percent in 2017 to five percent at the Auckland Islands this year.

At Campbell Island, survey numbers indicate pup mortality was at 23 percent this year, a significant decrease from 58 percent in 2015 – the last time this population was monitored.

"While it is very encouraging that fewer pups died at Campbell Island this season, the loss of 170 pups this year (down from 404 in 2015), is still an unacceptably high number," DWG chief executive George Clement said.

“Any way that we can minimise pup mortality will help the overall populations. It is essential we continue to monitor these populations and find ways to reduce the high numbers of pup deaths, which is why DWG is supporting this programme on Campbell Island.”



NIWA expertise contributes to healthy hoki fishery

When NIWA fisheries scientist Richard O’Driscoll went to sea earlier this year, he and his team measured so many fish that laid end to end, they would have stretched for 31km.

That’s 71,752 fish to exact – and a crucial part of NIWA’s annual assessment of New Zealand’s hoki stock. Conducted from NIWA’s flagship research vessel Tangaroa, one of the main aims of the month-long survey is to provide information that enables the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) to sustainably manage the hoki fishery.

Results from the survey would feed into a hoki population assessment, which supports MPI’s decision on the total allowable catch, O’Driscoll said.

Ensuring the hoki fishery remains healthy and sustainable includes monitoring the abundance of juvenile fish.

A biennial trawl survey carried out by NIWA on the Chatham Rise measures the abundance of juvenile fish from both New Zealand hoki stocks – one that spawns on the West Coast of the South Island, and one that spawns in Cook Strait.

“Juveniles of both those stocks end up together on the Chatham Rise, they get there when they are about a year old, stay all together until they’re about four. Doing the survey here allows us to assess the numbers of small hoki from both stocks when they’re in the same place.”

The total allowable commercial catch for hoki is set at 150,000 tonnes and it is an important export earner - \$229M in 2017.

[Read more](#)

News

The critically endangered Antipodean albatross will be functionally extinct within the next 20 years unless the devastating decline in their population is halted, Conservation Minister Eugenie Sage said. The population of this rare wandering albatross, which breeds almost exclusively on the remote Antipodes Island in the New Zealand subantarctic, has experienced an alarming decline in the past 13 years, with very high mortality of females and reduced breeding success.

NZAAE Seaweed 2018 starts on Saturday 3 March, with the number of events having swelled to 224, more than ever before. The biggest event in the country will be Sustainable Coastlines' 'Love Your Coast' Tāmaki Makaurau Clean-up, with clean-up stations located around the Hauraki Gulf and Waiheke Island on Saturday 3 March and around the Manukau Harbour on Saturday 10 March. Visit seaweed.org.nz to learn more.

Ocean Bounty

This week on Ocean Bounty we meet John and Sue Bennett. John captains the Sanford long-liner, San Aspiring. We'll follow him in to Antarctic waters as he chases toothfish from the Ross Sea to the Falklands and South Georgia. Colossal squid, orcas, sperm whales and icebergs, it's all in a days work for John and the crew. Tune in to Three at 11am on Sunday to check it out.

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