



THE UPDATE

Captain's Blog



A fresh voice for recreational fishers

Co-operation rather than condemnation is the byword for a recreational fishing group gaining traction in the South Island.

Fish Mainland is a new organisation designed by a working group comprising South and Stewart islanders to represent the 100,000 plus recreational fishers in those waters.

The group has sought Government funding and received a positive response about its activities from Fisheries Minister Stuart Nash this week.

He commended the working group “for its efforts to consult widely and develop robust foundation documents”.

“It is good to see the support you have received to date from recreational fishers and other fishing sectors and I look forward to seeing this translate into membership as your initiative progresses,”

However, he kicked for touch on funding, saying he would seek advice from his officials.

The group is taking a markedly different approach from Auckland-based LegaSea, the public and fundraising arm of the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council.

LegaSea activists seek a ban on inshore trawling, despite the impact this would have on livelihoods, fishing communities throughout the country and the supply of fresh fish.

They also oppose the Quota Management System and give little weight to the 1992 Maori Fisheries Settlement that recognises Treaty of Waitangi indigenous fishing rights.

Fish Mainland's primary purpose is to provide effective professional representation, advice and leadership, according to advisor Dr Randall Bess.

"For these services to be acceptable it is imperative that Fish Mainland works respectfully and collaboratively with Government, iwi and the other fishing sectors to find workable solutions that provide the best outcomes," he says.

Its mandate is based on a democratic electoral system, with members appointing five regional directors and iwi another two.

Bess concedes this is a challenge, given the recreational fishing sector is far more numerous, diverse and undefined than commercial and iwi fishing interests. The majority of recreational fishers do not belong to fishing clubs.

Membership is open to anyone, though only South Island and Stewart Island residents or property owners who are members have voting rights.

Bess says there has been strong support.

"Many recognise the need for collective representation - they realise that if joined together they can accomplish a lot more."

All nine South Island iwi have given in-principle support, along with commercial organisations.

Unlike LegaSea, the group is open to funding a recreational voice through a fishing license, as is the case in freshwater fisheries, although its preference is for full Government funding.

The Fish Mainland project has been funded by two wealthy individuals - US-based Julian Robertson through his Aotearoa Foundation and Sir Douglas Myers, one of New Zealand's richest men at the time of his death in 2017.

Bess said both were passionate about fishing but neither interfered in the project's direction.

A burly, bearded former Alaskan fisherman, Bess was a research fellow at the New Zealand Initiative in 2016-17, when he wrote a controversial report, *The Future Catch*.

He also produced a companion report, *The Overseas Catch*, which considered the state of fisheries management abroad.

The American-based The Nature Conservancy has also supported Bess and the Fish Mainland concept.

TNC, which employs 600 scientists worldwide, seeks collaboration with all parties to find solutions to pressing environmental issues.

Fish Mainland is about to launch its website and will kick off public meetings in Nelson and Marlborough in early March and then in other South Island regions.

It will also seek the support of South Island MPs in Government in the lead up to this year's general election.



**FISH
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Survey discovers a giant of the deep

NIWA scientists were left stunned after catching a giant squid during a hoki survey on the Chatham Rise in January.

At 7.34am, while hauling in a trawl net, scientists discovered huge tentacles amongst the fish they had collected.

It took six crew to lift the four metre long, 110 kilogram squid onto a tarpaulin.

Voyage leader Darren Stevens said the *RV Tangaroa* crew were abuzz with news of the squid and sleeping scientists stirred to take photographs.

"We knew there would be staff who wouldn't be happy if we hadn't woken them for a giant squid," Stevens said.

Auckland University of Technology squid researcher Ryan Howard examined and dissected the squid, taking nearly 50kg of samples, including the eyes, head, stomach and reproductive organs.

"We managed to get an 110kg animal down to two 25kg boxes in terms of what was actually kept," Stevens said.

"We took the stomach because virtually nothing is known about a giant squid's diet because every time people seem to catch one, there's very rarely anything in their stomachs."

The eyes would be used for research to shed light on the secret lives of giant squid.

"Getting two giant squid eyes is apparently enough for a scientific paper. They're really rare, and you need a fresh one. It was a really unique set of circumstances to get two fresh eyes."

The statolith – a tiny bone structure in the head – will be used to estimate its age.

"Currently there's no good way to age a giant squid. It's thought they live for more than one year that's for sure, maybe they live for three or four, but no-one really knows."

While giant squid are a global species, Stevens said New Zealand seems to be something of a hotspot for catching them, with NIWA researchers typically catching one each decade.

"New Zealand is kind of the giant squid capital of the world – anywhere else a giant squid is caught in a net would be a massive deal."



Methane-busting seaweed an opportunity for New Zealand

Properties of a native red seaweed could help tackle livestock methane emissions on a global scale.

In 2015, CSIRO researcher Robert Kinley released a study outlining that *asparagopsis taxiformis*, a seaweed native to Australia and Tasmania, reduced methane emissions from cattle by more than 90 percent.

Kinley stumbled upon the finding while experimenting with feeding various strains of seaweed to cows.

“The prominent effect occurred at dose levels >2 percent [P < 0.001] and no detectable [methane] was produced”, the study said.

Adding *asparagopsis* to cattle diets (>2 percent) virtually eliminated methane.

Its properties appear to inhibit enzymes, stopping the process that produces methane in the animal’s gut without affecting other bacteria.

The species present in New Zealand’s colder waters, *asparagopsis armata*, has been less researched than its Australian counterpart, but its properties are nearly identical, Kinley said.

New Zealand company CH4 Global have received a \$500,000 Provincial Growth Fund grant to research and harvest wild *asparagopsis* and are now seeking approval from MPI to begin farming trials.

NIWA and the University of Otago are also partnering on the project, conducting surveys of the area’s seaweed population to determine whether and how it can be sustainably harvested. Early indications from the surveys are that New Zealand has a copious amount of the seaweed.

Local expertise is also being employed.

Shellfish farmer Jim Maass-Barrett lost his oyster farm to a *bonamia ostreae* outbreak in 2017 but has recently started a mussel farm in Big Glory Bay. He will take the lead on any potential farming for CH4.

Stewart Islander Zane Smith has been monitoring the population of wild *asparagopsis* around the island and will also be assisting with collection for research purposes.

CH4 hopes to start with harvesting wild seaweed, phasing that out as the farms grow in scale, then developing a “product” that could be fed directly to dairy cattle.

A spokesperson for Agriculture Minister Damien O’Connor said that the Minister views the native red seaweed as an alga with a lot of potential.

"In previous trials, *asparagopsis* has proven to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in livestock by up to 80 percent. Other products typically provide reductions of between 10 and 20 percent," the spokesperson said.

"If successful, [*asparagopsis*] could be a game-changer for farmers here and around the world."



Divers gathering *asparagopsis* seaweed along a transect line in Port Pegasus. Photo, Toby Dickson.

News

A New Zealand vessel, alleged to have illegally fished in a protected part of the Tasman Sea, has been removed from an international blacklist, *Stuff* reported. The Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) moved to prosecute the Talley's-owned *Amaltal Apollo* over the alleged breach in May 2018. MPI's director of international policy Phil Houlding said the decision was made by consensus by the 15 member countries of the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (SPRFMO). "New Zealand supported this decision and is happy with SPRFMO's recognition of the effective action New Zealand has taken, and continues to take, in monitoring New Zealand flagged fishing vessels operating on the high seas and taking appropriate actions to deal with alleged breaches." In a statement, Houlding later added that Talley's was present at the meeting as part of the High Seas Fisheries Group which represents industry participants in the fishery. "It had observer status only, as is routine at SPRFMO meetings. It was not part of New Zealand's delegation." *Amaltal* - the deepwater division of Talley's Group - faces 14 charges over the incident. Tony Hazlett from *Amaltal* said in a statement that the *Amaltal Apollo* had been found to be a legal vessel. "The spirit and intention of the management measures of the SPRFMO Convention is to identify, publicise and penalise truly illegal unregulated and

illegal vessels. The *Amatal Apollo* is not one of those vessels and this is reflected in the unanimous decision of the 15 SPRFMO countries and the Commission's decision.”

The Department of Conservation and Fisheries New Zealand are seeking public feedback on a proposed network of marine protected areas off the southeast coast of Otago, the first of its kind in the South Island, *Otago Daily Times* reported. Covering almost 1300sqkm, the proposed network includes six marine reserves, where marine life would be fully protected and fishing banned, five marine protected areas, which would impose a range of restrictions to fishing, and one kelp protection area where commercial harvest of bladder kelp would be prohibited. The consultation document outlines the potential impact on commercial fisheries in the areas. The lobster industry could take a hit, with 17 tonnes (\$1.84 million worth) to go from the Te Umu Koau Marine Reserve off Palmerston, and smaller reductions in other reserve areas. Red gurnard, blue cod and school shark fisheries could also take significant reductions. [Submissions](#) close on April 17.

Submissions close Monday for a proposal to carry forward rock lobster ACE due to disruptions to the market from coronavirus. The Ministry has initiated consultation on options for the carry forward of uncaught annual catch entitlements (ACE) for rock lobster fishers. Industry has been seeking an urgent indication from government of their intent to implement this measure. Making the amendments to allow this is the single most important step that can be taken to alleviate the economic impacts of the effective closure of the Chinese market to our lobsters as a consequence of measures taken by the Chinese authorities to try and contain the coronavirus, said chief executive of NZ Rock Lobster Industry Council, Mark Edwards. In a meeting with the Minister last week he said he is actively looking at ways to alleviate the dire situation for operators and processors. Carry forward is a logical response to the inability of the industry to harvest lobsters for reasons that are unrelated to sustainability – we just seek to catch lobsters in the next fishing year that would otherwise have been harvested during this period. This does not create sustainability risks – the stock assessments set out what can be taken and carry-forward does not increase overall catch. Harvesting in the next fishing year provides the potential for a far better market return for operators which can flow into the regional businesses and communities where the industry is located. As at the end of January there was just over 400 tonnes of unused commercial catching entitlements held by permit holders and processors because the market closure came at a peak catching and landing period. In the absence of a carry forward option those rights – which are already paid for at a cost of around \$50/kg – will expire. The investment made by the industry will be immediately lost when that happens. It is that loss that industry seeks to alleviate without asking for financial assistance from government or the taxpayer and with no sustainability issues. The industry strongly supports the carry forward of all un-used entitlements because limiting carry forward to 10 percent will compound the substantial economic losses already incurred. The 10 percent option could mean that 260 tonnes held by operators across New Zealand with a potential export value of around \$30 million will be lost. Some small businesses may not be able to sustain losses of this level, particularly if they have

borrowed to purchase the entitlement. It is wasteful to force operators to try and catch the lobsters before 31 March, the end of the fishing year, with the current poor market returns, or allow the entitlements to expire. We seek a decision from government as soon as possible as the uncertainty on this matter is very stressful for individuals and companies who are already suffering significant financial hardship.

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