



FISHING POLICY

Sustainable fishing practices to ensure future generations can enjoy the ocean's bounty.

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TOP policy statement on Fisheries Policy

New Zealand's Quota Management System (QMS) has failed. When it was implemented in 1986, hopes were high. The intention was to create a living for small fishing companies, especially Māori-owned companies, while preserving our fish stocks for future generations.

Unhappily the QMS has done none of these things. Some species are severely depleted. Many others are probably heading the same way, but we don't have sufficient research to know. Ecosystems, such as the once bountiful Hauraki Gulf, have been destroyed by bottom-trawling. The seas around New Zealand are extensively over-fished. There aren't nearly enough marine reserves.

When the QMS was implemented in 1986, it saved NZ's fisheries from total collapse. But when it was introduced, only 27 commercial species were included. They were hammered. The original 27 species are no longer sufficient to support the industry. The system has failed because there are now around 100 QMS species 'managed' in the commercial catch and there has been no corresponding increase in research or management by government. The big industry players have had direct input to government decisions, often overriding advice from research scientists.

But small fishers didn't do well out of the QMS either. At inception, anyone who earned less than \$10,000 pa (or derived less than half of their annual income from fishing) was left out of the quota system. That left out about 7,500 people, mostly Māori, who supplemented their income from fishing for part of the year.

Since 1986, the smaller companies have been snapped up by the big ones. Recreational fishers (who were not included in the original legislation) have seen bag limits fall and size restrictions go up. Even with the best technology available, no one can catch fish that simply aren't there.

The big fishing companies are no friends of innovation. Instead of adding value to the catch, they spend their money on technology to make sure they have taken every last fish from a school. The fish don't stand a chance. Then the companies export whole, unprocessed frozen fish to countries like China, where the real value is created.

Quota as a property right overrides any concerns the industry may have for the actual fish stocks. Quota is now held only by a few major companies. Quota should be leased to fishers, and should never have been given away. The government should buy back existing quota and only lease it out to fishers who can show they are committed to sustainability.

If more research on fish species had been done over the past 35 years, we would have a better understanding of how particular fish populations have responded to the QMS. If we had cameras and observers on fishing boats, we would know more about how much 'by-catch' is dumped in the sea, and how many albatrosses and petrels are accidentally killed by poor fishing practices. If officials understood the implications of their policy decisions, we would have done a better job of protecting at-risk species. As it is, we know too little about the details of ecosystem decline and fisheries collapse. But the big picture is clear.

We note the helpful preliminary work done on fisheries reform by Legasea, as set out in their *Rescue Fish: Ika Rauora* policy document (May 2020).

TOP's policy is to reform the QMS system to address the biological and economic consequences of 35 years of greed and neglect. We want to see:

- Sustainable use of the fisheries around New Zealand, so that future generations can enjoy the seas' bounty.
- In order to reverse fishery declines, the management strategy must include extensive marine reserves that are off-limits to fishing.

- Forfeit of quota by companies who fish unsustainably. Instead, quota will be leased to companies that have shown they can fish sustainably.
- Robust research that is sufficient to preserve the health of fish populations and entire ecosystems.
- A re-negotiation with Māori of the Treaty settlement to protect their fisheries interests under Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The *Rescue Fish: Ika Rauora* proposal could provide a useful starting point for negotiations.
- A management system that protects the interests of small companies, including Māori-owned companies, and the wider community. At present the Crown assumes full and exclusive rights to make management decisions when setting quota limits and there is no input from Māori or the wider community that would protect community interests.
- Legislation to bring recreational fishers into the fisheries management régime.
- Innovation by large fishing companies and the wider industry to add value to the fish they catch. No more commodity exports; instead we want to see the value added to fish in New Zealand, by New Zealanders.