



# THE UPDATE

Captain's Blog

## You want debate? Let's make it informed

The New Zealand seafood industry has just endured another week of mainstream media criticism.

This is not a “should we be accountable” argument. This is a “what does a high-profile journalist fomenting uninformed comment actually add to the debate”, argument.

Advocacy “journalism” is, in my opinion, an oxymoron. Journalism is about presenting facts and debating their validity.

We didn't see that over the past 10 days.

What we saw was a presenter with an agenda trying to shut down informed debate, not open it up.

Let's have a look at it, fact by fact, not emotion by emotion.

Forest & Bird accuse the industry of putting profit above sustainability. All the science disputes that. Hague's assertion that “industry is managing the stock to ensure fish are replenishing themselves just enough to be caught, but not considering the impact of the ocean ecosystem” is nonsensical. What industry is doing is ensuring the sustainability of the fishery. Based on science. Supported by government. Endorsed by fisheries experts all over the world.

The alternative is ... actually, there is no alternative. Despite apparently living in a post-truth world, truth and science are the only things that hold back the descent into the rabbit hole of opinion trumping reality.

The science says 94 percent of fish landed in New Zealand is from sustainable stocks. The fishing industry does not make that up. Every year, scientists go out and assess the health of our fish stocks. It is verifiable.

We get that it is difficult to understand complex arguments around the Quota Management System and fisheries science but, at the very least, let the people who have spent lifetimes studying these have an uninterrupted say.

This whole, “fishers are bad and out just for themselves” argument is getting tiresome.

It is just not true.

At the most simplistic level, why do you think fishers would fish down a resource that is their own source of livelihood? They would not. In what other industry do its participants lobby for a 30 percent revenue reduction in the name of sustainability, which is what we saw in the tarakihi fishery over the past two years. What other industry asks for a pay cut?

I digress.

How about Maori involvement in the seafood industry? The CEO of Te Ohu Kaimoana, the body charged with looking after the assets rightfully awarded during the Maori Fisheries Settlement, was treated poorly on Tuesday.

For comment on the matter of Maori involvement, TVNZ chose to front Sandra Lee-Vercoe, a politician last seen publicly in New Zealand 20 years ago. Dion Tuuta was not invited to join the discussion until he sought the opportunity to respond.

For Te Ohu Kaimoana, to be labelled a “trojan horse” that championed industry and did not represent iwi was ignorant and insulting.

The issue of the Kermadec Marine Sanctuary, which was the subject of the presenter’s ire, is black and white. The rights of iwi to fish those waters are entrenched in the Maori Fisheries Settlement. They really should talk to former Minister for Treaty Negotiations, Chris Finlayson, who is on record as saying there was little consultation with Maori over the proposed Kermadec Sanctuary and, “a rushed call to Ngati Kuri” was not enough.

To the presenter’s credit, in the latest instalment yesterday the penny appears to have dropped.

Dion Tuuta spoke of respect on Tuesday, respect for the sanctity of a Treaty settlement that was 150 years in the making. Yes, it’s disrespectful to unilaterally remove a component of the Treaty Settlement without so much as a discussion with the 58 iwi affected. It’s heartening to see this concept has been grasped, but this should have been among the first utterances, not the last.

Staying with the Kermadecs, sorry to let facts get in the way, but they are not currently “unprotected”. The Kermadec region is currently protected by a Marine Reserve (protecting 0-12 nm) and Benthic Protection Area (protecting 12-200 nm). The fact that 30 percent of the EEZ is similarly protected, one of the highest protection rates in the world, seemed not to count, or was perhaps unknown.

Another tired allegation was that the fishing industry has too much influence on the government. How exactly? The seafood industry participates in government processes like any other eNGO or industry group. That’s the system at work.

It is tempting to go through the whole series of programmes on TVNZ Breakfast point by point, but I think it would be more helpful to address the real issue.

Advocacy journalism.

We're keen to have the discussion, but you are not listening.

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## Re-opening the Kaikoura shellfish and seaweed fisheries

Te Korowai is engaging with the community on the re-opening of the Kaikōura recreational and commercial shellfish and seaweed fisheries.

[Their document](#) sets out issues and options to help gather community views on when and how the shellfish and seaweed fisheries should be re-opened.

This feedback will then be passed on to Fisheries New Zealand to develop and consult on new management measures for the fisheries.

Feedback can be sent to [teamkorowai@gmail.com](mailto:teamkorowai@gmail.com) or via their [website](#).

Submissions close 30 September 2020.

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