



THE UPDATE

Captain's Blog

Scientific integrity must be paramount in a fake news world

Many a beautiful theory has been killed by an ugly fact, so the saying goes, and a demonstration of that was witnessed this week when the work of one scientist was eviscerated by another.

Dr Jim Roberts is the marine scientist who performed the risk analysis for the government's Hector's and Maui Dolphin Threat Management Plan (TMP), which included the controversial findings that toxoplasmosis, a cat borne disease, was killing more Maui dolphins than fishing.

This was a theory that did not sit well with those who believe fishing is at the root of every marine evil.

The government is still considering the TMP, however Liz Slooten and Steve Dawson, who are marine biologists at Otago University, took it upon themselves to critique the science around the TMP. They circulated their paper to the press and the world prior to having it subject to any peer review or publication. Within days of Slooten and Dawson's paper coming out, Jim Roberts had metaphorically torn it to shreds.

Roberts said Slooten and Dawson's work was not only misleading it contained multiple errors of fact.

The problem with papers presented as science, however, is a layperson is unlikely to realise they are being given manipulated information and this was Roberts' fear – that the public would swallow it as fact.

In a 13-page rebuttal, Roberts laid out his case that the paper written by Slooten and Dawson was biased towards their own foregone conclusions.

Slooten and Dawson are passionate about dolphins, particularly the fate of the Maui but crossing the line from science into advocacy is a slippery slope.

Environmental NGOs use exaggeration and shock to make their point, believing the end will always justify the means. This should not be a model adopted by scientists.

One of the more damning findings from [Roberts' full report](#) is the complete misrepresentation of an International Whaling Commission (IWC) report by their science committee. Slooten and Dawson cite this report to assist their argument that aerial population surveys to inform the TMP were flawed. In fact, as Roberts points out in his rebuttal, the IWC actually praised the methods used as a 'step forward'. Roberts called Slooten and Dawson's take 'an Orwellian misrepresentation of the facts that would be unlikely to be picked up by people who didn't have time to read the IWC reports.'

And this is the crux of the problem. In a world where falsehoods are presented as fact it is increasingly easy to get a narrative running that has no basis in the truth. Fake news becomes news. And if we can't trust the science, we are making decisions based on agendas and emotions. In other words, we are being manipulated.

The conclusions reached from consultation carried out on the Hector's and Maui Dolphin TMP are due to be released 'soon' according to the Minister of Conservation and they will have real impacts on real fishers and their families.

Science has contributed to the TMP and we can only hope that it is science that informs the imminent decisions.

Remembering Bob Stannard

Many older members of the fishing industry will have fond memories of Bob Stannard who died this week aged 96.

Bob was appointed chairman of the Fishing Industry Board in 1988 and guided the industry at a time when the quota system was in its infancy.

He was an outstanding chairman with a firm but always fair demeanour who provided excellent governance through some reasonably turbulent times.

Bob had many high profile positions in New Zealand – he was a partner in KPMG and served a term as president of the NZ Society of Accountants.

He was a Government appointed statutory manager of the Public Service Investment Society at a time when that organisation was in financial strife and was largely credited with returning the group to solvency. His other directorships including being appointed chair of the Bank of New Zealand when that bank was in trouble.

There were many other appointments to substantive boards, trusts etc., but Bob always maintained that his years with the fishing industry were among the most enjoyable of his commercial career.

He will be remembered with respect by all who knew him.



Moana Project delivers "exceptional progress"

Some of New Zealand's top marine scientists recently gathered to review progress of the \$11.5 million Moana Project.

The project, now part way through its second year, hopes to revolutionise the understanding on New Zealand's rapidly changing oceans and improve capabilities for forecasting ocean behaviour.

A team of 60 researchers from MetOcean Service's oceanographic division are leading the project, using cutting edge technology, science, indigenous knowledge and both new and old data to fill in gaps in New Zealand's ocean knowledge.

Project director and science lead João de Souza said the enhanced ocean knowledge provided by the project will better prepare the country for the impact warming seas may have on our coastlines and marine environments.

"It will also enable our role as kaitiaki and can help ensure the sustainability of our kaimoana and the livelihoods generated through the blue economy which generates \$4 billion annually," de Souza said.

"We've made great progress already based around a number of building blocks to achieve this ambitious and holistic project."

A core component of the project has been the development of high-tech, low-cost smart sensors. Created by Nelson company Zebra-Tech, the sensors are deployed on vessels to collect ocean temperature data from around the country.

Julie Jakoboski, another of the project's leaders, said results from an initial small-scale trial have been extremely impressive.

"Following a bigger trial incorporating additional vessels over a broader area, they will be deployed throughout New Zealand's exclusive economic zone with support from the commercial fishing sector's fleet.

"The result will be an unprecedented amount of subsurface ocean data that we'll be able to assimilate into our models."

An ocean forecasting model based on computer algorithms is also in development.

"We've gathered historical ocean data and used it to improve our newly developed ocean model of NZ's coastal and ocean shelf regions called the Moana Backbone," de Souza said.

"The 25 year hindcast is an incredibly valuable dataset that is now freely available to researchers and the broader community."

Research into our kaimoana, specifically mussels, rock lobster and pāua, also fall under the project's scope, with scientists seeking a better understanding of where the species come from, how they travel and where they end up.

The overall project is a collaborative effort, receiving support from a wide range of ocean-information end-users, including the New Zealand Defence Technology Agency, the seafood sector including Seafood New Zealand, the Pāua Industry Council, Rock Lobster Industry Council, Deepwater Group, Fisheries Inshore New Zealand, MPI and district and regional councils.

Iwi are highly involved too, combining mātauranga Māori and science to enhance future marine management.

“The Moana Project is an exciting and ambitious project with a meaningful Vision Mātauranga-centred approach to research,” MBIE senior investment manager Dr Carolyn Walker said.

“It brings together a diverse range of highly skilled people and innovative ideas.

“The Project is one of MBIE’s high-performers, having made exceptional progress in its first two years.”



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News

The BCO5 Association, representing commercial blue cod fishermen in the South, has backed Fisheries New Zealand’s rebuild plan for the fishery, *Stuff* reported. The plan, which proposes a reduction in commercial blue cod catch from 1239 tonnes per annum to 874 tonnes, is expected to cause an annual loss of \$890,000 in revenue for commercial

fishers. BCO5 Association chairman Bill Smellie said he was comfortable with a reduction in commercial catch limits, providing the rebuild management procedure was also in place. With a 30 percent catch reduction, the fishery would be expected to rebound positively within two to four years, he said. "Commercial blue cod catch limits should be able to quickly respond to changes in the fishery. Our blue cod are nearly all caught by potting, same as for rock lobster. Given the success of the rock lobster rebuild plan in Southland, we expect similar positive results for our fishery," Smellie said. The proposed changes will not affect the price or availability of blue cod in retail markets. As of July 1, blue cod's minimum catch size will be standardised to 33cm across most areas, except for the upper North Island. The minimum pot mesh size for blue cod will change to 54mm and a traffic light system will be implemented to indicate the daily bag limit for different areas. Director of fisheries management Emma Taylor said the new rules intend to address localised overfishing, particularly in the South Island where the majority of blue cod is caught. "Standardising to the legal minimum size of blue cod to 33cm will contribute to improving the productivity of blue cod populations by allowing the fish to grow to a larger size and giving them a greater chance to breed," Taylor said. "This size limit is already in place for commercial fishers and recreational fishers in many areas."

Banning overseas vessels from entering Nelson's port is costing jobs and millions of dollars in work, *Radio NZ* reported. Steve Sullivan, managing director of marine engineering firm Aimex, said vessels remained subject to the Covid-19 border closures and were being refused entry to Port Nelson for engineering and maintenance work. He said the firm had spent several weeks trying to resolve the matter after a foreign-flagged tuna fishing boat requiring urgent repairs was refused entry to Nelson. Aimex had already laid off 10 percent of its 100-strong workforce and was looking at further job cuts. Crew quarantine and Covid-19 testing could be managed in Nelson, Sullivan said. Nelson MP Nick Smith had been lobbying the government over what he said was an ad-hoc approach to exemptions which was harming the marine engineering industry. "The government has made exemptions for freight ships coming and going from New Zealand, it's provided exemptions for industries like the movie industry...I think they're making a real mistake by rigidly blocking vessels from coming into Nelson to be repaired." Smith said it "added insult to injury" that government officials had advised the tuna vessel aiming to come to Nelson to instead head to Hawaii for repairs without any regard for the loss of jobs and income and jobs to Nelson. The particular vessel at issue was the Captain Vincent Gann, an 1800-tonne tuna fishing vessel from American Samoa. "American Samoa's had no cases of Covid-19, the ship would have been at sea for more than two weeks - the quarantine period. The company is more than happy to have the full crew Covid-tested and put into quarantine," Smith said. An MBIE spokesperson said a request for an exception to enter New Zealand by the crew of Captain Vincent Gann was applied for under humanitarian grounds in late May but was declined as it did not meet the criteria. "The decisions made on the expression of interest was based on the information available to us at the time, and assessed against well-defined, specific criteria. Immigration New Zealand has no ability to apply discretion when considering requests against the border criteria," it said. New Zealand government agencies have now been in discussions with the ship's agents about the issues they were experiencing and what assistance could be provided within current border restrictions.



Image; BCO5 Association.

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