



THE UPDATE

Captain's Blog



The importance of fisheries management

A major paper on fisheries management has just been released by researchers at the University of Washington.

Led by Mike Melnychuk, it examines the various components of fisheries management to assess their efficacy.

They looked at the intensity and nature of fisheries management in 29 major fishing countries collecting responses to 46 questions on 632 individual fish stocks.

And it seems that shorter term, issues-based management procedures such as rebuilding plans are the most effective tool.

The paper looks at two management types; regulating stock levels as needed for individual stocks that may need attention or all-encompassing legislation that targets large scale fisheries through national policy.

With the New Zealand government currently looking to review our marine protection legislation and with some signals toward more holistic management, this paper is a timely reminder that good, targeted science, when used to quickly react to stock status changes is the best way to ensure healthy fisheries.

This is not to say that an ecosystem approach to fisheries management system should not be pursued, nor does it mean there is no place for other broader marine management tools such as marine protected areas.

However, when the health of fish stocks is the primary focus, the research clearly shows it is a solid fisheries management regime, coupled with good research and robust rebuilding

plans that can be turned on or off as needed (as we have in New Zealand), are more effective than longer-term, more permanent, and broad-brush measures.

Melnychuk cautions that rebuilding plans do need to be a tool within a robust overall fisheries management regime that will, by definition, reduce the need to ever need a rebuilding plan.

“If fisheries management regimes are strong enough, then overfishing can be avoided and large sustainable catches can be harvested annually, rendering emergency measures like rebuilding plans unnecessary.”

The fly in the ointment, not just in New Zealand, but in the United States where the research was undertaken, is that the availability of data – the means to detect a stock’s status – is often lacking, and these are the stocks that are often most at risk of depletion.

The New Zealand seafood industry has long called for more research into our inshore fisheries, particularly.

While acknowledging that assessment of fish stocks is expensive, and some fisheries are too small to justify the cost of collecting data, we would argue that some solution must be found to gaining more knowledge of our entire inshore fishery. A review of the funding mechanism is a good place to start.

The New Zealand seafood industry pays the government more than \$15 million each year towards research of stocks and this contributes to the valuable annual assessment by MPI on New Zealand’s overall fish stock status.

Critics of the Quota Management System ignore decades of science that shows countries that embrace good fisheries management have improved fisheries outcomes, while countries with little or no fisheries management suffer exploitation and overfishing.

The latest evaluation shows that New Zealand’s fisheries are in good health, with just six percent in need of rebuilding. This is only a result you get when your fisheries management regime is getting it right and the research by Melnychuk et al acknowledges that.

So before we embark on grand reforms; whether they be ecosystem based management or repeated calls by environmentalists to lock up 30 percent of our waters by 2030, let’s not lose sight of what really matters when it comes to healthy fisheries.

Read the paper [here](#).

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