



THE UPDATE

Captain's Blog



Time for some agility around changes to daily bag limits

If the number of applications for rāhui being processed since the end of lockdown are anything to go by, the number of recreational fishers harvesting kaimoana is at an all-time high.

Because Fisheries New Zealand cannot reduce a recreational bag take without Cabinet sign-off, iwi and rununga have been taking matters into their own hands and applying for temporary closures to protect their customary take in the future.

These rāhui, valid for two years, and granted under Section 186A of the Fisheries Act 1996, allow iwi to act quickly when fishing pressure is having a clear impact, however a quicker and more agile way of reducing the recreational bag limit must also be urgently addressed.

Ngāti Paoa was recently granted permission to close all of Waiheke Island out to one nautical mile. In their application they say, “Waiheke’s population growth has always been a concern for Ngāti Pāoa and the America’s Cup event has created additional pressure on our limited kaimoana resource. The current harvesting onslaught during the Christmas, New Year’s peak season has been devastating and continues as we observe more visitors coming from Auckland.”

Ngāti Paoa go on to say, “There is an urgent call for the Minister of Oceans and Fisheries to implement the reduction of recreational bag limits as stated in 2019. If this is not achieved the species will again be targeted and their existence threatened once the rāhui is lifted.”

Other closures through customary means, as opposed to bag limit decreases, include Ngai Tahu's on Akaroa Harbour to protect paua and Nga Hapu o Waimarama's in Hawke's Bay for the same reason.

In the Hawke's Bay application they state, "The Waimarama Rohe Moana and its supply of paua and other species is very popular with recreational [fishers] and especially high numbers of holidaymakers to the area each summer period. The depletion of the paua stock in their area is caused by past and now present overfishing pressures primarily, in their view, by recreational fishers."

Other recent applications have come from Te Rununga o Makaawhio on the West Coast and Ngai Tahu at Bluff Hill and Waipapa in Southland.

While it is heartening that iwi have the tools to quickly move to protect seafood stocks, it does not negate the fact that the legislative requirements to reduce recreational bag limits must improve.

At the very least, the recreational bag limit should be enacted by Gazette Notice, as TACC changes are.

The commercial industry also want agility within the Fisheries Act. And it is something that the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor also highlighted in her recent report on commercial fishing in New Zealand.

Professor Gerrard said the regulator needs to be more nimble, and more resource is needed to enable Fisheries New Zealand to keep pace with ever-changing commercial stocks.

Ditto for recreational.



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