



Forest & Bird

TE REO O TE TAIAO | *Giving Nature a Voice*

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Hon Stuart Nash
Minister of Fisheries
Parliament Building
Wellington 6160
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Dear Stuart

Fishing and New Zealand's COVID-19 recovery

Forest & Bird understands the Government is currently considering the role of the fishing industry in New Zealand's COVID recovery. We urge you to do so in a way that delivers the step change in fisheries that is needed to deliver a high value, genuinely sustainable fishery that delivers a traceable high value product from the vessel to the plate with confidence. New Zealand needs a recovery for people and the planet.

The decisions you make over the coming weeks will determine whether this will be the case or whether old patterns will be entrenched, delaying a much needed transformation of New Zealand fisheries and ultimately creating market risks to the industry as we have seen with the risk of a United States trade ban in relation to inadequate protection for Maui dolphins.

We understand that at present approximately half of the fishing fleet sits idle due to COVID-19 and that this particularly impacts on the inshore fleet. We also understand that this relates primarily to issues with demand and transportation rather than supply; fishers can catch fish but people are not buying or the fish cannot reach the market.

In this environment it makes little sense to focus on enhancing the supply side of the fisheries system through cost reductions and higher TACC. That will be a form of subsidy that contributes to overcapacity in the fishing sector. This is an approach to industry support that New Zealand has strongly campaigned against internationally in the WTO and elsewhere for many years and which is not in New Zealand's long term strategic interest.

Instead the Government should view this as a breathing space to recalibrate over-fished stocks, facilitate the transition towards only catching food and increasing the transparency of the fishing industry through enhanced use of human observers and cameras. Some fishers may not wish to return to fishing during the COVID recovery period. The Government has an opportunity to lift the performance of those who do, and assist the exit of those who do not. Fishers will need financial help transitioning or modernizing their existing vessels to reduce bycatch, benthic impacts or to improve target catch. These measures would demonstrate New Zealand's commitment to sustainable seafood and in the long term add market value.

Decisions that you can make to provide a short term employment boost and help drive a longer term transition to higher value sustainable fisheries are:

- Fund the voluntary adoption of cameras across the fleet. This will create a variety of jobs from technology providers, installation, associated vessel maintenance and modification as well as ongoing work with the use of cameras including training New Zealanders to analyse electronic monitoring data.
- Ensure the existing observer program is fully maintained and adequately funded
- Financially support the roll-out of hook-pods across the surface longline fleet which will help deliver a step change with reducing seabird bycatch
- Increase funding to the liaison program including additional resources to hasten the roll out and updating the protected species risk management plans, which could redeploy fishers without work
- Fund transition or modernization of existing fishing vessels, such as a voluntary transition for set netters to more sustainable fishing methods which would help reduce inshore bycatch across a range of species and deliver a boost to employment with modification of vessels and the option of redeploying fishers without work to support set netters with the transition
- Financially support fishers who want to exit set net fisheries
- Increase investment in marine sustainability research, including mitigation projects and increase the number of quantitative stock assessments carried out each year
- Invest in Ecosystem Based Fisheries Management by building on the National Science Challenge Sustainable Seas work, focusing on the Hauraki Gulf as a case study

Decisions that would undermine the long term market value of fisheries, limit a short term employment boost or undermine sustainability would be:

- Avoiding decisions on over-fished stocks
- Increasing TAC and TACC for stocks where there are sustainability concerns, potential wider ecological effects or limited information
- Further postponing the roll out cameras on boats and the quality assurance that provides to consumers and markets
- Delaying the roll-out of measures to reduce bycatch and benthic impacts

If the fishing industry is genuinely in a position of hardship in meeting the cost recovery levies, we would appreciate direct discussions with Forest & Bird on this matter and how central Government can pick up the slack rather than reducing programmes.

My staff are happy to work with your officials to help progress proposals that help deliver the kind of step change in fishing and marine management that New Zealand needs. The ability of the fishing industry to continue to benefit New Zealand depends on a healthy ocean and the country cannot afford to lose sight of this at this time.

Yours sincerely



Kevin Hague
Chief Executive / Kaiwhakahaere Matua