



# THE UPDATE

## Captain's Blog



## Seafood industry a powerhouse for communities

The fishing sector is an economic powerhouse, a new Government report has confirmed.

It is the reason why so many communities exist and thrive.

Fishing and seafood is part of our national identity, contributing social as well as economic wellbeing, the report said.

It is the first time the national economic contribution of the seafood industry has been reported.

“Fishing and aquaculture sectors contribute to the economic stability of regional communities through providing a baseline of economic activity throughout the year where other industries operate seasonally, such as tourism,” it said.

But it was not our Government offering this welcome support.

It was the Australian Government in the form of Senator Jonathon Duniam, Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries, in opening the Seafood Directions biennial conference in Melbourne last week.

He said fishing was so important to local communities that his home state of Tasmania was more accurately the Fish Isle, rather than its commonly known title of the Apple Isle.

If fishing declined, he said, the quality of life in the regions will decline as a result.

“We will not achieve the outcomes we have been striving for in employment, investment and healthy, fresh food.”

The Aussies, never shy in extolling their virtues, are keen to champion seafood's cause.

The report, commissioned by the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation on behalf of the Australian Government and undertaken by the University of Tasmania's Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies, puts seafood's economic contribution at \$5.3 billion and direct and indirect employment at 41,200.

It notes other benefits such as "commercial fishing vessel skippers and marine farm operators provide assistance and rescues to recreational users of the sea, supporting maritime safety for all".

Duniam also praised the social licence campaign being run by Seafood Industry Australia, the industry's peak body akin to Seafood NZ.

The Our Pledge campaign is modelled on this country's Promise, which introduced a code of conduct and seeks to raise seafood industry trust and reputation amongst the general public.

Duniam said the Pledge was a great example of industry taking the lead, as it should, on an issue critical to its future.

'We've seen in too many industries the crippling damage that the vocal minority can do. And the seafood sector is not immune.

We cannot be complacent."

Australia's pro-active positive approach is in contrast to New Zealand where the fishing sector, like farming, is beleaguered, under assault from urban elites who have no concept of food production.

An Australian fisheries leader commented at the Melbourne conference that every time he visited New Zealand he was surprised at the remoteness of officials and what he saw as a failure to get alongside the seafood industry.

That needs to change if the New Zealand seafood industry, celebrated far more overseas than it is at home, is to realise its full potential and help maintain an enviable standard of living.

We need champions.

One of the biggest cheerleaders for the seafood industry is re-elected Nelson Mayor Rachel Reese.

She features in the industry's Our Promise television campaign this year on the importance of fishing to communities around the country.

And Reese was even more effusive in the lead interview in last Sunday's edition of Graeme Sinclair's Ocean Bounty series.

Nelson is Australasia's biggest fishing port and its activities and all the related services are vital to its economy.

Reese is a keen recreational angler – catching plenty of snapper and blue cod – and recognises the Quota Management System is the key to a sustainable fishery that serves all sectors.

“We are people of the sea,” she says.

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## **Shark cage diving decision invites tragedy**

A Supreme Court judgement on the legality of shark cage diving off Stewart Island has further muddied turbulent waters.

Commercial pāua divers took action against the shark cage operators after they, and residents of Stewart Island became increasingly alarmed at a dangerous change in the Great White Sharks' behaviour.

The operators use tuna berley to attract the sharks to the cage and then use tuna bait to bring the animals close to the tourists in the cage.

Stewart Island residents and commercial divers say the Great Whites now associate humans with food and that is making it perilous to be in the water, which is why they have been attempting to shut down the practise for years.

The Department of Conservation issues the permits for shark cage diving operators because the Great Whites are classified as protected. Stewart Island commercial paua divers took the matter to the High Court and then the Court of Appeal, which ruled that shark cage diving was an offence.

However, the tourism operator, Shark Experience Ltd, appealed and this week's judgement by the Supreme Court allowed that appeal. However, it made no decision on whether the tourism operation was an offence under the Wildlife Act.

This could mean operators may be able to go back in the water in the meantime.

This is cold comfort for Helen Cave who owns the South Sea Hotel at Stewart Island's Half Moon Bay. In 2015, she got 768 people to sign a petition to parliament asking that all shark cage diving on Stewart Island be stopped immediately. Helen has lived on Stewart Island for fifty years and says the fishermen never used to see the sharks. She said it takes about seven minutes for the sharks to get from the cage diving area to where her grandchildren are swimming.

And a bitter pill too for commercial pāua divers who recall with horror a recent incident where, a short time after arriving in a bay the Great Whites were circling the boat, drawn by the sound of the outboard and an association with food. Without provocation, one launched itself onto the vessel and attacked the back pontoon.

So, three court cases on, it seems only a tragedy may finally settle this matter.

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## Iconic pāua at risk from warming oceans

Increasing ocean temperatures and ocean acidification are threatening New Zealand's endemic shellfish, pāua.

Warmer seawater and lower pH levels are likely to affect the thickness of pāua shells, leaving them more vulnerable to predators and less resistant to waves, a group of NIWA and University of Otago researchers have found.

Researchers grew juvenile pāua (<24mm long) in seawater, using various combinations of temperatures and pH levels and examined the pāua's growth, survival rates and general health, along with shell thickness, integrity and composition.

Although juvenile pāua were found to survive and grow in warmer water temperatures and lower pH, this could come at a cost, said lead researcher, Dr Vonda Cummings.

"We found that the outer layer of pāua shell gets etched by seawater with lower pH, especially if the water was warmer. Even a tiny change in the water temperature in our tanks (just 2°C) made a difference," Cummings said.

Pāua exposed to lower pH treatments were found to have lighter shell weights and differences in calcite content were also observed. Researchers said this may indicate calcification is less effective in lower pH conditions, or that biomineralization has been disrupted.

Abby Smith from University of Otago's Department of Marine Science said the research highlights that global climate change can have an effect on the smallest of things, like mollusc shells.

"All shellfish are at risk from marine climate change, but pāua are unusual because the shell is also a valuable part of the harvest, not just the flesh," Smith said.

Paua Industry Council (PIC) scientist Dr Tom McCowan said divers and PIC are also concerned about the impact warmer oceans could have.

"We know, specifically for pāua, that increasing acidity causes high mortality at the larval stage," McCowan said.

"We work with people who this [pāua] is their livelihood and you know it's their chosen way of living. People see it as very important to protect their resource."

The immediate focus is understanding the long-term impact of climate change on pāua, he said.

Read more on Cumming et al.'s recently published [study here](#).



Dr Vonda Cummings. Photo; Dave Allen, NIWA.

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## Fishers recognised at Seabird Smart Awards

Winners of this year's Seabird Smart Awards were announced by Fisheries Minister Stuart Nash and Conservation Minister Eugenie Sage at a reception in Te Papa on Wednesday.

The biennial awards, an initiative of the Southern Seabird Solutions Trust, aim to recognise commercial and recreational fishers who have shown outstanding leadership and commitment to looking after New Zealand seabirds.

This year's winner Dave Kellian, a fisher based out of Leigh, began his quest to invent a fishing technique that keeps seabirds safe from fishing hooks more than 20 years ago. Kellian spent many hours in his shed building a prototype device to release baited hooks 10 metres underwater, out of the reach of seabirds. Today, the device he envisaged exists and is on the cusp of final performance testing on a NZ longline vessel.

Kellian was also an early adopter of line weighting in his fleet, and has advocated the benefits of line weighting for seabirds for many years. He has acted as a champion for New Zealand seabirds internationally, working with fishermen in Peru, South Africa and French Polynesia, and received an MFE Green Ribbon Award for his efforts in 2004.

A special recognition award was given to Scott and Sue Tindall of Auckland, who have been spreading the seabird-smart message amongst recreational fishers, through trade shows, fishing contests and club nights.

Olaf Nilsen, a commercial set net fisher working out of Bluff, also received a special recognition award. Nilsen helped spearhead the four nautical mile ban on set netting around Whenua Hou to reduce the risk to yellow-eyed penguins breeding on the island. He has also eradicated pests off his family titi/mutton-bird island, and helped reintroduce snipe.

"All of the nominees for these awards are environmental champions," said Bill Mansfield, chair of Southern Seabird Solutions Trust. "Each has contributed on and off the water to reinforce the importance of seabird-smart fishing practices. Their passion and actions have positively affected the attitudes and behaviour of others. We want to recognise them and thank them for their vision and their work."



Conservation Minister Eugenie Sage, left, with Seabird Smart Award winner Dave Kellian, Special Recognition Award winner Olaf Nilsen and Fisheries Minister Stuart Nash, right.

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## Ocean Bounty season three - Timaru

John Bennett, skipper of *San Aspiring*, takes the Ocean Bounty crew to the Antarctic toothfish grounds before returning and offloading in Timaru. Timaru is New Zealand's second largest commercial fishing port and the industry has a profound effect on the community. An example can be seen as *San Enterprise* completes her five year survey. Timaru mayor Damon Odey profiles the region.

Tune in this Sunday, 5pm on TV Three.



## News

Commercial fisheries' impact on the marine environment is reducing, according to the Our Marine Environment 2019 report released yesterday. Bycatch of most protected species is decreasing, and seabird bycatch has halved to an estimated 4186 seabird deaths in the 2016-17 fishing year, compared to 8192 in the 2002-03 year. "We recognise this is still too many and our fishers are making strenuous efforts and adopting innovative technologies on a pathway to the ideal of zero bycatch," Seafood New Zealand chief executive Tim Pankhurst said. The report also noted a decrease in sea lion bycatch in trawl fisheries, with three observed captures in the 2016-17 fishing year, compared to 12 in 2002-03, and a decrease in bycatch of Maui and Hector's dolphins. The report recognises "toxoplasmosis has been identified as a potentially serious threat, particularly to female Maui and Hector's dolphins. The disease has negative consequences for reproduction, behaviour and mortality and has been confirmed in nine dolphins that died between 2007 and 2018". A number of commercial trawl and dredge tows have decreased in the past two decades and the area that is trawled is also decreasing, the report said. Fishing pressure has also eased from a peak of 650,000 tonnes catch in 1997 and 1998 to a stable level of less than 450,000 tonnes today. "In 2018, 84 percent of routinely assessed stocks were considered to be fished within safe limits, an improvement from 81 percent in 2009," the report said. Pankhurst said it would be more relevant to record the fact 95 percent of landings are from sustainable stocks, as confirmed in Fisheries New Zealand's 2019 stock status report.

Catch up TV Three's coverage of the report [here](#) (8:48 mark).

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