



# THE UPDATE

## Captain's Blog



### **Dolphin plan threatens butterfish supply**

Wellington's Muollo family has fished Cook Strait and its coastline for a century.

That way of life is now threatened by a proposed Maui and Hector's dolphin management plan that would greatly expand already extensive set netting and trawl bans on the North Island's west coast.

John Muollo, general manager of Deep Blue Seafoods based in Wellington's Webb Street, stands to lose his butterfish business as a result.

That is despite it representing no threat to the critically endangered Maui dolphins, whose habitat is hundreds of kilometres to the north.

"This proposal as it stands, unless status quo is the result, will completely knock out ability to butterfish on the south west coast," Muollo said in a submission on the plan.

"The only area that will be able to fish is the western side of Kapiti Island and this would mean our safety would be compromised. As well as that, the fishery would decline rapidly through intensity of effort if our ability is limited to this small area.

"My family in three generations have been the pioneers of many fishing methods and endured the hardships associated with this industry. All children have helped in family duties in the companies we have operated within this industry as well as many of the senior folk being active in search and rescue in the Cook Strait area. This has been the culture in which we have grown up. My grandfather came from Italy in 1922 and butterfish fishing was one of the ways he derived income. In their days they would even make their own mesh for nets from hemp.

“During that time and through the many years we as a fishing community have never caught a Maui or Hector’s dolphin in the nets we fish. Our form of netting these days on the south west coast of the North Island is butterfishing using 4 ¼ inch mesh. We target our set nets to catch butterfish in waters which are not consistent with that of the habitat of the Maui or Hector’s dolphin. The water in which we fish is rocky and weedy and very close to shore. It is clear water due to the flow of the Cook Strait current. The butterfish fishery on the south west coast gives the fisherman an opportunity to make an income during the winter months when the fish group up.”

He said fishermen are like farmers and use alternating fisheries like crop rotation.

“This is the way my family have fished now for close to 100 years.

“I have come to understand that the government wants to ban our way of fishing even though there has never been an account of a Maui dolphin caught in a butterfish net.”

His submission included extensive scientific data on dolphin interactions.

Threat management plan submissions closed last week and are now being considered.

Seafood NZ launched a media campaign this week with a full page advertisement in The Dominion Post headed: No fisher wants to kill a Maui dolphin.

The sub head stated: That’s why no fisher in 17 years has.

The last confirmed Maui death as a result of fishing activity was in 2002.

The cat-borne disease toxoplasmosis entering waterways has since been recognised as a much more significant threat to the species.

“Most fishers have never seen a Maui,” the ad states.

“Neither have the observers on their boats.

“Yet this vanishingly small likelihood is being cited as a reason to close down businesses and devastate communities.

“These businesses are not large corporates. They’re the people - (like John Muollo) – who supply your local fish and chip shop.”

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## **Marine farmers celebrated at awards**

Marine farmers from across the top of the south concluded the Marine Farming Association AGM this month with their annual awards dinner.

Scott Gillanders, general manager of MacLab in Nelson, took out the top award, receiving Marine Farmer of the Year for his work in producing mussels for high-end nutraceutical use.

“When I started here, we embarked on a supply strategy, which was a bit of a business change for MacLab - that involved some reasonably big farm acquisitions in developing

water space in Tasman Bay, we acquired a mussel harvester and set up partnerships in farming” Gillanders said.

Gillanders recently oversaw the design and delivery of a new mussel harvester vessel too, which will operate in both Tasman and Golden Bay, and developed a business app for a more accurate, paperless documentation system.

"Like any business, there's a lot of administration a lot of reporting on work that has been done or is to be done and like any farming operation there needs to be a database to record your biological stock in the water - because we went fresh into farming about two years ago, we had to think about a whole lot of new things so we developed a database and an app interface. It's more real time as well and you can put parameters in so people can't make mistakes."

The industry in general is looking to develop more open water farming, said Gillanders, something MacLab is now well placed for. "I think there's exciting opportunities for the nutraceutical sector for that high value area - more developments in that and the world market is huge - our base product for the mussel industry half shell is in high demand and prices seem to be good at the moment."

Pete Grierson of Marlborough Oysters and Bruce Brabsch of Kaituna Engineering were also recognised for their work in the industry, receiving the New Entrant and R & D awards for innovations to oyster farming. The Environment Award went to James Higgins from Sanford, for his efforts in reconditioning mussel floats – repurposing them as plastic pipes. Joanne Taylor of Waikawa was presented with the MFA Marine Merit Award for sustained service to marine farming.



Scott Gillanders (right) from MacLab won the Marine Farmer of the Year award, as presented by Hamish Oakley from Donaghys.

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## Ambitious Antarctica project gets green light

NIWA is gearing up to lead a six-year study on the Antarctic oceans.

Funded by MBIE, the \$26 million project 'Antarctic ocean mechanics: Past, present and future', seeks to understand how Antarctica will respond to a warming climate.

NIWA marine physicist Craig Stevens, who is leading the project, says Antarctica is one of the most challenging environments to measure.

"Despite this, it is vital we improve our understanding of how this domain works as Antarctica's impact on the global Earth system will largely come through the oceanic transport of heat and other associated materials such as salt, carbon dioxide, oxygen, and nutrients," Stevens said.

It's not known whether changing wind will increase the presence of warm water in the Ross Sea, or what will happen to ocean circulation if all the sea ice disappears, he said.

Oceanic and atmospheric processes involved in ice sheet melting and grounding line retreat will be a core focus of the expedition.

Researchers from NIWA, University of Otago, GNS Science, Victoria University and the University of Auckland will home-in on four research objectives:

1. Continue to collect data in target locations to develop extended observational datasets
2. Contribute to international expeditions to recover sedimentary evidence of past ocean conditions and relate these records to how climate has evolved and what it might do next
3. Conduct experiments that explore the Ross Ice Shelf Polynya – an area of open water important for sea ice production and global ocean circulation
4. Combine work within computer simulations to answer questions on how the ocean controls Antarctica's role in our future climate

The project is hoped to eventually provide decision-makers and scientists with a better understanding of how changes around Antarctica get transferred by the ocean further north, and the feedback loops that return to the south.

"To improve our predictions of the future we need to understand more about these processes and then work out ways to connect the small scales to the large."

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## News

A national survey conducted by Fisheries New Zealand has found recreational fishers have dramatically increased their catch of snapper and kahawai in the Hauraki Gulf over the past 30 years, *NZ Herald* reported. According to the survey, nearly two million fishing trips were taken across the country between October 2017 and September 2018, with an estimated 7 million individual finfish and 3.9 million individual shellfish caught in this period. The average recreational snapper catch in the Hauraki Gulf was found to have more than

tripled over the last 30 years and the average kahawai catch had more than quadrupled. Approximately half of recreational fishing occurred around the north-east coast of the North Island from the tip of Northland to East Cape. Southland was the only area where recreational fisher numbers increased (by 14 percent). Fisheries New Zealand director of fisheries management Stuart Anderson said the results confirmed the popularity of recreational fishing among New Zealanders and that recreational fishers caught a large proportion of key recreational fish species such as snapper, kahawai, blue cod, and kingfish. "There's been little change in the proportion of these fish caught by recreational and commercial fishers since 2011," Anderson said. Fisheries Inshore New Zealand chief executive Jeremy Helson said the increase in kahawai and snapper catch showed stocks were in great shape and the quota management system was working. "Like the commercial sector, recreational fishers need to respect the rules and contribute to managing our fisheries resources. We appreciate the undertaking of this research as it is important to ensure that we know the impact of recreational fishing and can manage that accordingly."

Paul Norling has announced he will be retiring as chair and director of Sanford, effective December 13, and will be succeeded by current deputy chair Sir Rob McLeod. McLeod acknowledged the significant contribution Norling had made to Sanford and said the company has an exciting future which the board and management are committed to realising. Norling said it had been a privilege to chair Sanford, a company with a long and distinguished heritage in the New Zealand fishing industry, with the business having its traceable beginnings back as far as 1864.



Current deputy chair Sir Rob McLeod.

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