



THE UPDATE

Captain's Blog

Saving our oceans - why the answer is not locking 30 percent up

Sometime in the coming months we expect the matter of marine protection will be at the forefront as the Government looks at releasing a discussion paper that aims to reform New Zealand's antiquated legislation.

Environmentalists globally are pushing for countries to lock up 30 percent of their Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in 'no take' Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). Quite how this arbitrary 30 percent number came about is unclear but for countries with well-developed fisheries management regimes already protecting their oceans from overfishing the question must be asked, why?

Let's be clear. This is not an argument against protecting our oceans.

MPAs are and should be part of the mix of measures used. Others include robust fisheries management, Benthic Protection Areas (BPAs) and Seamount Closures.

New Zealand already has almost 30 percent of its EEZ protected in some form.

That's 1,222,561 km² of ocean.

Add to that one of the finest fisheries management regimes in the world and we would suggest that an ideological approach to blithely closing 30 percent might be throwing the economic baby out with the bath water.

Balance and science are the key to decision making and we look forward to having that conversation.

The *Listener* this week has a worthy and extensive read on our oceans called “Hell and High Water” and all the science is pointing at ocean acidification and warming waters as the two urgent matters we need to be addressing.

The seafood industry knows as well as anyone that climate change is, and will continue to have, a significant impact on our business.

The fish are moving south to cooler waters and an arbitrary line on an MPA map is not going to prevent that.

New Zealand climate change expert Kevin Trenberth is quoted in the article saying this past decade was the hottest the ocean has been, and the heat has been seeping further down to depths of two kilometres and more.

And acidification is likely to have a dire effect on our shellfish, with paua and mussels affected by corrosive water conditions.

The question must be, what are the actual problems, and are ‘no take’ MPAs the answer?

It is our view that the conservation of our ocean resources can be achieved by a mix of many different means; including setting aside selected areas as MPAs.

However, there needs to be a serious look at the costs and benefits to shutting down any part of our marine environment, including the transfer of fishing pressure, impacts on the economy and employment, and the issue of reducing the availability of protein, or forcing its production onto more carbon producing equivalents.

The 30 percent cries are a slogan.

All we ask for is science and a rational conversation.

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