



Southern recreational fishers give their views

"Fishing's in my blood ... it's been my family's way of life for generations."

"Being able to catch a fish represents being a New Zealander to me; it's how we grew up, and ultimately it defines us."

These are thoughts shared by many recreational fishers, and Bryony Black, a summer intern for the Ministry of Fisheries, says it was a common sentiment when she spoke with seasoned fishers as part of a local ecological knowledge study.

Over a couple of months, Bryony interviewed over twenty fishers from across the South and south-east coast – all with between ten and thirty years' experience fishing. With a particular focus on flounder, she got a taste of how the fishery may have changed over the years.

Bryony says that her research provided a socio-economic insight into our fisheries and enabled a much more personal understanding of the different viewpoints of recreational fishers. The study also puts fishers' anecdotal comments into a form that can be more readily used by fisheries managers.

Bryony was also buoyed by the heartfelt passion that came from most she spoke with.

"What I really enjoyed about this research was hearing so many different stories about days spent fishing, about what motivates people to fish recreationally and how this simple pastime so often makes people's spirits soar.

"While the viewpoints from one fisherman to another often varied, everyone I spoke with exhibited great care, value and enjoyment for their environment. And I think that's really important – it's one area where we can all unite and work together so we can continue fishing for years to come."

Regardless of background, age, ethnicity, political views, income brackets or even culinary skills, Bryony says that all

participants had over the decades acquired a keen respect for the marine environment. What follows is a snapshot of what some of them have to say.

THE SOUTHERN FLOUNDER STORY

A figure casts a shadow over the surface of the water. You can hear him counting slowly as he hauls his net in. "One, two, three ... good-sized ... not too bad for a morning's work".

That may be the case now, but John remembers a time when you could catch enough flounder to feed the entire community within a similar timeframe.

A lot has changed since John first started visiting one of his favourite floundering spots, near the Waihao box in North Otago.

"We used to be able to catch flounder with a lure when the silveries were running, fill up a whole bucket in an hour fishing like that. Other times we'd use worms as bait."

In the last 10 years alone he's noticed a few changes, in particular the surrounding land use altering dramatically.

"There was only one dairy farm nearby for most of my life, now there are twelve and each farm has thousands of cows. I think the effluent and run-off have been the biggest impacts on the flounder fishery and nearby waterways."

John's concerns are shared by a number of other experienced

recreational fishers throughout the southern and south-eastern coasts of the 'mainland'.

Alongside dairying, other issues raised regarding the perceived decline of flounder fisheries included invasive algal species, reduced flow in rivers due to damming and irrigation, over-fishing, excessive regulations, land reclamation and increases in natural predation.

In some areas, such as the Waitaki River, floundering has ceased altogether due to a disappearance of suitable habitat for the flounder and excessive amounts of didymo clogging the net.

But in stark contrast, in other areas such as Southland and Canterbury, there's quite a different story. Flounder is plentiful.

Morris Yorke and brother-in-law Peter Hayes have been floundering in Waikawa estuary since the 1940s and along with others in the community, believe flounder numbers haven't changed.

"The only thing that has changed over the years is refrigeration. I'm happy with the management of the (flounder) fishery in my area; when I can't catch what I need I'll give you a call!"

The contrasting views raise questions as to the apparent health of some flounder fisheries versus others – reinforcing perhaps the value of localised knowledge and the need to protect our natural resources.



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Waiiau Lagoon (Te Waewae Bay, Southland).