

# CHARTER BOAT REPORTING - PRELIMINARY PROPOSAL AND FEEDBACK FROM FOCUS-GROUP MEETINGS

## Introduction

1 One of the Shared Fisheries decisions taken by Cabinet in October 2007 was to have the Ministry of Fisheries (MFish) consult on the introduction of activity and catch reporting by recreational fishing charter boat operators.

2 To move ahead with this initiative, focus group meetings with charter boat operators were held throughout the country during February and March. The purpose of the meetings was to obtain pre-consultation feedback on issues that need to be taken into account when a detailed proposal is developed for consultation during mid-2008.

3 The purpose of this paper is to describe the preliminary proposal for the introduction of charter boat activity and catch reporting, and to summarise feedback from the focus-group meetings.

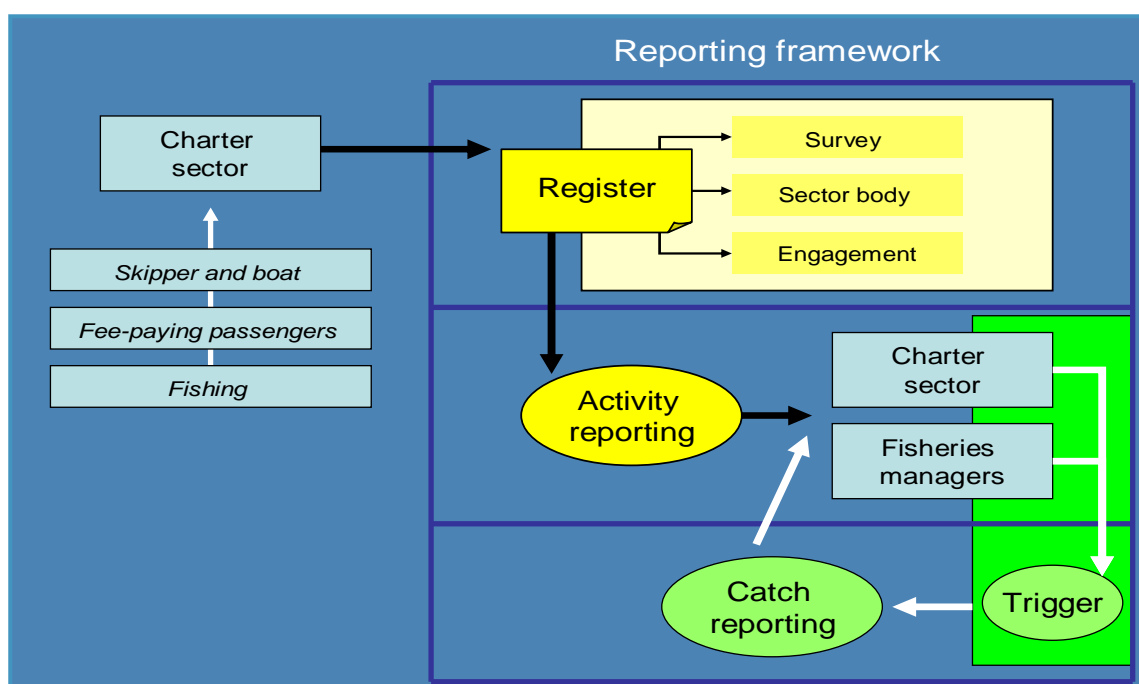
## Preliminary proposal

4 Feedback from consultation on the Shared Fisheries public discussion paper, released in 2006 showed that there is broad stakeholder support for proposals to improve information on amateur catch.

5 One avenue to improve information is through the introduction of activity and catch reporting by charter boat operators. Fishing from charter boats is an increasingly important component of the amateur fishing sector. MFish estimates that in 2006 there were between 600-800 charter boats who offered their passengers the opportunity to go fishing.

6 The preliminary proposal is that all charter boats be registered with the Ministry of Fisheries and that obligations be placed on charter operators to provide reports on their activity and, if requested, their passengers catch.

7 The key elements of the proposal are set out in Figure 1 and described in more detail in Annex 1.



**Figure 1.** Preliminary proposal for charter boat reporting framework

### Feedback from charter boat focus-group meetings

8 Most of the charter operators we met with were reasonably positive about the proposal to provide information on their activity and catch. However, there was a general guardedness about government's long-term intent and the possibility that the result might be an overly complex and expensive system. Some charter operators were strongly opposed to the proposal on these grounds, whereas others volunteered to work more closely with MFish to develop a practical and effective system.

9 Feedback from the meetings is arranged by subject below. No attempt is made here to analyse or respond to the feedback provided. This paper simply aims to record the issues raised.

### *Criteria to define charter fishing operations*

- a) Need to include operators who support specialist land-based 'drop-off and pick-up' fishing trips e.g. island/rock fishing. Also consider how to handle operations which involve a large 'mother ship' supporting a number of smaller fishing skiffs.
- b) Many agreed that operators who rent out their boats to private individuals ('bare boat' charters) should not be included.
- c) Consider exclusion of operators who fish below a certain number of days – others think that all operators should be included so that complete coverage is gained.
- d) Many operators see that registration with MSA should be a prerequisite to registration with MFish.

### ***Charter boat registration***

- a) Many operators support vessel registration as being a reasonable expectation of a professional business sector.
- b) Many see advantages in having a register of industry participants which could be used to improve awareness of who was involved in the sector, its size and distribution, and potentially lead to improved representation and the establishment of collectives at a regional and national level.
- c) Some operators see registration as being an attempt by government to separate the charter operators from the rest of the amateur fishing sector.
- d) Support as long as all charter boats are required to be registered.
- e) Concern over perceived duplication of MFish and MSA registration requirements.
- f) Support statute-based registration because voluntary schemes never seem to work.
- g) Not clear how this requirement will be enforced by MFish.
- h) Some concern was expressed about how charter boats would be identified on the water i.e. need for registration numbers etc
- i) Some oppose registration and are in favour of MFish undertaking biennial surveys to gather the required information via passenger questionnaires. Others think that surveys like this would be unlikely to gain the necessary funding.
- j) Some operators support introduction of a registration system but only in those regions where it is needed i.e. adopt an 'as needed' approach.
- k) Many operators consider that there should be no charge for vessel registration. Others consider that payment of a modest administration fee for vessel registration is reasonable in this day and age. Views were mixed on whether any registration fee should be an annual or one-off charge.

### ***Activity reporting***

- a) Many operators support the collection of 'real time' activity information on area fished, trip duration, fishing hours, fishing methods, number of passengers per trip, top fish species caught/targeted, catch/tag and release – as long as privacy was protected and information on individual operators was not released.
- b) Many operators thought having the ability to extract reports about activity of the sector would be useful for a range of purposes – marketing, business planning, sector development, fisheries management and engagement with other fisheries stakeholders etc.
- c) Others were not convinced of the need for, or value of, setting up a complex and costly system to collect activity information. To some it was not clear how the information could be used.

- d) Some operators question why government is interested in collecting information on charter fishing which they see as providing a service to a relatively small component of the amateur fishery.
- e) Some operators believe that government should pay them for providing information requested or fund a charter boat observer scheme.
- f) Many operators see an opportunity for activity reporting to add value if the charter sector received some tangible benefit e.g. via the provision of a log book which could be used to record information required by MSA and MFish.
- g) Many operators were concerned about the possibility of having to complete more paperwork. Some suggested that additional crew would be required to do this. Many consider that use of new web-based and cell phone technology should be considered.
- h) General agreement that any reporting system should be simple and easy. In some areas operators are already participating in research programmes and the paper work is increasing. Some operators offered to help design/consolidate and trial the new systems/log books.
- i) Need to know more about the frequency of reporting i.e. should it be by trip, by week, by month, every six months? and would 'nil reports' required?
- j) Many operators were supportive of reporting as a way of finding out how many charter operators were actively involved in the fishing business – as opposed to non-active.
- k) Need clarity about who would be responsible for reporting information ie. the boat skipper, the fisher, the boat owner?

### ***Catch reporting***

- a) Many operators see no difficulty in providing information on what their passengers catch.
- b) Many consider that providing catch information is vital for management purposes and are surprised that this may not be required for all species taken.
- c) Some see that catch information would be useful for certain stocks such as marlin/kingfish/groper/bluefin tuna, but think that a reporting system should be imposed only on vessels that operate in those fisheries.
- d) Others see no value or use in collecting catch information via charter boat reporting and would prefer to see this information collected via a programme of periodic surveys, or by working with a subset of experienced operators who wanted to be involved.
- e) Some operators see difficulty with trying to oversee and record the fishing activity of their passengers whilst at the same time managing the safety of their vessel – quality of information provided may be compromised.

- f) Some operators question the need for a complex and costly system when the take of charter boats is likely to be so small (and declining as more private vessels take to the water) in comparison to the total amateur take.
- g) Some operators question why they are being singled-out to provide catch information when existing methods of estimating amateur catch are available.
- h) Most operators are concerned that reliance on catch per unit effort from charter boats will be subject to bias and not very robust. Maybe the activity reporting should be used to identify where a tailor-made catch reporting system needed to be developed to address a particular situation.
- i) Some expressed concern over how the validity of the information could be guaranteed i.e. provision of 'false returns'.

### **Next steps**

10 The next step in the process is for MFish to develop detailed policy options and to gain Ministerial approval to initiate consultation in June/July 2008.

## **Annex 1**

### ***Criteria to identify a marine charter fishing operator***

1. A primary consideration in the development of the reporting regime is to settle on who will be required to be registered. Criteria used to define the charter operators of interest will include:
  - a) Skipper and boat
  - b) Fee-paying passengers
  - c) Involved in marine fishing
2. The need to develop a robust definition of those who will be required to comply with the proposed reporting regime is fundamental. Any uncertainty regarding coverage will lead to ongoing difficulties.

### ***Register***

3. The system will require charter boat owners to register their vessels with MFish. The registration system for charter boats could be similar to the one currently used in the commercial fishing sector. Boat registration and owner/operator details will be maintained on a public register. However, information subsequently provided by charter boat operators on their activity and catch will be kept on a separate and closed database. Information on individual charter boat activity would not be released. Charter operators will be required to pay a fee to register their boat. Ministry will pay for set up and ongoing operation of the system.
4. The purpose of the register will be to:
  - a) Allow MFish to identify those charter operators who have information that can assist fisheries management
  - b) Provide MFish with the ability to work more closely with subsets of the sector when there is a need to do so (i.e. fine scale management initiatives)
  - c) Provide the sector with comprehensive information on who is involved in the sector which could be used to improve sector governance and engagement in fisheries management.

### ***Activity reporting***

5. Boat registration will impose obligations on the charter operator to provide reports on their activity. This information will be used to develop a high level picture of activity across the sector. Activity information required could include:
  - a) Area fished
  - b) Trip duration
  - c) Fishing hours

- d) Fishing methods used
  - e) Number of fishers per trip
  - f) Top fish species caught / targeted
6. It is intended that this information will be of use to both MFish and the charter sector itself. In addition, the system should be able to generate standard reports of sector-wide activity which can be accessed via the internet. Activity reporting could also be developed to include the collection of information which the charter sector itself may request, although the cost associated with collecting additional information will need to be considered.

### *Catch reporting*

7. A requirement to report information on the catch taken by charter boat passengers may be triggered in fisheries where this additional information can be used to tackle a specific stock assessment of fisheries management issue. Reasons for triggering catch reporting might include:
- a) Monitoring catches/CPUE in areas of high or increasing activity
  - b) Improving stock assessment for particular fisheries
  - c) Improving ability to manage on a local scale
  - d) To support sector-driven initiatives.
8. Catch information required could include:
- a) Species targeted
  - b) Number of fish killed / taken off the vessel
  - c) Number of fish tagged and/or released
  - d) Some other more precise measure of effect
9. It is important to note that the obligation to report passenger catch information will be placed on charter boat owners (via skippers).
10. As is the case with activity reporting, the charter sector itself may initiate the collection of additional catch information. However, the generation of costs associated with collecting additional information will need to be considered.