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News Release from Aotearoa Fisheries and Sanford

New Study Busts Myths Around Undersize Snapper Catch ([+ VIDEO](#))



Image: Newly published figures reveal commercial fishers are catching far fewer undersize snapper than previously thought.

VIDEO: San Kawhai Skipper, Marc Pawley says having data showing just 3.3% of snapper caught on commercial boats are under the minimum legal size dispels the myths about waste in commercial fishing.

New Zealand fishing industry leaders say an unprecedented 12 month monitoring programme has dispelled the myths around how many undersize snapper are being caught and returned to the sea.

The new data collected by the Ministry for Primary Industries shows the commercial fishing impact on young snapper is much less than previously thought.

The total percentage by weight of undersized snapper being caught over the year of the study was just 3.3 percent of the total snapper catch in the snapper 1 fishery (SNA1).

Carl Carrington, the CEO of [Aotearoa Fisheries Limited](#), says he is pleased with the result.

“The [myth](#) was that our boats were returning as much as half of their catch to the sea because it was undersize. This new study has shown that’s simply not true.”

The data was collected by commercial fishers in the snapper 1 fishery who in 2013 volunteered to start recording and reporting the amount of snapper under their 25cm size limit that they catch and return to the sea. By law they have to put every undersize fish they catch back in the sea.

Volker Kuntzsch, the CEO of Sanford, who has a [marine science background](#) says having fishers actively assisting fisheries management by providing data on this scale is a boost for the snapper 1 fishery.

“Our boats and catches were monitored in several ways, electronic monitoring, with independent human observers on-board and with increased reporting requirements for our crews who recorded the undersize snapper they caught and returned to the sea. There was a level of detail, scrutiny and transparency never attempted before. It means we now know the facts and we can put in context some of the claims made about the number of undersize snapper being caught. The myths were a barrier to good communication. Now we know the reality, we can have the conversations needed about the future of our snapper fisheries on the basis of facts.”

The snapper 1 fishery, where the study was carried out is New Zealand’s [most valuable inshore](#) finfish fishery.

Both CEOs and their companies agree that the snapper 1 fishery is a shared fishery where guardianship should also be shared.

Mr Kuntzsch says “now that we know the facts around the impact of commercial fishing, we would love to see a similar approach to record catch taken by recreational fishers. We know rec fishers want a sustainable fishery as much as we do. Some of the leaders in recreational fishing have been advocates of best practice fishing techniques and we hope they can spread that attitude and approach to the whole of the [recreational sector](#).”

But Sanford and other commercial fishers are not resting on their laurels despite the 3.3 percent result. In 2013 commercial fishers in the snapper 1 area voluntarily agreed to take a range of steps to help protect and grow the fishery. These included adopting a ‘move on rule’ when they come across areas of small fish, recording the undersize catch and [installing new vessel monitoring systems](#) (VMS) on all trawlers within their fleets operating on the east coast of the North Island from the Far North to the bottom of the Bay of Plenty.

Mr Carrington says, “we’re pleased with this 3.3 percent result, but we know we can do even more to protect juvenile fish. That’s why we are also working hard on new technology like [Precision Seafood Harvesting](#) to reduce the number of smaller fish we catch and increase the survival chances of those we do land and return to the sea.”

Changes to fishing in Snapper 1

July 2013

The Ministry of Primary Industries issues a review of sustainability of the snapper 1 fishery

October, 2013

Commercial fishers design and adopt measures to monitor and protect the fishery including:

A ‘move on’ rule when areas of small fish are encountered.

Voluntarily recording and reporting all undersize snapper caught and returned to the sea.

[Installing new vessel monitoring systems.](#)

March 1, 2014

MPI introduces a requirement for commercial fishers in SNA 1 to report the amount of undersized snapper they catch, recorded as SNX.

April 1, 2014

Snapper bag limit and size changes come into effect. Commercial fishers allowances are unchanged while recreational fishers total allowable catch is increased from 2600 tonnes to 3050 tonnes, but bag and size limits are down.

February 28, 2015

SNX study is complete and data is collected by the Ministry of Primary Industries for analysis.

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Image & video for publication with this story is available [here](#) including:

Snapper Image.

V/O edited version

Non V/O edited version

B-roll footage on vessels, in the Auckland Fish Market and interviews.

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