

In this, my first annual report as the Convenor of Soundfish, I will review in brief the past year past and also look a little to the year ahead.

One of the positive aspects of having to sit down and write an annual report is that we are forced to undertake a little navel gazing – and occasional naval gazing can be beneficial!

We are often so busy focussing on what needs to happen next that we can too easily forget what we have already achieved. Sometimes, in all the hustle and bustle, we might even forget what our objectives are or, more so, what they mean.

As you will appreciate, Soundfish is a community organisation. The Soundfish committee brings together the collective knowledge of the three recognised fishing sectors within the Sounds to advise and work towards our pre-eminent objective; achieving a sustainable fishery in the Marlborough Sounds that will meet the cultural, economic and social needs of present and future generations. To achieve this we must address the trifecta of major enablers to a sustainable fishery; firstly ensuring suitable habitat exists to support the fishery, secondly building (or keeping) stock abundance at levels to support utilisation of that fishery and finally ensuring any utilisation is properly managed.

That is to say we understand that fisheries management needs to adopt an holistic and integrated management approach to be effective in the longer term. The Governments 2030 Strategy Paper goes some way towards acknowledging this although without the providing details or tools as to how this can actually be achieved.

Over the last twelve months and more Soundfish has been quietly and steadily putting in place our foundations.

In April 2009 we completed the scoping project “Marlborough Sounds Characterisation Report: The Values and Uses of the Marlborough Sounds Habitat and Fishery”. Identifying these values and uses of the fishery is an important stage in creating an overarching and integrated management plan for the area; still the ultimate goal of Soundfish. Understanding the social, ecological and economic values of the Sounds and its many different users will help inform future management decisions. A key challenge for Soundfish in the upcoming year will be utilising and continuing the work that this project has started.

One area we have focussed on with growing success, I believe, is developing our relationships with the regulatory bodies that govern the area and the many different user sectors.

Last Year Andrew reported that the Soundfish relationship with the Marlborough District Council (MDC) was “quite confused”. During the last 11 months we have been working with Council to resolve this confusion. This started with meetings with senior council staff and the Mayor. It was agreed at these meetings that, as MDC had regulatory responsibility for managing the physical environment of the Sounds (*i.e.* Habitats and associated land based activities that impact these habitats), Soundfish would be best placed to work towards our objectives by influencing the regional policies and plans. The result is that Soundfish are now involved in focus groups for the Regional Policy Statement (RPS) review. Once implemented the updated RPS will set the benchmark for the next 15 years or more in terms establishing what the environmental outcomes for the region are and how these will be achieved.

Soundfish also now sit on the Sounds Advisory Group, commonly referred to as SAG. Many of our respective concerns overlap and having Soundfish directly engaged with SAG is both a

sensible and mutually beneficial arrangement. Other SAG members are genuinely interested in the issues Soundfish are involved in.

Being involved in the RPS review process and SAG is critical to ensure the regional authority recognises and addresses through its policies and plans the importance of the Marlborough Sounds fisheries and the habitats required to support these.

As people here tonight will appreciate the other main player in governance matters relating to fishing is the Ministry of Fisheries, or MFish. Over the last 9 months the Ministry has been restructured and under the National government the focus of MFish has been on reduced consultation. Only recently has the Ministry recommitted to the Regional Recreational Forums while the future of the Challenger Inshore Fin Fish Plan Advisory Group, where Soundfish have a seat, remains uncertain. Soundfish also have two members on the Blue Cod Advisory Group to the Minister and, whilst some initial frustrations were evident about the perceived lack of progress, things are now reaching the business end with an Initial Position Paper on regulatory changes to re-open the cod fishery about to be started

The other focus for improving engagement has been with the community at large. Over the last 6 months we have redeveloped our website and work continues here to improve the functionality and ease of use of the online discussion forum. Our December 2009 newsletter has gone out to well in excess of 500 households. At Easter we intend to spend some time at launching ramps introducing additional people the concept of Soundfish and our objectives.

Throughout the year Soundfish made several submissions through resource consent applications and public consultations. Notable amongst these were:

- Submissions on the Australian Worldwide Exploration's resource consent application for a test site off the west coast of D'Urville Island. This was granted under condition by Council and is now the subject of a number of appeals.
- Submissions to Plan Change 16 relating to the allocation of new marine farming space in the Marlborough Sounds.
- Submission to the Technical Advisory Group's paper on Restarting Aquaculture. This is an area of particular concern for a number of Sound's communities and users and has caused the Council to put on hold their processing of Plan Change 19.
- Submission to the IPP pertaining to the Oyster 7c fishery. This was a successful submission highlighting that the IPP called for the opening of a dredge area immediately outside the entrance to Tory Channel and very close to shore. Soundfish had concerns regarding potential damage to BCO, and other species, habitat. The Minister, in his decision, did not make this area available for Oyster Dredging.

In addition to these regulatory processes we have also traded correspondence with the Ministry on the decision to lower the minimum legal set net mesh size for commercial butterfishing, made suggestions for improving fisheries compliance amongst migrant workers as well as the proposal to establish recreational 'havens'. All matters that we believe will impact the state of the Marlborough Sounds fisheries.

Looking ahead we recently held our planning workshop for the next twelve months and we found that there are more items on the agenda than we can possibly hope to achieve with our current resources. In addition to our normal activities in responding to consultations, arising issues and involvement in regular forums some of the more notable items we aim to address in the upcoming year are:

- Continued input into the review of the Regional Policy Statement and utilising the, yet to be released, DoC and MDC sponsored report of Ecologically significant sites within the Marlborough Sounds to identify important habitats within the Sounds requiring protection.

- Further development of the Characterisation Report to quantify the social and economic value of the Marlborough Sounds fisheries and identify strategies to protect and enhance these.
- Education programmes around the use and potential impacts of plastic and chemically enhanced baits.
- Initiate discussion on recreational/amateur fin fish daily bag limits with a view to ensuring utilisation and sustainability.

So there's a lot to be done. Managing fish stocks and fishers are only two parts of the equation. There is also management of the habitats and land based effects. Soundfish will continue to advocate that the Marlborough Sounds are important and complex enough to be deserving of being a fisheries management area in its own right. Given the goal of integrated management it would be appropriate that this management area is aligned as closely as practicable with the terrestrial responsibilities of the MDC.

Going forward I believe it will be critical to collaborate as much as possible with like minded organisations and stakeholders in the fishery and Marlborough Sounds environment so that all of our combined resources are utilised as effectively and efficiently as possible; without of course taking away the autonomy of individual organisations.

When we look to the future I think we should ask ourselves a question, perhaps something like; if the development and utilisation of the Marlborough Sounds resources continues to increase for the next 35 years unabated and at the same rate it increased for the previous 35 years what will the Sounds come to represent in the year 2045? As a community, we have a responsibility to act.

Finally, I thank the committee for their continued support and contributions and I look forward to working with you all over the next year. Every member of the committee adds something of value to the process and because of that we are making tangible progress towards our goals. Like most committees our members are all volunteers and give up considerable time to attend to Soundfish business – but for a cause you can be assured we all believe in.

Eric Jorgensen

Wednesday 10th March 2010