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Iwi united in opposition to shared fisheries proposals

More than 60 people representing almost every iwi in the country voiced united concern today over the Government's proposed shared fisheries proposal which could see iwi lose the value of their fisheries settlement assets.

Te Ohu Kaimoana, the Maori Fisheries Trust, hosted a hui in Wellington today to discuss the proposals and their possible impact on Maori fishing rights.

Te Ohu Kaimoana Chief Executive Peter Douglas and Ngapuhi Chairman Sonny Tau said today that, as far as they were concerned, recreational fishers and commercial fishers were united in their opposition.

"I know that recreational fishers are not excited by this proposal from the Government. It's full of fish hooks and recreational fishers could end up with a pyrrhic victory where they lose more than they gain. Maori have a huge investment in this sector as well," Mr Tau said today at the conclusion of the Wellington hui. "I would urge all iwi to express their concern to local Labour MPs and especially those Labour MPs who make up the Maori caucus."

Mr Douglas added: "The commercial fishing industry has no truck with recreational fishers. We believe that everyone should have access to the marine environment for food. We have an issue with this proposal from the Ministry of Fisheries and our concern, and that of Ngapuhi, is that there just isn't enough information available for the Ministry to make any sort of decision of the sharing of fisheries."

At today's hui, iwi agreed that information was lacking to make a decision, there was no effective management of recreational fishing that would contribute to sustainability decisions, there were no agreed principles for allocating the total allowable catch (TAC) to the different sectors – commercial, recreational and customary.

Mr Tau said Maori were not being hysterical about this issue. "We fought long and hard to have iwi commercial and customary fishing rights recognised by the Crown. If a rights based framework is completed for all sectors of the fishery, then other arrangements about the management of shared fisheries can be made by discussion and negotiation between all sectors at a local level."

Mr Douglas said Te Ohu Kaimoana would be releasing better options for managing the fisheries environment in the near future. "It's not right to say commercial fishing operations are taking more than recreational fishers. You can't make that sort of declaration in the absence of necessary information, and that the Ministry wants to do so is completely flawed."

"Every sector needs to report its catches because only then can we make sure we manage the fisheries environment in a fully sustainable manner. Our goal is ensuring our fisheries are here forever and a day; it should not be for political gain on spurious beliefs about the fisheries environment."