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Future looks bright

By Aaron Shields, Vice President, Our Fishing Future Inc.

For as long as I can remember the ocean and the fascinating treasures that lie beneath the surface have been a part of my life. Fortunately I don't have to cast my mind back very far as I've only had 22 years enjoying catching crabs in the mud flats, spearing flounder, diving for paua, rock fishing and boat fishing off the rugged Otago coast. I clearly remember being 10 years old catching a wrass off the rocks at Taieri Mouth. That was the biggest fish I had ever seen at the time, I could barely run back to the crib fast enough to show the old man. Before you ask, of course I ate it!

The ability for any member of the public, regardless of colour, creed or age, to experience what I did as a child in both the present and future, is extremely important to me. It is this deep seated passion and love for the New Zealand lifestyle that made me commit to being part of a movement to bring a professional accountable body to promote responsible fishing, unite a recreational community and ensure a sustainable fishing future for us all.

Over the past year a small group of volunteers have been working to establish the foundations for a national organisation. The progress has been steady and methodic but most importantly constructed for the right reasons. The organisation is called Our Fishing Future and is an incorporated society with a purpose to promote and protect responsible public fishing in New Zealand.

Our Fishing Future is unlike anything the recreational fishing sector has witnessed before and that to me is very, very exciting. What sets Our Fishing Future apart is the mandate agreed upon by 66 individuals at an event in February 2013 (FISHinFuture Search) to establish a professional body. This would represent all public fishing interests, act charitably, focus on the youth and collaboratively reach solutions with all stake holders involved in the marine environment.

Even in my limited experience, I have seen the pain and exhaustion that fighting for a cause can bring to individuals, especially volunteers. Fortunately a new era of cooperation is on the horizon. A strategy driven by youth, who have a heightened appreciation and attitude toward sustainability is the way forward.

Recreational fishers, whether you chase marlin in the sun baked waters of the north or dive for crays in the misty fiords in the south and everything in between, your best interests lie with Our Fishing Future and the security of a recreational asset that we are so fortunate to have. The time is almost upon us to look at our peers, our families, our friends and our leaders to support Our Fishing Future.

The recent issues faced by fishers the country over have only highlighted the need for such a change. Whether we like to acknowledge it or not the future of our fisheries is uncertain, we cannot keep growing the fishing population without change occurring to fish stocks. Problems will arise, but war will be avoided if we collectively have a calm voice that can collaboratively work with everyone.

Last February a diverse group agreed a clear vision and goals. They have since established the foundations for launching an organisation to realise these goals. Our

Fishing Future has achieved some seed funding and has a growing support base. Watch this space for future change.

The future looks bright from where I am sitting and I am privileged to be a part of it.

If you want to know more about the process, become a member and be part of this growing movement go to www.ourfishingfuture.org.nz