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Minister of Fisheries Stuart Nash urged to 'stand firm' by LegaSea

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Stuart Nash.

Northland Age



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Recreational fishing group LegaSea is urging Minister of Fisheries Stuart Nash to "stand firm" against industry pressure to dump the introduction of cameras and electronic monitoring on commercial fishing boats.

LegaSea is challenging industry claims that it is engaging in best practice fishing endeavours, and that cameras and other forms of monitoring are not required.

Dave Turner, director of fisheries management at the Ministry for Primary Industries, had been quoted saying, "We estimate that if we found the golden bullet to stop discarding, we would probably put over half of the inshore fleet out of business overnight."

That admission alone should be truth enough to continue with surveillance cameras, LegaSea spokesman Scott Macindoe said.

Mr Turner had gone on to say that fisheries management could not quantify the tonnages involved, but suspected they were significant to the point that they were impacting on stocks.

"When historical claims against the industry of dumping were investigated in 2013, MPI officials countered by announcing plans for a new electronic monitoring package to solve these systemic sins. Now it seems we are to forego even this," Mr Macindoe said.

"While many boats are run professionally, there are fishers who operate illegally. They are difficult to catch, because offending is easily hidden far out at sea.

"These fishers give the industry a bad name, but worse still, they give the fishery a hiding.

This has to stop. The public are sick of it; the stocks can't sustain this kind of abuse, and unless these operators are exposed or forced to change their ways, everyone, including our kids will lose.

"We know that more seabirds are killed on boats with cameras than are reported killed on boats without direct observers in place," he added.

"We know from the Sea Around Us research that the industry dumps more fish than it lands. We know that the industry was happy to have cameras when they were run by its own privately-held company, and we know that the industry lost the footage recorded in the early trials.

"Cameras are the least we can do to protect our fisheries, our dolphins and our seabirds, and we strongly urge the Minister to make the right decision here.

"The industry needs reform. We've called for a Commission of Inquiry into the way our fisheries are managed, and we need to know what is going on aboard these vessels. After all, our fisheries are a public resource, and as such we all have kaitiakitanga obligations to fulfil.

"Recently we applauded the Minister for rejecting the industry call for camera footage to be withheld from public scrutiny. Now, sir, please put our fisheries first and follow through with both the implementation of the electronic monitoring package as well as a full and proper inquiry into the way our fisheries are being managed."

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