



Commercial fishers make the switch to electronic reporting

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Paper reporting is a thing of the past for New Zealand's commercial fishers, who must now report electronically on what they catch and where they catch it. Going digital means fishers spend less time on paperwork and can concentrate on what they do best – catching quality seafood for local and overseas consumers to enjoy. It also means Fisheries New Zealand has better, near real-time data at hand, to help effectively manage the country's fisheries.



In most cases, catch reporting involves using e-logbook software on a laptop or tablet, or through a cell phone app. Fishers without somewhere dry, like a wheelhouse, to use their e-logbook can opt for a ruggedized device.

Position reporting involves a transmitter sending frequent automatic location pings.

“I used to spend hours filling out paper forms. Electronic reporting means all that detail is now either pre-populated or easy to select and enter on-screen,” says Rex Olsen from Dunedin. “It took time to get used to the technology and new way of doing things, but now it's become second nature and it's a lot easier.”

The variety and volume of problems that come with a paper-based system (think: water damage, unclear handwriting, data entry errors) have been drastically reduced. Any corrections can also now be swiftly and often automatically detected, then corrected without having to send paper back forth by snail mail.

Deepwater trawlers over 28 metres long began reporting electronically in October 2017. The rollout was extended in eight stages last year, to cover all remaining commercial fishers, from tuna long-liners to pāua divers and seaweed harvesters. Electronic reporting became mandatory for the final stage of fishers in December 2019.

“It's world-leading to have an entire industry transition to electronic reporting in the timeframe that has been achieved,” says Deputy Director-General of Fisheries Dan Bolger.

“Commercial fishers have really taken up the baton and shown that a step-change at this scale and pace is achievable. I know making the switch came with its challenges, and I thank commercial fishers for stepping up and doing their bit to help take our fisheries system into the future.”

While the core requirements of what gets reported haven't changed significantly, the level of detail has increased and timeframes for reporting have shortened. This takes advantage of the ease with which large amounts of data can be captured and transmitted using electronic devices.

"It's still early days, but we are already seeing cases where richer data is being provided, which can help improve our understanding of fish stocks. We're also able to more quickly detect and act on cases where fishers aren't complying with the rules," says Dan.

With more accurate and timelier information, the government and industry can better ensure New Zealand's fisheries are managed sustainably for the benefit of everyone.

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