It's time to stop talking to ourselves

During the first lockdown, the fishing industry ratcheted up its philanthropy, with many companies donating fish to those in need.

The industry has always been generous, with regular donations of fish to worthy causes ranging from penguins to people but much of it goes unnoticed by all but the recipients.

Of course, we are not doing it for a pat on the back, but sometimes shouting it from the rooftops is exactly the right thing to do.

Case in point this week was the launch of a foodbank collaboration between Dunedin’s Harbour Fish, the Port Chalmers Fishermen’s Co-op and the Salvation Army.

What makes this different is the desire to make this initiative business as usual.

The Port Chalmers Fishermen’s Co-op has 48 fishermen, all of whom are fishing for the cause. President Ant Smith says this is not something they see stopping when the pandemic quiets. He believes poverty may be worse during COVID-19, but it is here to stay.

Smith wants the scheme expanded throughout the country, but it will require sign-up of the major quota owners and Licensed Fish Retailers (LFRs). He says he was lucky that Talley’s Group didn’t hesitate to help him out with ACE and Harbour Fish was keen to get on board with the processing and storing.

Around 200 kilograms of fish will be going to the Salvation Army for distribution to Dunedin’s foodbanks each month.
Smith says he has thought about getting the initiative started for a while but with quota owners and LFRs critical to the implementation it needs to be a ‘whole of industry’ decision.

Doug Loder from the Federation of Commercial Fishermen has already encouraged other ports to get onboard. Many are already supplying Pataka fish, fish caught under a customary permit on behalf of iwi, and other quota owners are outright donating to good causes.

Since May, Sanford has been giving fish to two food banks in the South Auckland area, ButtaBean Motivation foodbank and Papatūānuku Kōkiri Marae. They hope to continue this as the country moves back down the alert levels.

An ongoing effort to feed the less fortunate New Zealand’s premium kaimoana is to be applauded but there are other benefits.

We reconnect fishers to the wider community.

Province by province, region by region, this good work will do more to drown out our critics than almost anything else.

It’s time to talk about what we are doing in our communities.

Loudly.

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