



Right: A net set directly under a shag colony, Otago Harbour. Above: Forest and Bird executive member Graeme Loh with the casualties.



along the rocks but they had been caught by the many recreational fishermen that came by, leaving the mackerel and the hunting grounds to the smaller school fish.

Unfortunately, spread out before them, invisible and unmoving, was 500 metres of loosely hung gill net. The lead fish never sensed the net and suddenly found himself swimming at full speed into a curtain of death. By the time he saw it there was no time to turn. He was too big for his head to fit through the mesh but his fins and tail quickly tangled in the monofilament. As he struggled, more of the net wrapped around him until he was held virtually motionless.

The nylon that trapped him was teeming

with millions of bacteria and fungi, left over from the infections of earlier victims of the net. While the young leader struggled, the nylon wore away the protective mucous that covered him and began to get under his scales. The fast growing bacteria found it easy to gain access to the fish's skin and soon began to colonise his living tissues.

Within an hour the kingfish sensed move-

ment in the net. He was being pulled upward, towards the dark shadow of a boat. As the net was pulled tight, its mesh spread apart and the king's trapped fins began to work free. Finally, when the net was only a few metres from the boat, the mesh spread far enough for the kingfish to drop out and swim weakly away. He was free!

As he moved through the water his gills

Gill net update

THE FIRST STEP taken by the MAF Fish Board to deal with the destructive effects of gill nets was a regressive one. They abdicated all responsibility for gill net control to the individual Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) being developed in various parts of New Zealand. This was clearly an attempt to delay decision making and diffuse responsibility. But it was not totally unreasonable because gill nets ARE used differently in the various fisheries around the country.

The first of the FMPs to be proposed (late 1989) was for the Auckland Zone, the top half of the North Island. This is the area where most New Zealanders live and where most recreational and tourist fishing occurs. Amazingly, there was virtually NOTHING in the proposed FMP about regulating gill nets! There were only promises of additional evaluation and a short list of their harmful effects.

The public response was clear; the lack of set net regulation was the most common complaint in 900 submissions representing many thousands of people. Additional information came from a survey by *New Zealand Fishermen* conducted during the winter of 1990. It revealed that 92 percent of the country's recreational fishermen wanted gill nets

eliminated from within two miles of shore. It also showed that 16 percent of recreational fishermen use gill nets, a figure that corresponded with an earlier MAF survey. Amazingly though, more than half of the recreational fishermen that use gill nets would be happy to give them up if IF commercial gill nets were banned!

So the situation was clear. In the Auckland Zone 225,000 recreational fishermen wanted to see an end to commercial set nets. In opposition to them were only 422 commercial gill netters. Of these 422 fishers ONLY 167 of them used gill nets for a significant percentage of their activities!

In response to this conflict a Set Net Task Force was established in June 1990. By September 1990 they had met six times and submitted two reports. Representation on the task force was lopsided to say the least. There were five commercial fishery representatives for 422 fishers and one representative for 250,000 recreational fishermen! In addition there was one representative from the Underwater Association, one from Greenpeace (100,000 members) and one from Forest and Bird (60,000 members). There were also several MAF officials and various numbers of other observers which sometimes varied the ratio slightly.

Clearly the task force was structured to the advantage of a handful of gill net fishers and the second report reflects that. Most of the report deals with how gill netters could improve their techniques to reduce the killing of mammals, seabirds, turtles, sharks and non-targeted fish species. Many excellent suggestions were made here and some might actually help reduce the terrible side-effects of gill netting. Examples were increasing net mesh sizes, closing hazardous reef and current areas to nets, decreasing net length, increasing use of buoys, outlawing trammel nets and decreasing soak time of nets. In an effort to gather more information the task force also sent out a questionnaire for recreational gill-netters to respond to.

If every gill netter was an ardent environmentalist and IF MAF had the funds and personnel to enforce new regulations then SOME of the proposals would make a little sense. But we live in a different world than that. MAF cannot enforce the present regulations, even in areas around Auckland, and most gill netters I've met are certainly not environmentalists. And, most importantly, none of the proposals solve the most significant problems produced by the nets.

The important issues that were not solved by the task force were how to protect reef