

Recreational perspective of crayfish management in New Zealand

Summary of submission

February 2015

Nathan Guy, Minister for Primary Industries, has been urged to take a more active role in the management of New Zealand's crayfish stocks.

In the most recent response to the Ministry's proposals for the future management of crayfish, the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council-LegaSea submission has highlighted ongoing issues that need to be addressed before any changes on April 1st this year.

The size and abundance of crayfish needs to be increased to ensure the public's recreational and customary needs are met, to mitigate the risks associated with low stock levels, and to sustain the rock lobster fishery for future generations.



In a detailed submission the Minister has been advised to make changes that would reduce commercial fishing pressure on coastal areas that are popular with the public.

Crayfish are a prized shellfish.



The public will not accept low numbers of adult crayfish when commercial fishers are granted a license to take undersized crayfish in selected areas of the country including Gisborne, East Coast, Otago and Southland.

These small crayfish are being scooped up before they reach legal size, meaning few are left in the water for public fishers.

Also, large numbers of just-legal crayfish are being taken for the live export trade every year. These fish need to be left to grow large and productive, to rebuild the stocks and protect the fishery from any future adverse environmental event.

While these concessions remain there will be no support by recreational fishers for any commercial catch increases in these areas.

If the fishery is as healthy as the scientists suggest then cancel the concession and let everyone enjoy increased abundance!

Protecting our fragile marine ecosystem

We are concerned that crayfish management has been hijacked by a few interested parties to the detriment of New Zealand's marine environment and people's social, economic and cultural wellbeings.



"Currently the Minister seems to have no idea what it's like to try and gather crayfish from waters that have been hammered in the pursuit of private profits."

As in 2014, the public was given only 18 working days to respond to the complex proposals. This is indefensible.

Such short consultation periods deny the public ample opportunity to both understand what is happening in their fishery and respond adequately so the Minister can make an informed decision.

The marine ecosystem needs to be nurtured so species such as crayfish can thrive. And, it is more important for the public to have reasonable access to these fish, not the leftovers from an overpriced export market!

The once-prolific Gisborne fishery is now so depleted that surveys of recreational catch estimate just 8 tonne of catch, with the lowest average weight (580g) per crayfish in the country. This crayfish stock is projected to decline by 15-31% in the next four years. Commercial catch rates could fall to an historic low, yet there is no advice to the Minister to remove the concession or reduce commercial catch limits.

Potential solutions

The recent submission proposes a raft of measures to restore crayfish abundance, availability and size.

Most importantly, the level of exploitation needs to be reduced, significantly in several areas, so the fishery is not so dependent on next year's young to sustain the whole stock.

The Minister needs to make precautionary decisions that ensure total catch is sustainable.

The Minister must also act in a manner that provides for reasonable public use of the fishery now, and sustains the fishery for future generations. www.legasea.co.nz/crayfish.php

Crayfish are a treasure, a taonga.

