

NZ Fishing World – MARCH 14 Edition.



Be quick, loud and plentiful

By Trish Rea

At the end of January we farewelled Mandy Kupenga, our National Programme Leader for the past 12 months. Mandy has moved on to do her own TV fishing show and other exciting stuff, but she's got the bug and supporting LegaSea is now part of her DNA. Go well Manz.

For most of us this time of year is the best. We get to enjoy chasing skippies and marlin off the coast (we're still waiting for more tuna to arrive), or we could be hunting snapper, kingfish, blue cod, gurnard, crayfish or even flounder in the shallows.

All up, whatever your taste, there's a fish out there to suit. Or at least there used to be. That's where LegaSea comes to the fore.

Right now your interests of enjoying a special meal of crayfish with family and friends is under threat and you need to act. Quickly.

Crayfish jackpot

In 2013 you and thousand of others got behind LegaSea during the marlin and snapper campaigns.

Currently there are five crayfish fisheries under review. All suffer from the same affliction – the data being passed as “best available science” merely validates commercial overfishing.

Many of you have reported the proliferation of commercial cray pots in places where they have never been before, on marginal pieces of the coastline or in your favourite spot, all in the hunt for the last refugees.

Our opening response is to say NO WAY to proposed commercial catch increases in depleted fisheries.

If your region is not affected don't relax, because next year it could be your fish they're after. This is your chance to stand up for yourself!

Crayfish 2, upper east coast

Area 2 is the worst performing crayfish stock in the country, yet it has vast areas of prime habitat in Northland, the outer Hauraki Gulf, Coromandel, and Bay of Plenty to East Cape.

History proves there was mass abundance before crayfish became a valuable export. Now there are few legal size fish available to recreational fishers.

Even commercial gatherers are struggling, only getting around 0.4kg per pot lift. Small returns, especially when fishers in the south and west coast enjoy more than 3kg per pot lift.

The Ministry proposes a catch reduction that will, at best, produce a miniscule (0.08%) improvement in stock levels in the next 20 years. This is unacceptable.

If we want our kids to enjoy crayfish and a healthy, functioning ecosystem in the future, a rebuild plan must be implemented now.

Wild west coast

Out west crayfish 9 runs between the Kaipara and Westland. Here we have some of the highest commercial catch rates in the country. But again, proposed catch increases are based on the assumption that catch equals abundance. There is little acknowledgement that advances in technology, equipment and techniques have all contributed to higher catch rates.

As recreational fishers we need to make sure a conservative commercial catch limit is applied and a new, realistic recreational allowance is made to protect our interests.

Gisborne – a national disgrace

Recreational fishers around Gisborne have protested for years against poor catches, the lowest in the North Island.

Crayfish 3, between East Cape and Hawke Bay, was once a prolific fishery. It is being deliberately kept at low levels by iron-fisted commercial interests who are determined to keep the loophole that allows them to take crays below the recreational minimum size limit.

If size limits are there to ensure abundance how can allowing a lower size limit to those fishers who profit from selling crayfish be tolerated?

This size differential between commercial and recreational interests is a blatant way of saying commercial fishers get priority in this fishery ahead of recreational and environmental interests.

No amount of data massaging will justify the ongoing slaughter of new recruits in this fishery.

Nathan Guy has Ministerial power to stop this nonsense.

Wairarapa woes

Proposals for crayfish 4, between Wairarapa and Wellington, demonstrate the folly of using commercial catch rates as the basis for changing catch limits.

In 2013 the commercial catch limit was increased by 32 tonnes, but actual catch has declined so this year a 32 tonne decrease is proposed.

Commercial interests argue last year's lower catch rates was due to weather not a lack of fish. Really?

Clearly a review of management procedures is required.

Flip flop in Otago

A similar up-down scenario has occurred in crayfish 7, Otago. Last year the Ministry reduced commercial catch by 19 tonnes, this year they propose a 22 tonne increase.

This fishery relies heavily on new recruits reaching legal size. After a few years growth they are thought to move to the west coast. It is risky to rely on past catch rates to set new limits because by the time they are applied these fish have moved on, leaving vulnerable juveniles behind.

What can you do?

The public cannot be blamed for the poor state of these fisheries, as the reins of power are held tight by a small band of people who jealously guard their territory, providing advice directly to Nathan Guy, and having no accountability to us.

Now it's your turn. LegaSea has initiated an awareness campaign to alert the public to the crayfish debacle.

No worries if you missed the Ministry's submission February deadline, we only had 18 working days to respond.

It's important you take advantage of the opportunity to give Nathan Guy your feedback before he makes a decision, by April 1st.

Act quickly. Be loud and get your mates to follow you to the LegaSea website www.legasea.co.nz/crayfish. Stake your claim.

And while you're there, sign up for our free newsletters and commit to making a modest, regular contribution because advocacy without resources is an illusion.

LegaSea is the public outreach brand of the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council. We're committed to inspiring people to engage, subscribe, contribute and spread the word, because by working together we can secure more fish in the water and a meaningful fishing experience for future generations.

www.legasea.co.nz or check us out on Facebook www.facebook.com/legasea