

NZSFC Fisheries Management Update 32

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Mismanagement of crayfish must stop!

Nathan Guy must intervene and get crayfish management back on track if we want our fisheries restored to healthy levels.

As Minister for Primary Industries Mr. Guy cannot continue to hide behind the veil of a statutory body offering poor advice while many prime crayfish habitats are deserted, leaving us empty-handed and despairing at barren reefs.

In our latest submission the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council has highlighted concerns that the Ministry is again exposing Guy to a highly public backlash against the latest advice promoting higher catches and risky procedures.

Offensive strategies such as allowing us only 18 working days to respond to complex proposals, and limiting our access to raw data just amplifies how disengaged we are from managing one of our most precious fisheries.

Nathan Guy will make his decision before the end of March and it will apply from April 1st. We are adamant that 2014 is the year mismanagement of our crayfish must stop.

One plan out of five is acceptable

Catch limits and controls in five out of nine crayfish stocks are being reviewed. Only one plan is acceptable, if the Minister applies conservative catch levels. If not, the relatively healthy west coast fishery may sink to the lows evident in other areas.

When managing fisheries the Minister is obliged to provide for reasonable public use, both now and in the future; he cannot do that if our crayfish stocks are being depleted by excessive commercial fishing.

We have made numerous recommendations to both restore crayfish levels and reduce the risks associated with low stock sizes. Selected comments are below.

Pakiri to East Cape (CRA2) has the lowest catch rate in the country, at 0.41kg per commercial potlift.

- Public catch has plummeted; the fishery is near-collapse.
- Excessive commercial fishing has depleted the fishery, yet proposed catch reductions will maintain this fishery around this same level for the next 20 years.
- Bigger commercial catch cuts are required.
- A rebuilt fishery will mean more and larger crayfish contributing to a healthy ecosystem.
- The Minister must implement measures to double the existing stock size.

The once-prolific Gisborne fishery, CRA3, is now so depleted that recreational catch surveys estimate just eight tonne of catch, with the lowest average weight (580g) per crayfish in the country.

- Recreational catch is being constrained by low availability levels, small animal size and the concession granting commercial fishers access to undersized, 52 and 53mm crayfish. While this loophole remains we will reject any Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) increase.

We reject the status quo and support a commercial catch reduction in CRA4, between Hawke Bay and Wellington. Only time will tell whether the previous, large TACC increases are sustainable – we think not.

Management of CRA7, the Otago fishery, is a national disgrace. It is a fishery built on harvesting immature fish for a long-lost canning venture. The concession loophole must be slammed shut and no commercial catch increase ought to apply until toothpick crayfish are left alone to mature into adults.

One relatively healthy fish stock with a reasonable number of large adult fish is CRA9, extending south from the Kaipara Harbour to Westland. We support the Minister setting a TAC for the first time and expect him to set aside reasonable allowances for recreational, customary and environmental interests.

Grooming the data then hiding it from public view cannot disguise our concerns that current management is serving a small number of quota holders at the expense of the national interest. It is time for Nathan Guy to become more active and risk-averse when managing our fragile fisheries and ecosystems.

More info at www.sportfishing.org.nz - Fisheries – Latest news.