



Image: Andy Belcher

CRA 3 2024

February 2024

Our crayfish are in trouble



Crayfish numbers around the east coast of the North Island are depleted and need to be restored. The fastest way to rebuild the rock lobster population is to apply a 40 percent cut to catch limits.

In early 2024 Fisheries New Zealand (FNZ) consulted on four options for the future management of the east coast crayfish population, CRA 3. The options ranged from minor cuts up to a 40% reduction in commercial catch limits.

LegaSea, the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council, New Zealand Underwater and New Zealand Angling & Casting Association supported the most conservative FNZ option to enable crayfish numbers to rebuild.

After speaking with local interests the joint parties recommended the Minister retain the existing recreational daily bag limit at six per person, and split the large management area into smaller units.

The submission was sent to FNZ in February.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Crayfish on the east coast, from East Cape to Wairoa, have struggled to survive the onslaught of excessive

annual catches, the commercial harvest of undersized fish, and more recently several cyclones.

Since the cyclones, much of the fishing effort from the east coast and Gisborne has shifted into the waters around Mahia and into Hawke's Bay. The CRA 3 management area is so large that there is no way to stop this shift of effort.

Mahia and Hawke's Bay locals urge the Minister to reduce catch limits so the crayfish population can rebuild to more natural levels.

WHAT NEXT?

It's important that the Minister adopts a precautionary management approach to an already struggling fishery. This requires reducing catch limits by 40 percent and splitting the large CRA 3 management area in two.

It will take time for the crayfish population to rebuild. However, smaller management areas will enable catch limits and controls to be adapted to meet local needs and the foreseeable needs of future generations.

Ministerial decisions on the catch reductions and recreational daily bag limit are expected by March. Any new changes will apply from 1 April 2024.



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