

Northland rock lobster (CRA 1) proposed management measures



Fisheries New Zealand

Tini a Tangaroa



This is a summary of a Fisheries New Zealand (FNZ) discussion document, which is available here:

<https://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/66006>.

In northeastern New Zealand, fishing of top reef predators (including snapper and rock lobster) is considered to be a key factor behind the proliferation of kina, resulting in extensive kelp loss and the expansion of urchin barrens.

To support the recovery of kelp forests, the Government has implemented a number of measures to facilitate removal of urchins from barrens including approving a special permit purpose for the removal of urchins and increasing the recreational daily limit for urchins. Further measures to increase the abundance and size of urchin predators (including rock lobster) would help to support kelp forest recovery in existing barrens and to prevent the formation of new urchin barrens.

FNZ is now seeking feedback on a range of management measures to increase the abundance and size of rock lobster in Northland to better enable them to meaningfully contribute to the control of sea urchin populations. These measures lead on from the 2023 reduction of catch settings for the CRA 1 fishery.

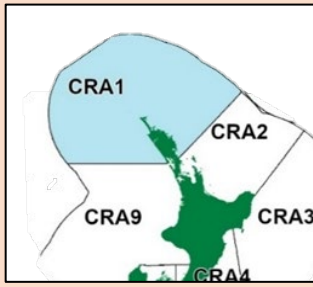
Management measures being considered to help address urchin barrens in CRA 1



Non-regulated measures implemented by the rock lobster industry



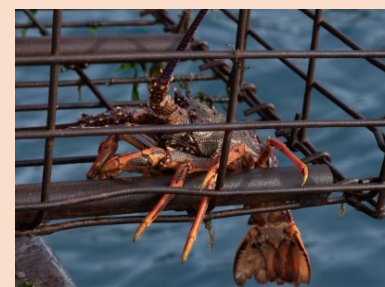
Adjustments to legal size requirements



Subdivision of the CRA 1 Quota Management Area



Area and/or seasonal closures



Accumulation/vessel limits for recreational rock lobster fishing



Recreational controls for packhorse rock lobster (*Sagmariasus verreauxi*)

We encourage you to provide your feedback on which management measures should be progressed using the submission form on our website: <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/66012-Submission-form>.

Send your feedback via email to: FMSubmissions@mpi.govt.nz. Consultation closes at 5pm on 15 December 2024.



Urchin barrens in Northland

Urchin barrens are 'sea-urchin-dominated areas of rocky reef that would normally support healthy kelp forest but have little or no kelp due to overgrazing by sea urchins'.

Urchin barrens have been identified in a number of locations on the east coast of Northland. While multiple factors including sedimentation and marine heatwaves can cause kelp decline, in northeastern New Zealand, fishing of sea urchin predators (including rock lobster and snapper) is thought to be a key factor behind proliferation of kina, resulting in extensive kelp loss and expansion of urchin barrens. This relationship is based on evidence from marine reserves in northeastern New Zealand showing that increased abundance of large urchin predators (including rock lobster and snapper) can assist in reversing urchin barrens and support the re-establishment of kelp forest habitat.

For the full rationale for the proposed measures, read the technical discussion paper available here: <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/66006>

Current industry non-regulated measures

Closed areas, closed seasons, and a harvest cap of five tonnes on the east coast for the 2024/25 fishing year (implemented by the rock lobster industry).

Benefits:

- Highly flexible compared to regulated measures, which can be easily and quickly changed.
- Limits commercial catch in the area of urchin barren concern (east coast) for the 2024/25 fishing year. Industry may offer a longer-term agreement.

Risks:

- Cannot be enforced by FNZ (but adherence can be monitored).
- Would need to operate for a prolonged period to effectively increase rock lobster abundance.
- Does not prevent commercial fishing returning to the east coast in the future.
- FNZ’s initial view is that the measures that have been put in place to date, and the current industry non-regulated measures, will not sufficiently address urchin barren issues.



Implementing a maximum legal size for recreational fishers

Implementing a maximum legal size (**MaxLS**) for commercial and/or recreational fishers has been investigated. FNZ does not recommend applying this to the commercial fishery because modelling indicates it would reduce the number of large rock lobster in the long term because more small lobsters would have to be caught to take the same catch weight, leaving fewer lobsters to grow to larger sizes. As recreational fishers are limited by the number rather than weight of lobster they can collect, it is expected a MaxLS could be more effective for recreational fishers.

Benefits:

- Tangata whenua often express support for protecting large lobster because it aligns with tikanga.
- A recreational MaxLS could be beneficial at increasing the abundance of large lobster.

Risks:

- A commercial MaxLS would reduce the abundance of large lobster over time.
- Implementing a MaxLS for the recreational fishery alone could be perceived as inequity between sectors.

Increasing the minimum legal size for recreational and/or commercial fishers

Fishers currently can only collect females larger than 60 mm tail width and males larger than 54 mm tail width; increasing these size limits has been investigated.

Benefits:

- Increases size and abundance of lobster and is expected to reach its full effect on lobster size distribution after about 15-20 years.
- Beneficial if applied to both commercial and recreational fishers.

Risks:

- Would result in a slight decrease in catch rates for commercial fishers
- Would make it harder for recreational fishers to catch legal-sized fish in the short term.

Subdivision of the CRA 1 Quota Management Area (QMA)

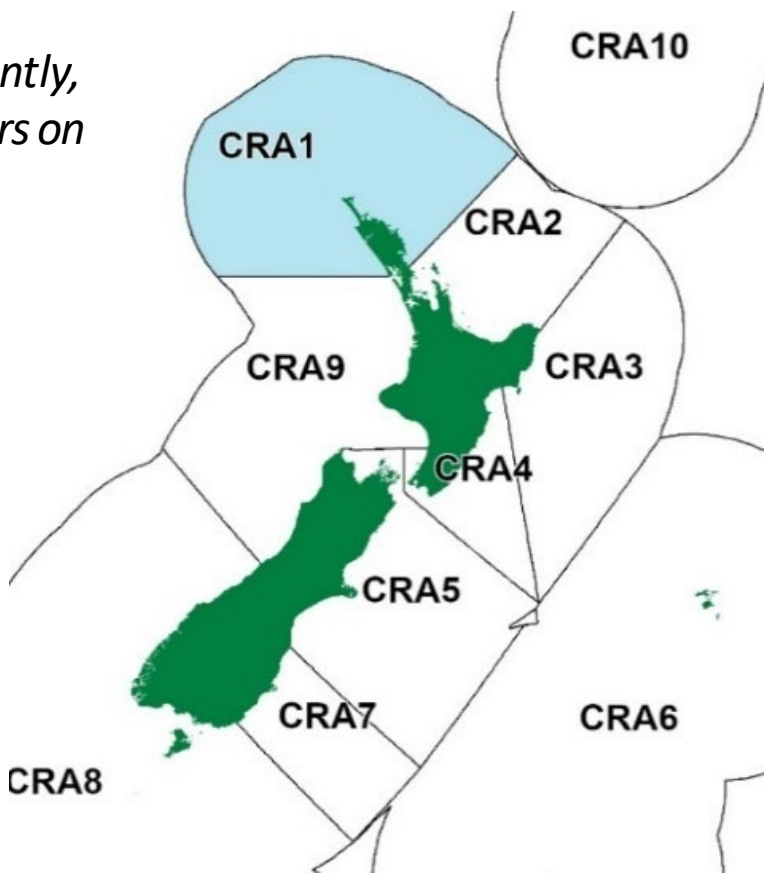
Subdividing CRA 1 into east and west regions (Three Kings Islands in the west) to allow targeted management that accounts for environmental differences between coasts. Currently, commercial fishing mostly occurs on the west coast while recreational fishing mostly occurs on the east coast.

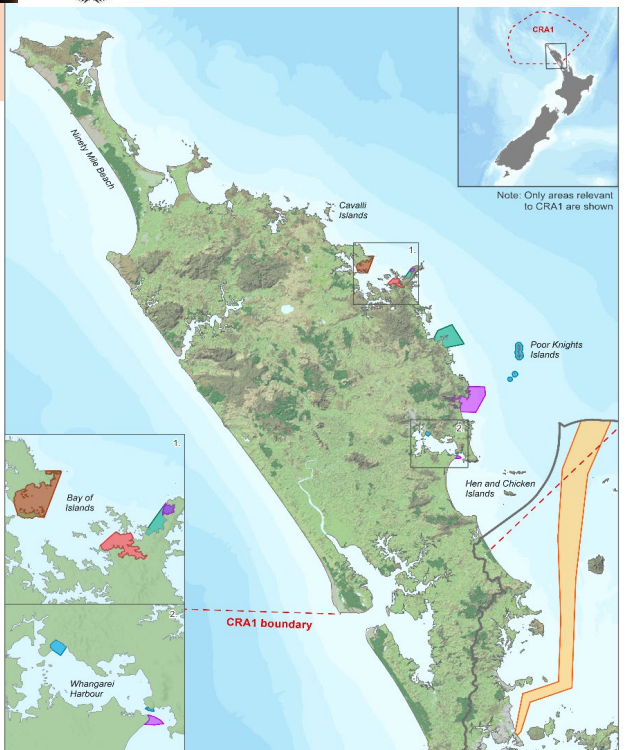
Benefits:

- Would allow for targeted east coast management where urchin barrens occur.
- Ensures management measures on the east coast can be operated over a prolonged period. This provides a higher likelihood that increases in rock lobster abundance and kelp forest recovery will eventuate.

Risks:

- Implementation is complex, likely taking 12 months or more to complete.
- To continue operating, the fishers who currently fish the east coast may need to relocate their fishing effort to the west coast if the available Annual Catch Entitlement (ACE) in the east coast QMA does not provide for them to fish their current catch.





Area closures for recreational and/or commercial fishers

Sections of coast could be closed to fishing for either rock lobster or all species. There is evidence that closures to all fishing supports reversal of urchin barrens. It would be expected that rock lobster only closures would increase the abundance and size of rock lobster within that closed area.

Benefits:

- No-take area closures are more likely to address urchin barrens than closures to rock lobster fishing only. However, effective closure design requires expert input.
- Relatively quick to implement, although co-development of closures takes time. Closures to rock lobster fishing only would be quicker to develop.
- Allows localised management without permanently altering the QMA.

Risks:

- Kelp recovery outside of closed areas is uncertain.
- Improved information on the location and extent of urchin barrens due in May 2025.
- Progressing closures takes time given the level of engagement and planning required (especially multi-species closures).
- Displacement of fishing could occur depending on closure design.
- Small networks of closures can be difficult to enforce.

Seasonal closures for recreational and/or commercial fishers

Closures during key breeding periods (April to November) has been supported by tangata whenua. Alternatively, a closure from December to February would align with the current industry non-regulated closure and reduce recreational pressure during the peak recreational fishing period.

Benefits:

- Regulated seasonal closures may provide greater confidence across sectors than non-regulated (voluntary) closures.
- April to November closures could reduce disturbance and death/injury caused by handling during the moulting and breeding season.
- A December to February closure would be expected to reduce recreational pressure on the east coast.

Risks:

- April to November closures would significantly impact industry because about 80% of catch is taken during this period and would not align with the current non-regulated commercial closure period.
- Enforcement of seasonal closures can be challenging if they are not implemented over large areas.
- Fishing could shift to other periods of the year and areas depending on the design of the closure.

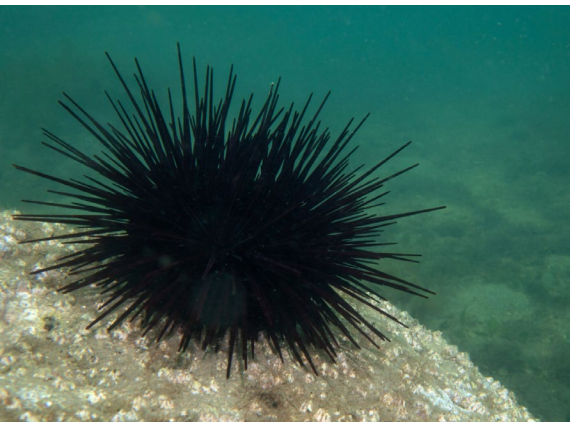
Summary of additional measures proposed by tangata whenua



Accumulation and/or vessel limits for recreational rock lobster fishing

Regulations could be implemented to limit the number of lobster taken by individuals on a boat (**vessel limit**) or the number of lobster accumulated over more than one day (**accumulation limit**) for recreational rock lobster fishing.

Limiting recreational fishing on the east coast will likely help address urchin barrens.



Measures to reduce recreational fishing pressure on packhorse rock lobster (*Sagmariasus verreauxi*)

The recreational daily limit for packhorse rock lobster could be reduced.

Packhorse grow much larger than spiny rock lobster and may be important urchin predators, particularly of the long-spined urchin *Centrostephanus rodgersii*.





Initial view of FNZ

Subject to further engagement and analysis, FNZ's initial view is that the non-regulated measures in the 2024/25 industry AOP and the measures put in place to date will not sufficiently address urchin barren issues, and a further package of regulated measures is required.

FNZ considers subdivision of the CRA 1 QMA should be pursued because it would facilitate independent actions for each coast in response to changing rock lobster abundance and urchin barren distribution. In addition, increasing the minimum legal size for commercial and recreational fishers has a high likelihood of increasing the overall abundance of rock lobster and the abundance of large rock lobster. FNZ does not recommend pursuing a MaxLS for the commercial fishery because it reduces the abundance of large lobster over time. However, there may be some benefits to implementing a MaxLS for the recreational fishery. FNZ's initial view is that there is merit in exploring some area closures in Northland and in reducing the recreational daily limit for packhorse lobster.

Key questions for providing feedback

We are seeking your feedback on which management measures should be progressed for the CRA 1 fishery to help manage the impact of rock lobster fishing on urchin barren formation in Northland. A submission template is available here: <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/66012-Submission-form>.

Send your feedback via email to: FMSubmissions@mpi.govt.nz. The deadline for feedback is 5pm on Sunday 15 December 2024.

- What measure(s) do you support and why? Do you support alternative measures not discussed in this paper?
- Which measure or combination of measures do you think will most effectively address urchin barren issues?
- Do you agree with FNZ's initial view that the current non-regulated industry measures alone will not sufficiently address urchin barren issues?
- Do you have any further information to share on the location of urchin barrens in Northland?
- Do you have any views on where QMA subdivision should occur or how quota should be allocated if changes to the QMA are pursued?
- Do you have any views on the location and/or scale of area closures or which sectors or fish stocks they should apply to, if progressed?
- Do you have any views on the timing and/or location of seasonal closures for rock lobster or which sectors they should apply to, if progressed?
- How could the measure(s) outlined in this paper impact you?

For the full rationale for the proposed measures, read the technical discussion paper available here:

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