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Review of Rock Lobster Commercial Concession Area Regulations

Rock Lobster are a taonga, highly valued by all New Zealanders.

NZ Sport Fishing Council

1. The NZ Sport Fishing Council (NZSFC) is a national sports organisation. Membership from affiliated clubs has grown steadily and we now represent over 30,000 members in 59 clubs spread throughout NZ. We run the NZ Nationals fishing tournament, which has evolved over time and remains successful.
2. NZSFC compile and publish the New Zealand records for fish caught in saltwater by recreational anglers. NZSFC is affiliated to the International Game Fish Association (IGFA) which records and publishes catches that qualify as recreational world records.
3. In 1996 the NZSFC helped establish the NZ Marine Research Foundation, which aims to sponsor research on marine species and fisheries for the benefit of all New Zealanders, including participants in ocean recreation.
4. Many of our most established fishing clubs have a focus on fishing for large pelagic species such as marlin, tuna, and sharks. In recent years our membership has expanded beyond the well-established deep sea angling clubs to include many local clubs targeting other species. These include many traditional food fisheries and iconic species such as crayfish.
5. NZSFC representatives regularly engage and contribute to science, management and policy development processes on behalf of our members and supporters, in the interests of achieving abundant fisheries and a healthy marine environment.
6. However, we have been excluded from participating in the active management of the cray fisheries because this role is jealously guarded by the National Rock Lobster Management Group (NRLMG), comprised of industry, customary and New Zealand Recreational Fishing Council representatives.
7. The NZSFC does not believe all the crayfish stock are being managed at sufficient abundance levels to enable people to provide for their social, economic and cultural well-being, as required by the Fisheries Act 1996. We object to the ongoing mismanagement of many of our cray fisheries and request that our objection be highlighted in the Final Advice Paper to the Minister.

Submission

8. All Rock Lobster concessions be removed immediately.

New Zealand Sport Fishing Council Inc.

(Previously New Zealand Big Game Fishing Council Est. 1957)

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The Initial Position Paper

9. The Initial Position Paper (IPP) attempts to present a balanced exposition of the facts. However, in this respect it fails due to the contrived language and pre-supposed outcome; i.e. that commercial benefits are derived from concession regimes, and non-commercial interests will not benefit from the removal of concession regimes. It is an underlying theme reinforced with rhetoric, but noticeably lacking in substance.
10. The IPP is unbalanced. The nature of the proposals suggests the IPP was largely, if not completely, written by NZ Rock Lobster Industry Council (NZRLIC) staff.
11. The IPP becomes embroiled in esoteric considerations of the role Minimum Legal Size (MLS) plays in fisheries management, and attempts to bind Minimum Legal Sizes, Total Allowable Catches (TACs) and benefits into a single value proposition. This IPP loses focus through attempts to reframe the review in terms of 'maximising benefits' and leads readers to make value judgments that are without foundation and irrelevant.
12. The terms for this review should only be to consider the purpose for the concessions when originally established, whether that remains valid today, and make contemporary decisions whether these concessions remain fit for purpose.
13. The setting of Minimum Legal Sizes across Rock Lobster fisheries has to occur in the context of a sustainability review.
14. Trying to intertwine MLS and concession topics in this proposal paper serves only to obfuscate and are simply out of context.

Why we have tail width concessions

15. The three Crayfish (CRA) management areas with tail width concession regimes have separate and clearly identified reasons for each regime.
16. The tail width concession in CRA 3 (Gisborne) arises from a stock rebuilding programme instigated in 1993, and served to mitigate the economic impacts on commercial fishers of a 50% reduction in Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC).
17. The tail width concession in CRA 7 (Otago) arises from the historical need to land Lobster small enough so their tails could be canned.
18. The tail width concession in CRA 8 (Southern) arises from an observed regional anomaly in the relationship between carapace length and tail width, particularly for females.

Is there a continuing need for concessions?

CRA 3 (Gisborne)

19. The TACC reduction and stock rebuilding strategy for CRA 3 is now mature. There was an immediate and prolonged recovery following the TACC reduction in 1993, although this has now been eroded and stock languishes in the lower bounds of recent history.

20. The proportion of concession fish in the catch has declined and the success of the rebuild strategy begun in 1993 can only be gauged following removal of the concession. Permitting commercial catch of sub-MLS fish was never intended to be a mechanism for resetting the Minimum Legal Size. It was always a temporary means of mitigating the economic impact of a TACC reduction.
21. It is counter-productive to create a commercial fishery with a dependence on concession fish. Commercial catch must be regulated for the long term value that arises from abundant mature stocks.
22. Landing concession fish results in a larger number of Lobster being caught for each tonne of Annual Catch Entitlement (ACE), leaving fewer mature fish to recruit into the adult stock, increasing the risk to egg production and genetic diversity.
23. The public are placed at an intolerable disadvantage by offering Lobster for commercial removal before they are available for non-commercial catch.
24. It is highly objectionable that a tool that was generously introduced to prevent economic disaster from commercial overexploitation is now being used as a reallocation tool for commercial benefit.

CRA 7 (Otago)

25. The CRA 7 fishery serves as a classic example of what happens when you allow concessions to continue when the original purpose is no longer valid.
26. Commercial fishers have become addicted to sub-MLS fish, and cannot be voluntarily weaned. Long and multi-pronged attacks are mounted in defence, using every rationalisation imaginable in protection of their addiction, completely without principle.

CRA 8 (Southland)

27. CRA 8 is the only fishery with some biological logic offered for the introduction of the Minimum Legal Size (MLS) concession. Now it appears that the concession is permitting large numbers of female Lobster to be commercially caught before they have an opportunity to contribute to the spawning stock.
28. Best information suggests the original concession was implemented on a poor assumption i.e. that in CRA 8 a narrower tail for females equated to an equivalently mature fish in northern waters. We now know that this is not as simple, and the concession did not provide for equality across regions, it unwittingly permitted large numbers of immature females to be removed from the stock.
29. The unknown nature of the stock recruit relationship is no defence for the status quo, indeed just the opposite. While we remain so ignorant of the recruitment patterns and dependencies of Lobster we should avoid taking unnecessary risks by taking immature fish. This is just common sense and doesn't require a long scientific thesis or contrived explanations by commercial interests trying to protect access to small, immature crayfish.

The New Zealand Sport Fishing Council appreciates the opportunity to submit on the review of Rock Lobster commercial concession area regulations. We are available to discuss our submission in more detail. We look forward to MFish addressing our concerns and would like to be kept informed of future developments.

Yours faithfully,

Mark Connor
President
NZ Sport Fishing Council