

Rock lobster: a well-managed fishery that keeps coastal New Zealand working

What the sector contributes, and what we need from any government



\$608m

economic contribution a year

1,500

jobs supported on the water and on shore

\$350m

export earnings a year

220

boats, landing at around 100 places

What rock lobster gives New Zealand

Rock lobster is New Zealand's most valuable wild-caught species, worth \$228 million a year at the wharf. Most of the fleet works from small coastal communities rather than main ports.

More than three-quarters of the economic contribution from catching rock lobster is in Southland, Fiordland and Stewart Island, the Chatham Islands, and Canterbury and Marlborough.

The money flows to:

- Local businesses such as boatyards, fuel, bait, freight and marine electronics;
- More than 600 quota owners, including the small family businesses that operate vessels; and
- Iwi who fund education and social programmes from their fishing income.

A fishery that is well managed

- 82% of the commercial catch limit comes from stocks above the target levels used under the Fisheries Act. 96% of catch comes from stocks above the threshold for spawning stocks.
- Since 1990, catch rates are up 400%, with 57% fewer boats and 73% fewer pots hauled.
- Lobsters are caught live in pots. The small amounts of other fish that come up in the pots go back alive.
- Fishers fund the science and data collection: logbooks, a 30-year tagging programme, industry contracted technicians and elective research.
- Where stocks need work, such as the inner Hauraki Gulf, Mahia to East Cape, east Northland and Kaikoura, we back action. Industry management is responsive – we take voluntary catch cuts where stocks need it.

What we need from any government

- 1 **Faster, science-based catch decisions.** Agree the rules in advance so catch limits can move quickly when stocks change.
- 2 **Consider the cumulative effect of existing closures before new ones are added.** Between Te Arai and East Cape, 29% of lobster reef is already closed and fishing displaced to adjacent areas.
- 3 **Build on the quota system and protect the Māori Fisheries Settlement.** The system is better than alternatives and gives fishers and iwi the confidence to invest in and look after the fishery.
- 4 **Fair, transparent cost recovery.** Charges should match the services actually delivered.
- 5 **Better information.** Fix electronic catch reporting, measure recreational catch properly.

Common misunderstandings

"More marine reserves will fix fisheries." Lobsters stay close to home, so closures just push fishing into nearby areas and cause problems. Controlling the total catch works better.

"Rock lobster is functionally extinct in the Hauraki Gulf." Numbers are low in the inner Gulf, where silt and runoff have damaged reef habitat and action to manage fishing came late. Commercial catch rates in the outer Gulf and around the islands are good. We back higher targets and direct action on kina barrens for the inner Gulf.

"The quota system has failed." It was brought in because the old system failed. It keeps the catch within science-based limits and made the Māori Fisheries Settlement possible.

Protect what works. Fix what doesn't.

We are ready to work with the next government.

Mark Edwards, Chief Executive

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