

Hon Phil Heatley
Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture

28 March 2011

Media Statement Rock lobster catch limits announced

Fisheries and Aquaculture Minister Phil Heatley has decided catch limits for rock lobster (crayfish) fisheries to apply from 1 April this year.

Mr Heatley says the catch limits in the Wellington/Hawkes Bay spiny rock lobster fishery will increase, while those in Otago and Southern fisheries will decrease. No changes are proposed in the Canterbury/Marlborough spiny rock lobster fishery.

In reaching his decisions the Minister carefully considered the best scientific and management information available as well as submissions from the public, customary, recreational and commercial fishers.

“The Government, wants to facilitate a responsive management regime that helps ensure sustainability and provides for appropriate levels of use of the highly valuable rock lobster fishery,” says Mr Heatley.

In Wellington / Hawkes Bay (CRA 4) the catch limit will increase by eight per cent from 610.625 to 661.9 tonnes for commercial fishers only.

“Commercial fishers have taken a responsible approach to managing the fishery over several years by significantly reducing their catch to halt declining lobster numbers and help ensure the ongoing economic viability of the fishery,” says Mr Heatley.

“Recreational fishing groups have also done their bit to help declining lobster numbers in the past by voluntarily reducing their daily bag limit. This restraint has resulted in increased abundance in the fishery which is to everyone’s benefit,” he said.

In Otago (CRA 7) the total catch limit for the CRA 7 rock lobster fishery will decrease by eight per cent from 104.5 to 95.7 tonnes.

“I have decided to take a conservative approach because of large fluctuations in lobster numbers. The catch limit reduction is likely to quickly assist the stock to a stable situation that provides greater and consistent benefits for all fishery participants,” says Mr Heatley.

The reduction in catch will come off the commercial catch limit only and non-commercial allowances will be unaffected.

In Southern (CRA 8) the total catch limit for the CRA 8 rock lobster fishery will decrease by 5% from 1110 to 1053 tonnes.

“The decrease in the total catch limit is due to the conservative nature of the management regime used in this fishery and is not to sustainability concerns. The CRA 8 fishery is above the desired statutory target stock level,” says Mr Heatley.

“The reduction in catch will come off the commercial catch limit only and non-commercial allowances will be unaffected.”

“The CRA 8 commercial industry group supports the cut and is committed to ensuring high lobster numbers continue in this fishery. I thank them for their responsible approach to its management,” he said.

The Minister has also agreed the deemed value rates (penalties for fishing over the set commercial catch limit) will increase for all spiny and packhorse rock lobster stocks. The annual deemed value rate will increase from \$100 to \$110 per kilogram, the interim deemed value rate will increase from \$75 to \$99 per kilogram, and the differential deemed value rates will be adjusted accordingly.

Media contact: Anna Woolnough 04 8179707 or 021 242 8269

Background:

Rock lobsters are taonga to Maori, and are highly sought after by customary, recreational and commercial fishers throughout New Zealand. Rock lobster is the highest value seafood export from the inshore fisheries environment, grossing over \$206.1 million in the year ending June 2010.

Most rock lobster caught in New Zealand are exported live, with the majority sent to Hong Kong (88.1%), with Japan (3.6%), USA (0.9%) and Singapore (0.9%) the other significant markets. The largest commercial catches of rock lobster are landed in Southland (CRA 8).

Management tools like size limits, no take of egg carrying and soft shell lobsters, and escape gaps in lobster pots are used to protect the breeding stock. However, rock lobster abundance varies with changes in environmental conditions that affect important factors such as settlement of juveniles and natural mortality rates. This means catch limits often need to be changed to reflect the changing environmental conditions.

Summary of Current and New Catch Limits:

Stock		Total Allowable Catch	Total Allowable Commercial Catch	Customary Allowance	Recreational Allowance	Allowance for Other Mortality
CRA 4	Current	610.625 t	415.625 t	35 t	85 t	75 t
	New	661.9 t	466.9	35 t	85 t	75 t
CRA 5	Current (No change for April 2011)	467 t	350 t	40 t	40 t	37 t
CRA 7	Current	104.5 t	84.5 t	10 t	5 t	5 t
	New	95.7 t	75.7 t	10 t	5 t	5 t
CRA 8	Current	1110 t	1019 t	30 t	33 t	28 t
	New	1053 t	962 t	30 t	33 t	28 t

The final advice paper the Minister considered along with the submissions received are available on the Ministry of Fisheries website, www.fish.govt.nz