



The slow growing, coastal reef fish red moki has been decimated by spearfishing in the last few decades. In Leigh Marine Reserve it finds a safe haven. Photo: Ken Grange

"It seems to me this situation is increasingly required if we're to have fishing rights in the future – who wants rights to something that doesn't exist? Would you like rights to catch moa? It's hardly worth bothering about," he concludes. 🐦

Russell Joyce is a Department of Conservation journalist from the Waikato region.

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Recreational spearfishing gives a good example of the impact the slightest human activity can have, he says.

"One relatively inexperienced spearfisher, fishing inshore for home ranging territorial reef fish, can have an effect in half an hour which can last for 10 years."

In the 1950s Leigh was an example of this. Close to Auckland, the coast became a favourite weekend spearfishing spot which quickly saw the area gutted of fish, crayfish and shellfish.

Since the reserve was created, fishing of any sort has stopped.

"Today we can see what happens if we stop all the killing; things change back to what is presumably more natural," Dr Ballantine says.

"Most people would like to eat crayfish that are at Leigh. Most people would like to eat the snapper, or sell them. But we have decided, collectively, that we won't because there are other benefits which outweigh that – fun, recreation, education for students, but most importantly of all the protection of fish stocks.

"I think insurance is important – most sensible people spend money on it. We're still very ignorant of the way the sea works. This is a complicated system which we know so little about. So perhaps it would be better to keep some parts untouched, as insurance, until we find out what effects we're having.

"I think it would be quite nice to keep some places pristine and natural so we can tell what effect we're having on others. Are we going to have more disasters like the Chatham Island crayfish industry, the Firth of Thames mussels, the Golden Bay scallops, fur seals, snapper nearly everywhere – or are we learning?

"Symbolically you can ask – is Leigh a sunrise of a new idea which will actually provide a benefit and do some good? Or is it a sunset in which we will preserve a sort of museum of how things used to be?

"Leigh is a place where fish can breed undisturbed. It's a place where large fish can provide lots of eggs and continue to live. Dispersal of fish out of the reserve supports people who wish to fish for fun, food or money.

Old Blue Award For Dr Bill Ballantine

IN RECOGNITION of the tremendous efforts made by Dr Bill Ballantine in promoting marine reserves, Forest and Bird recently presented him with our "Old Blue" award for outstanding conservation achievements.

Dr Ballantine welcomed Forest and Bird's involvement in the marine reserve campaign, saying New Zealand was at the start of a revolution in marine conservation.

"New Zealanders must insist on the protection of marine assets. I believe nearly everyone will be hoping that the Forest and Bird Society can repeat the successes it has had on land, in the seas," Dr Ballantine said.



Executive member Joe Crandle (left) presenting the Old Blue to Bill Ballantine. Photo: Rodney and Waitemata Times