



## Lobster on the rocks

**I**NCOMPETENCE BY FISHERIES managers and intransigence by crayfishers are together driving the New Zealand rock lobster population to commercial collapse. For a number of years fisheries scientists have warned of overfishing, falling catches and poor stock recruitment.

However, the warnings have been ignored and overfishing has continued. Today an end to all commercial crayfishing in the North and South Islands may not be enough to restore the commercial fishery.

The problems in the rock lobster fishery were discussed in the *Future Rock Lobster Strategy* (1986). All of the present concerns were recognised then, but never addressed. Again in 1988, fisheries scientists emphasised stock recruitment problems in the population and the need to reduce catches.

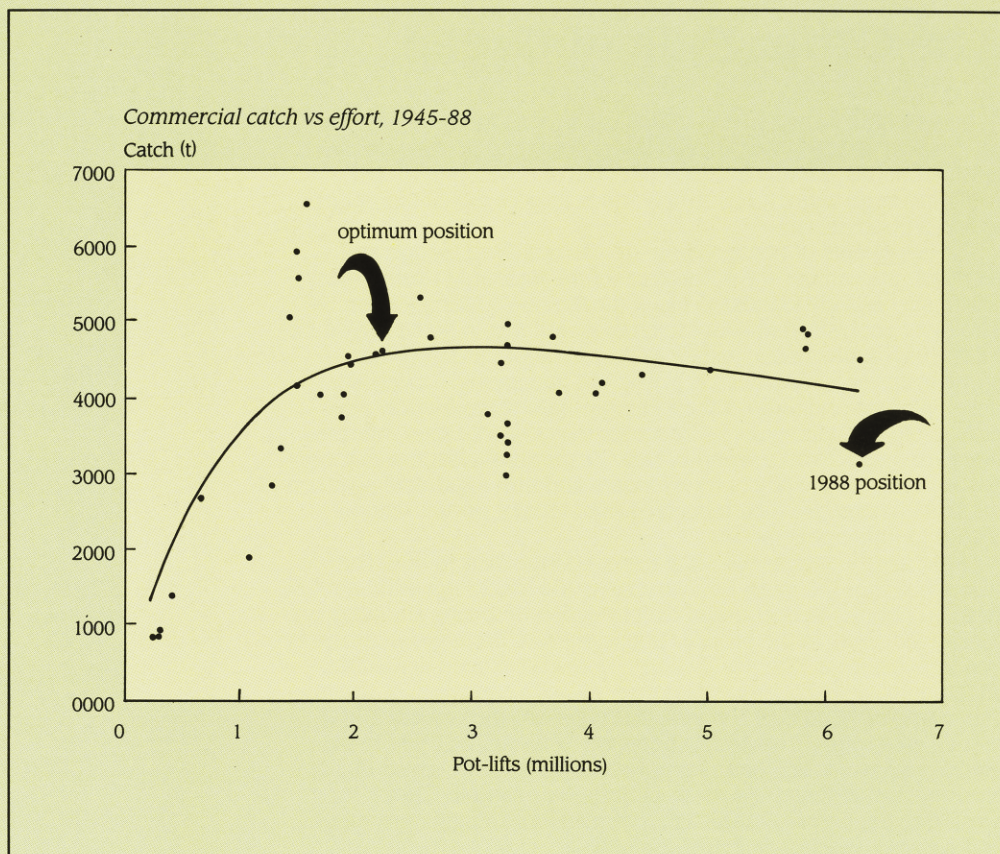
"The catch levels of recent years for the North and South Island are probably not sustainable... the biological safety of the fishery depends on stopping and reversing the present trend towards increased effort and decreased stock levels."

By 1989 the scientists were describing the fishery as "stressed." But when quota were set for rock lobster in the Maori Fisheries Act 1989, it was at the same level as the previous two years. The much needed reduction in catch was not there.

The Chatham Islands rock lobster fishery – once severely overfished – is presently at a sustainable level. But the Chathams population relies on recruitment from New Zealand. We can therefore expect this population to suffer soon after the North and South Island populations collapse.

It appears also that Otago and Southland lobster breed later in their life cycle, so many are caught before they have had the chance to breed. Conversely, those in northern areas have bred several times before reaching the legal size for capture.

Meanwhile at the Leigh Marine Reserve, rock lobster numbers are now 20 times



*Crayfishers are putting down three times as many pots (pot-lifts) as in the 1960s, yet are catching fewer crayfish.*

higher than in similar marine habitats nearby. When the commercial fishery collapses, inhabitants of this marine reserve (and others as they are created), may be the only hope for any recovery of the population. Each year the crayfish produce millions of larvae that drift off along the coast to build up stocks in other areas.

Early next year the Minister of Fisheries will set the total allowable commercial catch (TACC) for rock lobster. Unless the TACC for the North and South Islands is more than halved, we can expect to see the demise of

commercial and possibly recreational crayfishing in New Zealand. The Minister should reduce the catch in the Chathams to buffer that population from a New Zealand recruitment failure. A larger size limit is also needed to give lobsters sufficient time to breed before they are caught.

The only sure hope for rock lobster seems to be marine reserves and taiapure (Maori reserve) which are closed to fishing. 🦀

**Mark Bellingham**

## A decade of restoration

**I**N SEPTEMBER THIS YEAR the Native Forest Restoration Trust celebrated its tenth anniversary and could look back at some notable achievements.

The Trust's beginnings can be traced back to 1978 and the now famous tree-top sit-in led by Trust member Steve King to protect the giant totara of Pureora Forest in the central North Island. As a result the Government placed a three-year logging moratorium over the forest.

A number of those who protested about the logging later formed the Trust, which tried to convince local mill workers that they should restore the forests they had destroyed. By growing 100,000 trees at a nursery at Oratia, the Trust hoped to provide the initial impetus for the restoration project. However,



*Trust patron Sir Edmund Hillary with Pat and Arthur Cowan on the Cowan Wildlife Reserve, Pureora, an area where the Trust has planted 20,000 trees.*

the Government decided to close the mills and \$7 million was provided as compensation.

This left the Trust with thousands of mainly kahikatea and totara seedlings looking for a home. Many were sold to farmers, and the proceeds formed the start of the Trust's fund. Since then the Trust has added 319 ha to Puketi forest and 248 ha to Waipoua forest with its purchase of the Puketi Mokau Reserve and the Prof W.R. McGregor Reserve. Its current campaign is to restore reverting farmland on Rangitoto Station to the east of Te Kuiti.

If you would like to know more about the Trust's work, write to The Trust, PO Box 80-007, Green Bay, Auckland 7 🦋