

A chronology of events

July 1988

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) prepared under contract by MAF Fisheries for Presbyterian Support Services.

18 August 1988

Support apply to MAF for consent to import "the stock or fertile ova" of channel catfish into New Zealand claiming that "... the findings of the EIA speak for themselves and that there are many compelling reasons for early approval of importation..."

October 1988

The EIA is distributed to a restricted number of interested parties by MAF-Fish. The Federation of Freshwater Anglers and Forest and Bird find out about the existence of a detailed proposal and obtain a copy of the EIA in January, two months after submissions to MAFFish close.

December 1988

MAF is concerned over the legal tests to be applied under the Animals Act 1967. It is claimed that the refusal to grant a permit on environmental grounds would be open to legal challenge by Support. (This view is not held by the Ministry for the Environment/MFE or Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment (PCE). MAF seeks a more specific set of criteria in the Animals Act to provide clearer directions to the decision-maker to enable balancing of the matters to be taken into account.

12 December 1988

Cabinet agrees to proceed with an Animals Amendment Bill. Until such time as the Bill receives the Royal Assent, the importation of channel catfish is prohibited by the Customs Import Prohibition (Aquatic Fauna) Order 1988, brought under the Customs Act on 22 December 1988. The Order-In-Council will be withdrawn on the forming of the Amendment Bill.

23 February 1989

MAFFish completes review of responses to EIA from those who had been invited to comment on EIA.

16 March 1989

MAF undertakes review of the importation proposal against the criteria of the draft Animals Amendment Bill. It concludes that there is an insufficient case to permit the importation of channel catfish.

2 May 1989

Animals Amendment Bill introduced into House. It is referred to the Primary Production Select Committee.

8 May 1989

Minister of Agriculture submits verbal recommendations to Cabinet in favour of allowing the importation of channel catfish. These recommendations are based upon a substantially incorrect and misleading MAF paper. No Cabinet paper is presented or discussed and Ministers are inadequately briefed on the issue. Cabinet agree that channel catfish be allowed into New Zealand subject to certain terms.

22 May 1989

The Animals Amendment Bill is pre-empted by the Customs Import Prohibitions Order (Aquatic Fauna) 1989, which revokes the earlier Order. It prevents the importation of live channel catfish at any stage of its life cycle, subject to the comment of the Minister of Agriculture and such conditions as the Minister thinks fit to impose.

The Animals Amendment Bill remains unpassed.

15 June 1989

An interdepartmental meeting of officials is convened to consider any evidence against importation of channel catfish. Federation of Freshwater Anglers makes a submission citing opinions from experts in Michigan and South Carolina warning against importation. It is ignored.

16 June 1989

Minister of Agriculture grants consent to importation of the catfish. He retains the right to order the destruction of the stocks if he considers "...on the basis of the information presently available or as a result of tests or research carried out, or any other reason that the fish pose an

unacceptable hazard to New Zealand." It is intended that environmental trials be conducted during the period of the catfish's quarantine.

21 June 1989

Channel catfish eggs are imported.

August 1989

Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment states in her monthly newsletter that the quality of the EIA for the channel catfish application was inadequate.

July-December 1989

Unsuccessful MAF efforts to design meaningful trials for assessing impact of channel catfish on New Zealand's freshwater ecosystems.

January 1990

FFA institutes Ombudsman's inquiry following MAF decision to withhold information relating to importation.

May 1990

MAF advises in newsletter of its intention to transfer the catfish to owner-operated quarantine in Auckland from June 1990.

May 1990

FFA and Forest and Bird form coalition to step up the campaign against channel catfish. Petitions, letters to MPs and Ministers follow.

May/June 1990

Further documented research evidence and expert opinions against channel catfish received from North America: Washington/Oregon; California; Utah/Colorado; Michigan; Florida. The evidence against channel catfish is overwhelming.

June 1990

Minister of Fisheries establishes an Independent Review Team (IRT) to consider all relevant available information on channel catfish and make recommendations, by 20 July 1990, on whether the environmental risks posed by channel catfish are acceptable or unacceptable. FFA presents two detailed submissions and copies of overseas research evidence.

20 July 1990

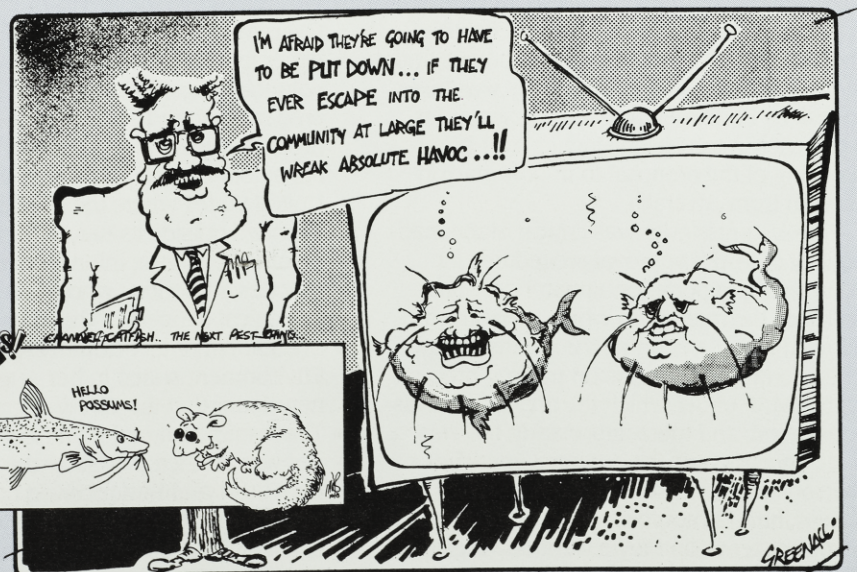
Minister receives IRT report which concludes "... that one or more value species is more likely than not to suffer an unacceptable decline in abundance or distribution as a consequence of the introduction of channel catfish. Accordingly our recommendation to the Minister is that the environmental risk posed by the channel catfish is unacceptable."

July - early September 1990

Minister advises Support he is of the preliminary view that channel catfish pose an unacceptable environmental risk and they should be destroyed. Support is given an opportunity to respond to the report and present any new information in support of its case. The responses received do not persuade the Minister to change his preliminary view.

20 September 1990

Channel catfish stocks destroyed.



Cartoonists relished the catfish saga.