

freshwater fauna of importance to Maori was not understood.

- On 8 May 1989 Agriculture Minister Moyle spoke to Cabinet in favour of allowing the importation of channel catfish. His recommendation was based upon a substantially incorrect and misleading MAF briefing paper to its Minister. No Cabinet paper was presented and ministers were inadequately briefed on the issue. The Cabinet decision to proceed with importation was therefore based on incorrect information and eminently challengeable.
- MAF advised its minister that environmental trials could be undertaken to assess the impact of channel catfish in the New Zealand environment, even to the extent of releasing catfish into natural environments to assess their impacts. In the US it had been shown that catfish could not be eradicated once established in the wild.
- MAF advised its minister that "a source of catfish eggs of acceptable health status has been identified." Yet at the time the import permit was granted, both MAF and the minister knew that the source broodstock, from which the eggs were obtained, had disease.
- In advising its Minister, MAF claimed to have "firm economic advice that the project has a reasonable chance of success." Yet some six months later the project's executive marketing officer said no market studies had been undertaken to find out what level of acceptance the catfish would have with consumers.
- The importation reversed the onus of proof. Instead of placing the onus on the proponent to prove that the new species would not have any adverse impact, MAF and its Minister took the view that if there was no evidence to the contrary, they might as well take a gamble.

One of the factors contributing to the catfish fiasco is MAF's structure. As a large government agency with diverse responsibilities, it has inherent conflicts of interest.

In relation to the catfish application, MAF acted as:

- *consultant* to the importers (a joint venture between Presbyterian Support Services and the Muriwhenua Incorporation), by preparing an EIA and supplementary report for financial return. The supplementary report published in *Freshwater Catch* 41, Spring 1989, appeared to be little more than an attempt to justify the importation;
- *distributor* of the EIA and *receiver* and *analyser* of submissions on the EIA on behalf of the proponent;
- *arbiter/advisor* on whether the importation should proceed;
- *advocate* for aquaculture;
- "*independent advisor*" to the Minister of Agriculture;
- *quarantine manager* (on contract to the importers) for financial return;
- *guardian* of the ecological estate.

A letter dated 6 April 1989 from Northland Support to MAF Fisheries highlights these conflicts:

"My secretary in Whangarei has been busy gathering supplemental information regarding overseas experience with catfish to further bolster the extensive material in the EIA. Hopefully this will provide the people at Gillingham House with yet more ammunition to ward off any possible anticipated attacks

Just when you thought it was safe...

THE CONTROVERSY over new animal imports does not end with the channel catfish victory. Marron crayfish and chinchilla (a South American rodent) have both been imported into New Zealand in recent years and hard questions are now being asked as to their potential impacts on the environment.

Marron crayfish, a native of West Australia, were imported in 1987 under dubious circumstances. The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment questioned the Environmental Impact Assessment but licensing for a farm at Warkworth went ahead nevertheless.

At the time fears were raised about the possible ecological impact of the crayfish after it was discovered they had been banned in Victoria and Tasmania on the grounds they would predate on the native freshwater fauna in those states.

The issue came to a head in December 1990 when reports came in from around the country of the crayfish being sold in fish shops, hotels and restaurants. As a result, Forest and Bird and the Federation of Freshwater Anglers called for an independent review along

the lines of the catfish inquiry.

New Fisheries Minister Doug Kidd responded to our concerns by announcing the Government would begin negotiations to buy the Warkworth farm, and that further live sales were banned.

When chinchilla were imported in the mid-1980s, the importer was granted a licence to farm them only in the North Island. They were specifically excluded from the South Island on the grounds that the South Island high country most closely resembled their South American habitat.

Since then however the terms of the licence have been challenged and overthrown, and today chinchilla are freely sold as pets, including in the drier areas of the South Island. Concern has been expressed that they could become another rabbit-like pest. Forest and Bird has joined the growing body of organisations calling for the destruction of the chinchilla before the inevitable escapees establish wild populations. These organisations include several South Island local bodies, High Country Federated Farmers and the Mountain Lands Institute. ♀



Chinchilla, "the ideal pet for working people because they are active in the early morning and again at night." (Dunedin pet shop owner). However Forest and Bird believes the South American rodent may pose a threat to New Zealand's environment.

Photo: Dominion Sunday Times



An environmental handful. Chairperson of the Auckland Regional Council's resource management committee, Mrs Jean Sampson, holds aloft two marron crayfish during a visit to the Warkworth farm. Photo: New Zealand Herald

by the dreaded extremist environmental critics," it reads. (Gillingham House is MAF's Wellington Head Office.)

Maori Values

A supreme irony of the catfish story is the fact that one of the partners, the Muriwhenua Incorporation, which has a concern for traditional fisheries, was advocating the importation of an alien, predatory species which would decimate the native fisheries to which its people have a cultural attachment.

The venture was promoted as a Maori initiative and it was claimed that a refusal would be viewed as anti-Maori. However, the reality is that the impact of channel catfish on native freshwater fisheries - which are of significant cultural importance to Maori - would have been devastating. Our efforts in opposing the importation were strongly supported by a number of iwi.

A disappointing feature of the debate was

the eleventh hour approach made to the Waitangi Tribunal by the proponents seeking an interim tribunal ruling inviting the Minister of Fisheries to postpone destruction of the catfish. Such an approach achieved little but brought the Tribunal into disrepute.

It was indeed ironic that the Tribunal, an institution created to help protect Maori values and access to traditional resources, should be called upon to support the exotic catfish.

Of importance to Maori also are the central North Island trout fisheries. The trout fisheries of the Rotorua Lakes and Taupo are gems which have been established through a partnership between the Crown and Te Arawa and Ngati Tuwharetoa. Ngati Tuwharetoa receive \$500,000 a year in funds from their share in Taupo licence fees and from fines. Direct angling-expenditure pumps close to \$50 million into the Taupo/Rotorua economies. The capital value of business assets