Left: *Recently Thelma Wilson (DoC New Plymouth) had to rescue a fur seal pup trapped in a set net. The pup fortunately survived the traumatic experience.*

In 1986, of the 2266 vessels in the domestic fishing fleet, 406 were set net vessels.

brought more and more life-giving oxygen to his tissues and the weakness began to ease. But as the hours passed, the pain under his scales increased and it became more and more difficult to flex his skin when he moved. By the next day the bacteria had begun to spread into the bloodstream of the stressed fish. As the bacteria spread inward, fungal spores began to grow in the damaged skin and increased the pain and swelling under the rigid scales.

The once powerful kingfish became progressively weaker and immobile as the infections gained momentum. By that night he settled near the bottom, exhausted by his struggles. The fungi and bacteria continued their attack and soon overwhelmed his weakened immune system. With the coming of the dawn the kingfish began to be pushed by the tide towards a small beach. His skin was covered by the fungal growth that had found easy purchase in the many wounds from the net. His blood was swarming with the bacteria that had effortlessly got in the same way. He finally found death on an empty beach, under a cloud of hungry gulls.

A few minutes later the gill net fisher's boat sped by. He was heading out to check his gear. He noticed the flock of gulls on the beach but was unaware of where they had got their meal that day. Just as he was unaware of so many of the other, unnecessary deaths caused by his nets as they lay under the sea.

fish, how to reduce the killing of non-targeted quota species, how to reduce the wastage (50-70 percent of species caught) inherent in gill nets, how to reduce the flow of netted fish to the black market, how to prevent the destruction of the recreational fishery (60 percent of the commercial catch of kingfish is in set nets), how to avoid local depletion of fish in harbours and how to protect the seabirds and mammals that live throughout the Auckland Zone.

In short, the task force had no solutions to the destruction caused by set nets. So, what are the effective options we have? The report written by Mark Davison of Greenpeace on the use of set nets advocates the elimination of all set nets except those necessary to catch species that cannot be caught any other way; and then to have those fisheries highly regulated to prevent abuses. In the Auckland Zone that boils down to using gill nets ONLY in the estuarine mullet and flounder fisheries. All other species that are important commercially can be caught by other means. Forest and Bird and the Sport Fishing Council are in agreement with the elimination of all gill nets except those used for mullet and flounder by commercial fishermen.

Unfortunately, even the nets used for flounder and mullet can be used to target snapper, trevally, kahawai and parore. Because of these potential abuses, recreational set nets should be eliminated completely from the Auckland Zone. Commercial fishers that supposedly target flounder and mullet should not be allowed to do so unless they have adequate quota for trevally, kahawai and snapper. Most importantly, ALL set nets should be banned from areas that support substantial recreational fisheries like Mangonui, Bay of Islands, Whangarei and significant areas around Auckland.

The destructive effects that set nets have already had on our recreational fishery, tourist industry, marine birds and mammals, reef fish and quota regulated species will take many years to correct. The desires of a few hundred gill netters cannot be allowed to interfere with the needs of millions of people and the health of our oceans.

There have already been too many delays. We should have had the gill nets out of our waters a year ago.

Mark Feldman is a Mangonui fisher and conservationist who wrote an article for the May 1990 issue of Forest & Bird *on the quota system and its effect on fish species such as kawhai.*

Cartoon courtesy of Christchurch Press