

JUST 16 YEARS AGO, New Zealand fishers operated in small boats within 20 km of the shore, fishing to depths of around 200 metres. Orange roughy was unknown and the industry was dominated by owner-operators who caught traditional species like snapper, school shark, trevally, groper, flat fish and rock lobster. Apart from rock lobster, fish were mainly sold for local consumption.

Today all that has changed. In 1978 New Zealand extended its fisheries management control out to 200 nautical miles [370 km] as part of the international consensus on changes to the law of the sea. The enclosed area of water is the fifth largest Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the world and is over 15 times the land area of New Zealand. Fish is now a billion dollar export industry.

The catch from the EEZ area over the last 20 years has increased from 225,000 to 565,000 tonnes – a small catch in international terms. By comparison, the current reported world catch is around 100 million tonnes, up from the 70 million tonnes reported in 1976. The actual catch could be 30 to 50 percent higher.

For the first few years after the declaration of the New Zealand EEZ, foreign-licensed vessels from Japan, the Soviet Union and South Korea dominated the fishery. But from the early 1980s New Zealand companies began investing in vessels or chartered foreign vessels to catch fish on their behalf. This was promoted by the government through tax incentives on the boats and through increasing restrictions on foreign vessel catch.

Since 1986 there has been little increase in the percentage of the total catch taken by New Zealand owned vessels. About 180 foreign vessels – trawlers, squid jiggers and long liners from Japan, Korea, Russia and Norway – are now chartered each year by New Zealand companies for fishing throughout the EEZ.

Today the fishing industry is dominated by a decreasing number of large New Zealand companies. The three big companies, Sealords, Talley's/Amaltal and Sandfords, control over half the total quota. These companies are the major players in a large industry lobby, the Fishing Industry Association. The owner

John Dory is a northern inshore species but is a by-catch rather than a target fish. This means it is caught incidentally of the fish being sought, in this case snapper and trevally. Conservationists have long been concerned at the poor reporting of by-catch species by commercial fishers.

