

**29 July 2012**

## **Antarctic Fishing Sustainable and Tightly Controlled**

The fishing activities of the New Zealand fishing industry in the Antarctic's Ross Sea are responsible and sustainable says the industry organisation, the New Zealand Seafood Industry Council, in anticipation of the release of a documentary film on the subject by New Zealand film-maker Peter Young.

Entitled "The Last Ocean", this film will have its first showing as part of the film festival. The industry has been refused the opportunity to see it in advance, however, the film is listed in the "activist" and "environmental" categories at the festival and is understood to attack the Antarctic toothfish fishery which operates in the Ross Sea.

"Clearly this documentary film has a point of view", says Peter Bodeker, chief executive of the New Zealand Seafood Industry Council. "We are concerned though that its intent will be to generate public outrage in the absence of the full picture. We want to make sure people are able to get a balanced view."

"We support an active conservation policy in the Ross Sea, in fact already large areas are closed to fishing under existing and internationally agreed conservation measures that the New Zealand industry has actively supported. We do not support its total closure as is being advocated.

"In that context the Ross Sea toothfish fishery is a highly managed fishery. It operates under the guidance of an international agency named "Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources" (CCAMLR) which is made up of all countries which have an interest in conserving the marine environment of the Antarctic and Southern Ocean region," he says.

"CCAMLR sets very conservative catch limits and has very specific rules for exploratory fisheries such as the Ross Sea toothfish fishery, so there is built-in caution in the system.

Last year New Zealand's toothfish catch was 26 per cent of the total catch limit set by CCAMLR, and for the past six years only once has it topped 40 per cent of this catch limit.

Mr Bodeker said that the annual total toothfish harvest by CCAMLR members was less than three per cent (3%) of the total biomass of toothfish in the Ross Sea from 2011.

In addition to these international measures, New Zealand operates strictly within the guidelines of the respected international certification organisation, the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) which describes New Zealand's approach as "well managed".

The MSC accreditation process is rigorous and highly internationally regarded. It is based on three core principles; the fishing activity has to be at a level which is sustainable for the fish population, fishing operations must minimise environmental impact and finally, the fishery must have an effective management system in place.

“In short, this industry is doing the right thing by the New Zealand Government, by other international Governments and agencies and by the unique Antarctic environment itself. We fish responsibly and sustainably, and the fishery is backed up by good science.

“In this respect, we exercise a high level of restraint. The fishing takes place over an area, which in total, is less than three per cent (3%) of the total area of the Ross Sea.

“In addition, the Ross Sea is has a natural protection of sea ice which means it is closed off to fishing naturally for eight months of the year. Our environmental footprint is therefore very small.

“It is understood that this film, together with a number of environmental groups, calls for the total closure of the Ross Sea to all fishing activity,” says Mr Bodeker.

“We believe this is a total over-reaction and unnecessary. New Zealand has been fishing parts of the area in a careful and managed way for many years, demonstrating that it is possible to effectively balance conservation and fishing.

“We are concerned at the all-or-nothing approach amongst some environmental groups at present. This approach ignores the good work of CCAMLR, of Government agencies and the industry. Careful and responsible fishing, respectful of the Antarctic environment has few, if any, adverse effects.

“We can only hope that the public is able to manage the feelings of guilt this type of campaign is designed to engender and to trust the combined efforts of international and government institutions which are doing a good job protecting the Antarctic environment.

“Fishing is a key industry for New Zealand. We do it well and sustainably. We have some of the world’s most advanced approaches to sustainable fishery management based on strong science,” he says.

**For further information:**

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**Notes for Editors**

See also MSC’s statement: <http://www.msc.org/newsroom/news/msc-update-on-ross-sea-toothfish-healthy-stocks-and-minimal-impact-on-ecosystem?fromsearch=1&isnewssearch=1>

And the following backgrounder on Ross Sea toothfish:

**Ross Sea management (CCAMLR) <http://www.ccamlr.org/>**

- The Ross Sea is a deep bay on the coast of Antarctica. New Zealand’s Scott Base is situated on its eastern side.
- Toothfish fishing takes place within only three per cent (3%) of the total area of the Ross Sea. Large areas of the Ross Sea are closed under existing conservation areas.
- Fishing in the Ross Sea is managed under the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) with the objective of conserving Antarctic marine living resources, where ‘conservation’ is defined to include rational use.
- CCAMLR works on an ecosystem-based management approach, which means considering the effects of any harvesting on dependent and associated species, not just the target species and ensuring that those ecological relationships are maintained.
- There are now 25 Signatories to the Convention and 9 States which are party to the Convention but not Members of the Commission. New Zealand was one of the initial signatories to the Convention.
- CCAMLR has a science committee overseeing a number of working groups which collect, analyse and share the science that underpins the toothfish fishery. Its stock assessment for toothfish species is rigorous, using a mark and recapture programme (tagging).

### **NZ fishery in the Ross Sea**

- Four New Zealand vessels operated in the Ross Sea in the 2011/12 season (in total 15 vessels from all CCAMLR States for the 2011/12 season).
- The fishing season is short, from December to end of March, with the area naturally closed to fishing for the remaining eight months of the year by sea ice
- All vessels use the longline method of fishing using baited hooks attached to a weighted line that sinks quickly to the ocean floor. Fishing takes place mainly at depths ranging between 700-1800 metres.
- New Zealand operates strictly within the guidelines of the respected international certification organisation, the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) which describes New Zealand's approach as "well managed". The certification process took three years (Nov 2007 to Nov 2010). <http://www.msc.org/>
- New Zealand vessels contribute to the CCAMLR's scientific research process through additional sampling and reporting.
- In 2011 the export value of toothfish was NZ\$19m with most sales (87 per cent) to the US market.

### **About Toothfish**

- Ross Sea toothfish belong to the family *Nototheniidae*. They are grayish with a broad head, elongate body, long dorsal, with large pectoral fins - they by and large resemble an overgrown blue cod in shape and form. <http://seafoodindustry.co.nz/n1459,302.html>
- The relative maximum age for a Ross Sea toothfish is 35 years (compared with snapper 60 years, hapuku (groper) 46 years and tarakihi 46 years).
- They grow to around 1.7m in length
- Research suggests that Ross Sea toothfish are not major prey items of either Weddell seals or killer whales. Recent scientific work shows that they only make up somewhere in the range of 5 to 10 per cent of prey items for these two species.

**Additional websites:** <https://www.niwa.co.nz/video/the-antarctic-toothfish-fishery>