

Fisheries New Zealand

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Introduction of Proposed Local Rock Lobster Management Measures for Aotea Great Barrier Island

SUBMITTER DETAILS

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Introduction

1. This is a submission on proposed local rock lobster management measures at Aotea Great Barrier Island as set out in the Fisheries New Zealand (**FNZ**) Discussion/Technical/Information Paper No: 2026 (**Proposed Measures**).¹
2. The Environmental Defence Society (**EDS**) is an independent not-for-profit organisation conducting interdisciplinary policy research and litigation. It was established in 1971 with the objective of bringing together the disciplines of law, science and planning to promote better environmental outcomes.
3. EDS has a special interest in the marine environment and recently completed a multi-year project looking at issues within the national oceans management system and options for future reform, which had (among other things) a focus on fisheries matters.²
4. EDS supports the Proposed Measures requested by the Aotea/Great Barrier Local Board (the **Local Board**) and the Ngāti Rehua Ngātiwai ki Aotea Iwi Trust Board (the **Iwi Trust Board**), with support from the Aotea Ahu Moana Project.

¹ Fisheries New Zealand (**FNZ**) (2026) *Proposed local rock lobster management measures for Aotea Great Barrier Island* (FNZ, August 2026, FNZ Discussion/Technical/Information Paper No: 2026) (**Proposed Measures**), available [here](#).

² G Severinsen, R Peart, B Rollinson, T Turner and P Parson *The breaking wave: Oceans reform in Aotearoa New Zealand* (EDS, May 2022), available [here](#); R Peart *Pathways to oceans reform* (EDS, September 2025) available [here](#).

Fishery Context

5. The biomass of the CRA 2 rock lobster stock has experienced two significant declines in recent years; one in the late 1990s and another from the mid-2000s until 2018.³ This is shown below in Figure 1.

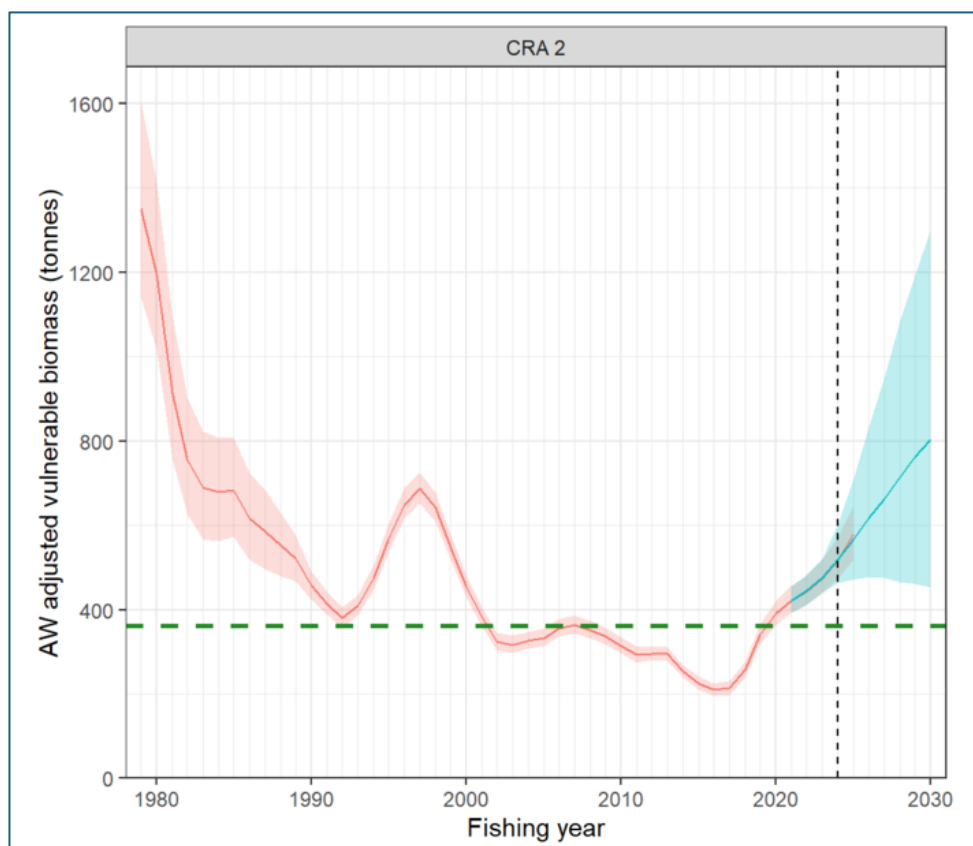


Figure 1. “Estimated vulnerable biomass of CRA 2 between 1980 and 2025 (red) with projected biomass to 2030 (blue). The interim management target biomass level is shown as a dashed green line.”⁴

6. As a result of depletion, the inner Hauraki Gulf fishery (**CRA 2**) was closed for spiny rock lobster harvest in April 2025.⁵ Following this, the spiny rock lobster fisheries on the east coast of Northland (**CRA 1**) and an additional region of CRA 2, were closed from 1 April 2026. This expanded on the previous closure to create a chain of protected areas to allow the stock to recover.⁶ The current extent of these closures is shown in Figure 2.

³ Proposed Measures at 22; M B Rudd and others *The 2025 stock assessment of red rock lobsters (*Jasus edwardsii*) in CRA 2* (FNZ, July 2026, New Zealand Fisheries Assessment Report 2026/28) at 60, available [here](#).

⁴ Proposed Measures at 22.

⁵ FNZ *Review of sustainability measures for spiny rock lobster (CRA 2) for 2024/25* (FNZ, December 2024, FNZ Discussion Paper No: 2024/33), available [here](#); S Jones *Changes to fisheries sustainability measures for rock lobster stocks as part of the 2025 April sustainability round* (Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI), 2025), available [here](#).

⁶ S Jones *Eastern Northland rock lobster fishery closed* (Beehive.govt.nz, 27 March 2026), available [here](#).

7. The rock lobster fishery is highly valuable for customary, recreational, and commercial fishers, and the Aotea population is relatively close to population centres.⁷ Signs of fishing effort displacement to regions outside of protected areas have been found in other rock lobster fisheries, such as around the Kapiti Marine Reserve.⁸ For this reason, EDS considers the potential for effort to be displaced from the recently closed areas in CRA 1 and 2 onto Aotea to be of significant concern.

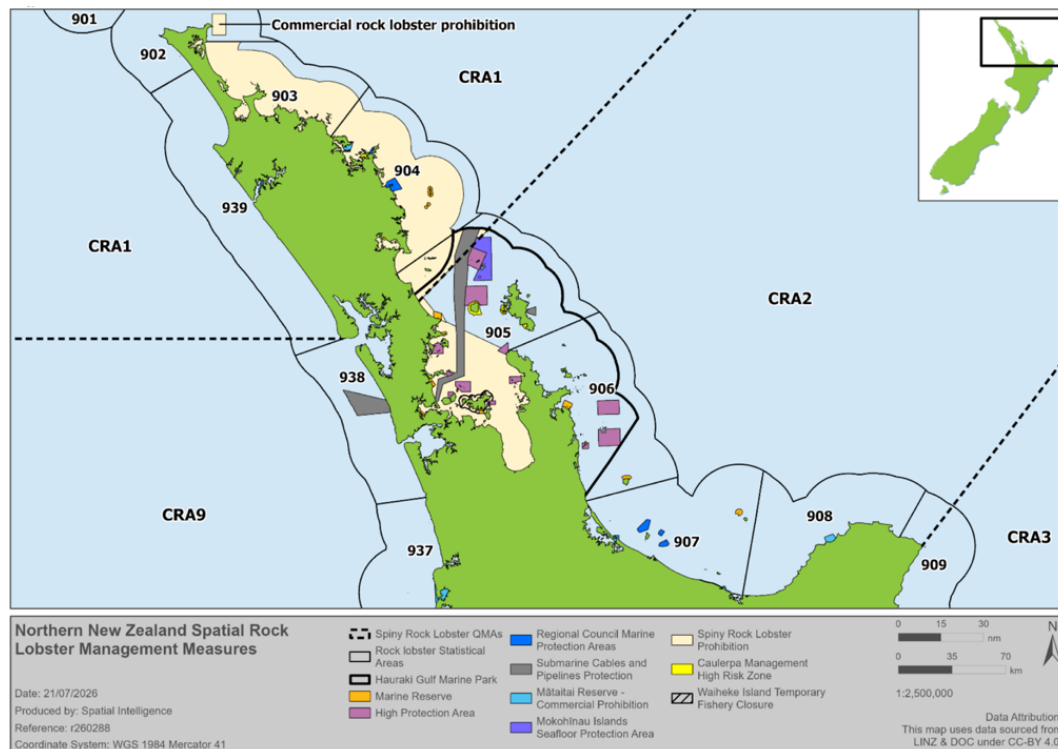


Figure 2. “North-east coast of the North Island, showing the CRA 1 and CRA 2 quota management areas and existing spatial management measures that affect rock lobster fishing.”⁹

8. The fact that localised depletion of rock lobster within CRA 2 has been noted, particularly within the Hauraki Gulf, further elevates this concern.¹⁰
9. Urchin barrens are caused by the overgrazing of sea urchins/kina, which in north-eastern Aotearoa has largely been a result of the overfishing of predators that would normally keep kina populations in check, including rock lobster.¹¹ This leads to the destruction of

⁷ FNZ, above n 5, at [2].

⁸ Ursula A Rojas-Nazar and others “Lobster fishery and marine reserve interactions in central New Zealand” (2019) 105 Marine Policy 67.

⁹ Proposed Measures at 7.

¹⁰ Kelsey Miller and others “Large-scale one-off sea urchin removal promotes rapid kelp recovery in urchin barrens” (2023) 32(1) Restoration Ecology e14060; S Jones, above n 5, at 3.

¹¹ FNZ, above n 5, at [196].

coastal kelp forest ecosystems, that are of high socioeconomic and biological value, and their replacement with low-productivity ecosystems.¹²

10. Once established, urchin barrens are persistent and difficult to reverse.¹³ This has become a widespread issue across rocky reef ecosystems in north-eastern Aotearoa.¹⁴ EDS therefore supports the Proposed Measures as important safeguards for both the Aotea rock lobster population and coastal ecosystem as a whole.

Proposed Changes

11. The measures have been requested by the Local Board and the Iwi Trust Board to be implemented within a one nautical mile boundary from Aotea (Figure 3). This is in response to the concern of Aotea residents and mana whenua that displaced effort from surrounding fisheries will deplete the Aotea rock lobster populations.¹⁵ They include the following:
- a. Establish six recreational-only areas;
 - b. Reduce the recreational day limit;
 - c. Introduce a recreational accumulation limit, set at a single day's catch;
 - d. Introduce a maximum legal size for both recreational and commercial fishers; and
 - e. Introduce a closed season during the autumn and winter mating seasons for both recreational and commercial fishers.
12. EDS supports all the measures proposed on the basis that they will provide holistic support and protection to the Aotea rock lobster population.
13. The restrictions on commercial and recreational catch will reduce the quantity of biomass removed from the population, including by large recreational fishing vessels, which residents and mana whenua of Aotea note have been known to aggregate multiple days of recreational take while fishing around the island.¹⁶ Nonetheless, the proposed recreational and customary-only fishing areas will balance this with supporting subsistence harvest by the local community, and the recreational fishery which brings value to Aotea.¹⁷
14. EDS considers seasonal breeding closures will help support the population's reproductive success. Research suggests that fishing effort during the mating season has the potential to negatively impact the reproductive success of rock lobsters. Females that experience

¹² B Doheny, J P Davis and B Miller *Fishery-induced trophic cascades and sea urchin barrens in New Zealand: a review and discussion for management* (FNZ, November 2023, New Zealand Aquatic Environment and Biodiversity Report No. 324), available [here](#).

¹³ S D Ling and others "Global regime shift dynamics of catastrophic sea urchin overgrazing" 370(1659) *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London B: Biological Sciences* 1; Karen Filbee-Dexter and Robert E Scheibling "Sea urchin barrens as alternative stable states of collapsed kelp ecosystems" (2014) 495 *Marine Ecology Progress Series*.

¹⁴ FNZ, above n 5, at [17].

¹⁵ Proposed Measures at 2.

¹⁶ Proposed Measures at 14; *Updated proposal of measures developed by Aotea/Great Barrier Local Board and the Ngāti Rehua Ngātiwai ki Aotea Iwi Trust Board* (MPI, June 2026) at 3-4, available [here](#).

¹⁷ *Updated proposal of measures*, above n 17, at 3.

injury or stress may not successfully mate and will then re-absorb the unfertilised eggs, which can then scar the ovaries and subsequently limit fecundity.¹⁸ The impact of handling, including exposure to air, can also reduce reproductive and larval success, meaning that the current protections preventing egg-carrying females from being landed are insufficient to address this.¹⁹

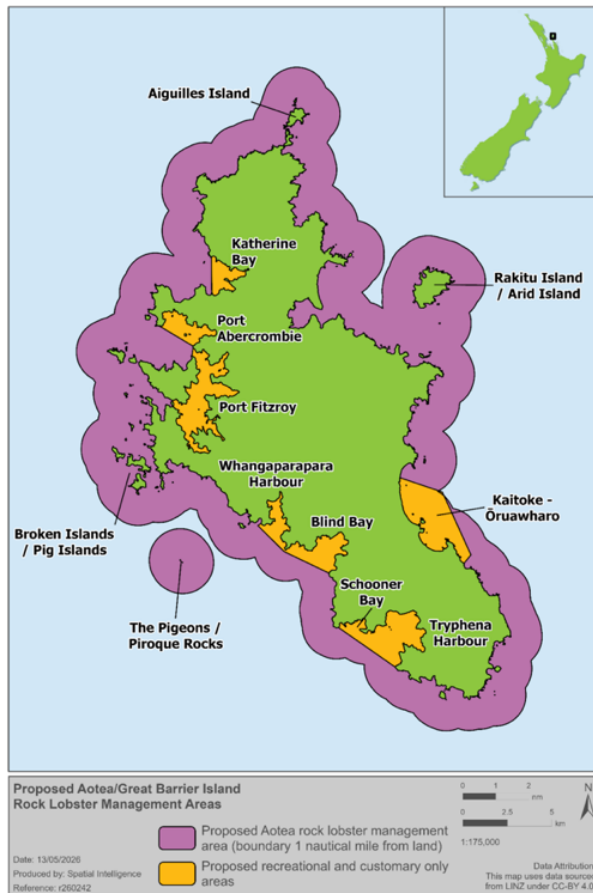


Figure 3. “Map of Aotea Great Barrier Island showing the proposed Aotea Rock Lobster Management Area (purple) within which it has been proposed that the requested measures are implemented, and the proposed recreational and customary only rock lobster fishing areas within which commercial rock lobster fishing would be prohibited (orange).”²⁰

15. Additionally, the introduction of a maximum size limit should be beneficial for the long-term sustainability of the Aotea rock lobster population. It is well known that the

¹⁸ A B MacDiarmid and Mark J Butler “Sperm Ecology and Limitation in Spiny Lobsters” (1999) 46(1) Behavioural Ecology and Sociobiology 14; C Fry, B Green, and C Gardner “Conversion of southern rock lobster (*Jasus edwardsii*) carapace length to tail width for enforcement of size limits” (2014) 48(1) New Zealand Journal of Marine and Freshwater Research 139.

¹⁹ Greg G Smith and Arthur J Ritar “Effect of physical disturbance on reproductive performance on the spiny rock lobster, *Jasus edwardsii*” (2005) 39(2) New Zealand Journal of Marine and Freshwater Research 317; MPI “Rock lobster (crayfish): rules and guidelines” (accessed 22 August 2026), available [here](#).

²⁰ Proposed Measures at 9.

fecundity of lobsters is size dependent.²¹ For both males and females, the quantity of gametes produced increases significantly with size.²² The maximum size limits proposed (spiny rock lobster: 80 mm tail width (**TW**) for males and 85 mm TW for females; packhorse lobster: 120 mm for males and 130 mm for females) are informed by studies of this fecundity.²³ Therefore, these limits will help preserve the overall reproductive capacity of the population by preventing larger individuals from being removed.

16. These limits have additional benefits given that individuals need to have a carapace length over an estimated 130 mm to predate on larger kina.²⁴ Protecting larger individuals will further safeguard the ecosystem from urchin barrens.
17. Currently, there are no maximum size limits applied to the rock lobster fisheries in Aotearoa, with reproductive protections limited to females carrying external eggs.²⁵ Given the benefits described, EDS suggests that FNZ consider implementing maximum size limits more broadly in lobster fisheries.

Conclusion

18. EDS supports the proposals and commends the local engagement and management efforts that have gone into the development of them by the Local and Iwi Trust Boards, and as part of the Ahu Moana Project.

²¹ For example, see A B MacDiarmid, D Freeman and S Kelly “Rock lobster biology and ecology: Contributions to understanding through the Leigh Marine Laboratory 1962-2012” (2013) 47(3) New Zealand Journal of Marine and Freshwater Research 313.

²² S Kelly and others “Spiny lobster, *Jasus edwardsii*, recovery in New Zealand Marine Reserves” (2000) 92(3) Biological Conservation 359; M Butler, R Bertelsen and A B MacDiarmid “Mate choice in temperate and tropical spiny lobsters with contrasting reproductive systems” (2015) 72 ICES Journal of Marine Science i101.

²³ MacDiarmid and Butler, above n 19; Fry, Green, and Gardner, above n 19.

²⁴ MacDiarmid, Freeman and Kelly, above n 21.

²⁵ MPI, above n 20.