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New Zealand cuts catch limits for rock lobster

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New Zealandâ??s Fisheries Department has reduced the catch limits for rock lobster fishery by 21 tonnes in Northland.

Rock lobsters, also known as spiny red rock lobster, crayfish, and kÅ•ura, are a taonga for tangata whenua and a popular species for commercial and recreational fishers.

Rock lobsters also play an important role in ecosystems as predators, feeding on a wide range of prey including kina (sea urchins).

The reductions to catch limits received ministerial approval following a public consultation and consideration of advice provided by Fisheries New Zealand.

"They provide food for whÄ•nau, support valuable export markets and local economies, and provide jobs in our communities," says Emma Taylor, director of fisheries management.

"The Ministerâ??s decision takes a precautionary approach, and it is expected to increase rock lobster abundance in the fishery so they can contribute to the control of kina populations over time.

"In Northland, there is evidence that spiny rock lobster abundance is below a level that enables them to play their part in controlling kina populations, which in high abundance are known to cause â??kina barrensâ??, resulting in less biologically diverse marine habitats.

"Weâ??ll continue to assess the effectiveness of the new catch settings on rock lobster abundance and consider if a further review is required for April 2024," Emma Taylor said.

The changes, which come into effect at the start of the new fishing year, on 1 April include, the total allowable catch (TAC) decreasing by 21 tonnes to 172 tonnes. This reduces the commercial limit by 16 tonnes to 89 tonnes, and the recreational allowance by five tonnes to 22 tonnes. The customary MÄ•ori allowance and the allowance for all other mortality, such as illegal take, will remain the same.