

# **Aotea Kōura management online survey results**

Prepared by Glenn Edney, Ocean Spirit Ltd

For Aotea / Great Barrier Local Board and Ngāti Rehua Ngātiwai ki Aotea Trust Board

Dated September 2025

# **Aotea / Great Barrier Island Local Bylaws for Crayfish (Kōura)**



Prepared by Glenn Edney

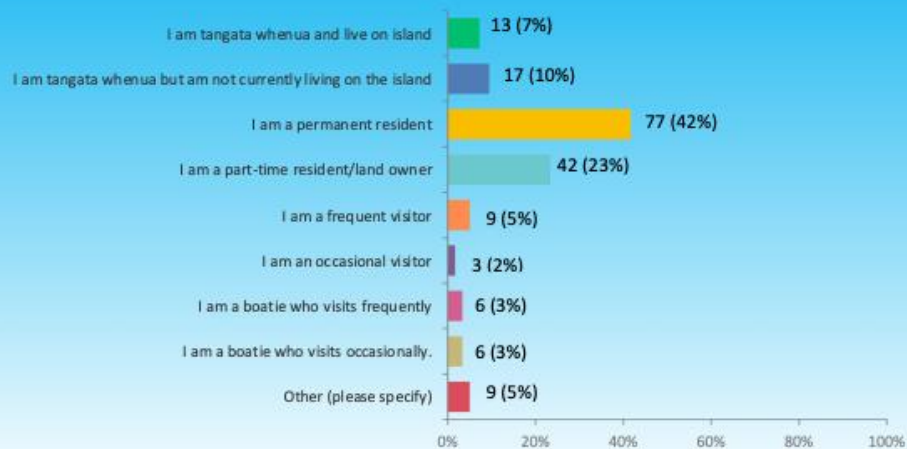
For the Aotea Great Barrier Island Local Board and Ngāti Rehua Ngātiwai Ki Aotea Trust Board

The purpose of this survey was to seek feedback and gauge community support for introducing a range of local bylaws to manage both recreational and commercial crayfishing around Aotea. The aim of these measures is to support recovery of the crayfish population back to a state of ecological stability and managing for a sustainable fishery in the years ahead.

The online survey was open for two weeks, from August 19<sup>th</sup> to September 3<sup>rd</sup>. Paper copies of the survey were also available on-island. A total of 185 respondents completed the survey.

### Q1: Can you please tell us about your relationship to Aotea / Great Barrier Island?

Answered: 162 Skipped: 3

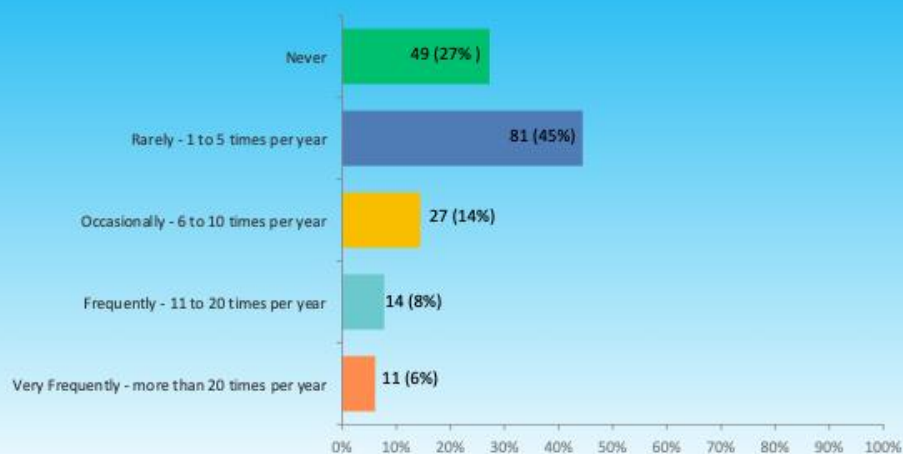


Powered by SurveyMonkey

#### Notes:

All but one of the nine who ticked “other” are former residents of Aotea.

### Q2: How often do you fish for crayfish (kōura) around Aotea?

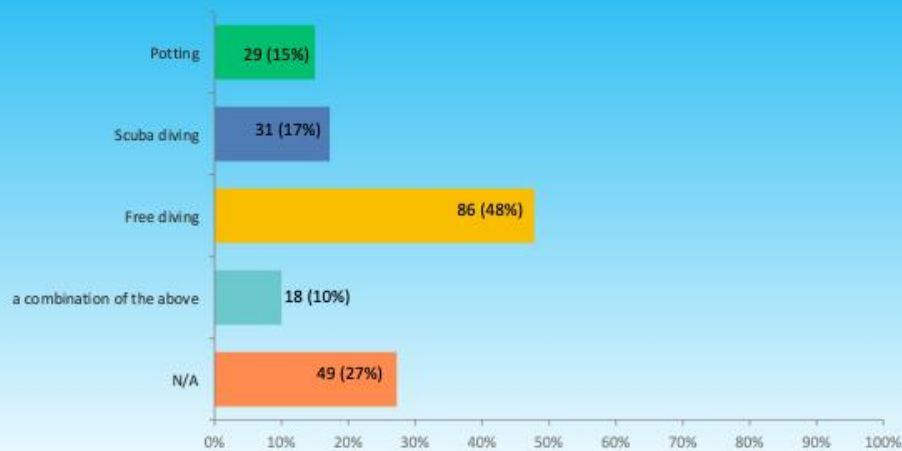


Powered by SurveyMonkey

#### Notes:

The majority of respondents (73%) engage in crayfishing with variable frequency, including most permanent residents and on-island tangata whenua. A significant minority of respondents (27%) never take crayfish. However, many of them commented that they used to catch crayfish but stopped because of the decline.

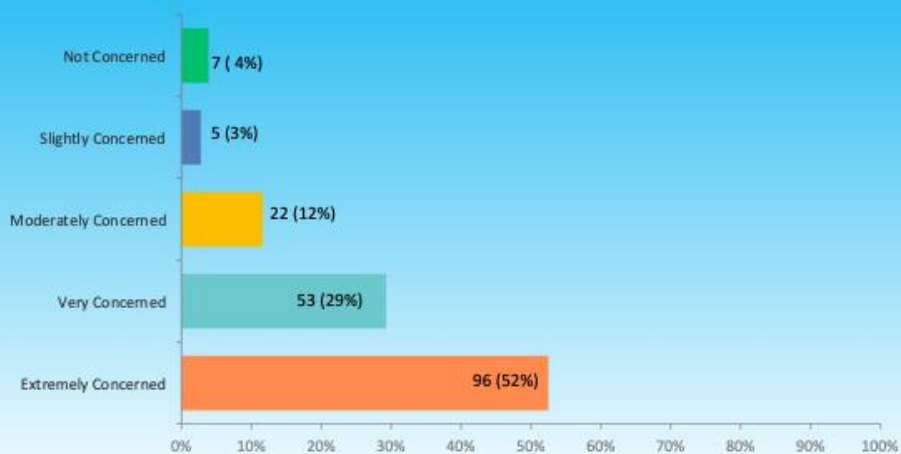
**Q3: What methods do you use for catching crayfish? Select all that apply.**



Powered by  SurveyMonkey

Notes: Free diving is the most common method used on the island, followed by SCUBA diving, which may be influenced by the significantly higher equipment and training costs associated with SCUBA. Recreational potting is less common, but is nevertheless utilised by all groups.

**Q4: How concerned are you about the decline in crayfish numbers around Aotea?**

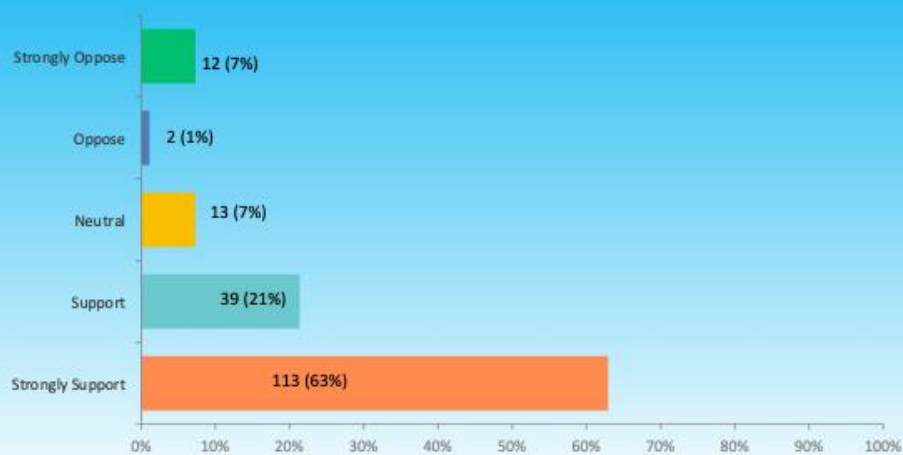


Powered by  SurveyMonkey

Notes:

93% of respondents are moderately to extremely concerned about the decline in crayfish numbers around the Aotea, with 7% not concerned or only slightly concerned. 100% of those who answered never to Question 2 are very to extremely concerned.

**Q5: Do you support the implementation of local crayfish bylaws to manage the fishery sustainably?**

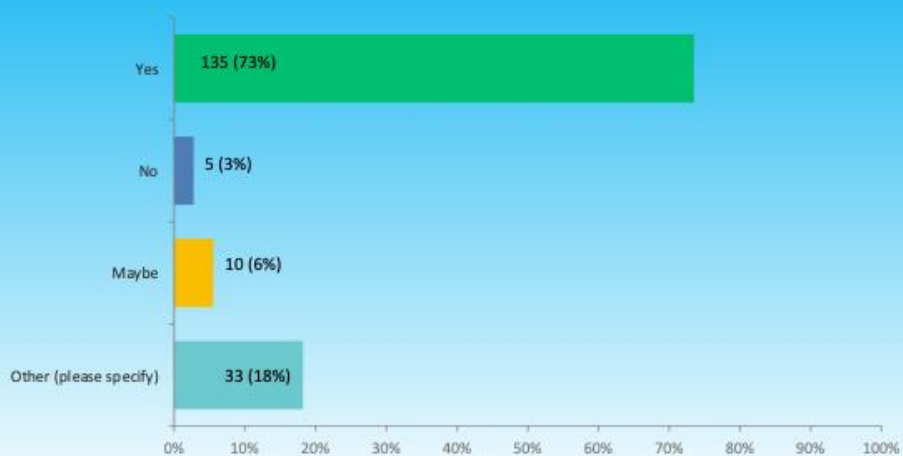


Powered by  SurveyMonkey

**Notes:**

Across all groups there is strong support for local bylaws.

**Q6: Would you be willing to reduce your crayfish catch to help ensure the sustainability of the fishery?**

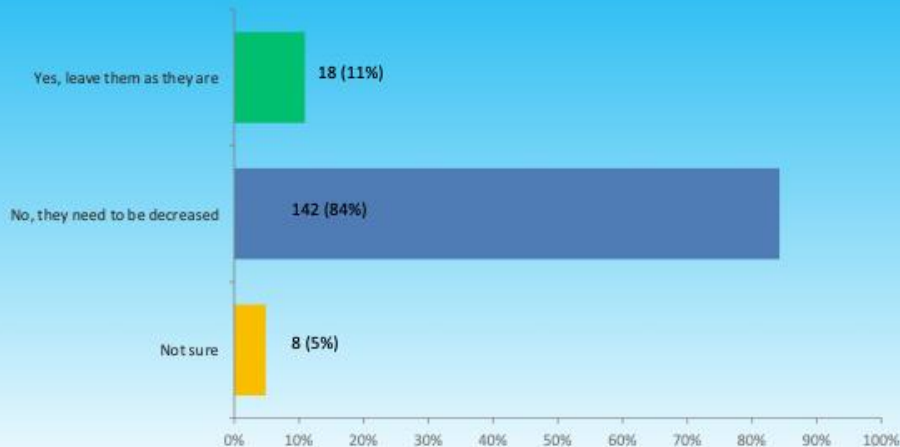


Powered by  SurveyMonkey

**Notes:**

The large majority of respondents are willing to reduce their catch. 33 respondents provided comments. Many respondents commented that they have already decreased their catch due to low numbers, including five of who cited the decline in numbers as the reason they no longer fish for crayfish. A further five stated that they don't fish for crayfish but did not clarify for what reason. There were a number of comments highlighting the need to address the commercial fishery, not just the recreational take.

**Q7: Lower daily bag limits: Currently the daily recreational bag limits are three spiny red crayfish and six packhorse crayfish. The combined daily bag limit is six (e.g. 3 reds & 3 packhorse, or 2 reds & 4 packhorse etc). Do you think these daily bag limits are sustainable?**

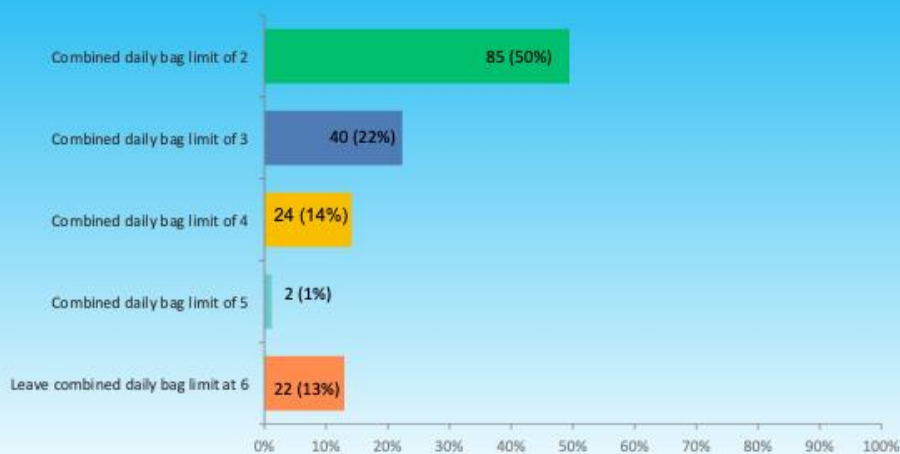


Powered by SurveyMonkey

Notes:

Lower daily bag limits are supported by the vast majority of respondents. There were 21 comments, with three main themes: the need to lower the limits, the need for more surveillance and enforcement of the rules, and once again the need to also address the commercial take. In addition, there was one comment highlighting the need for education about the important role crayfish play in the ecological function of the reef and one comment calling for a total closure of the fishery for five years.

**Q8: If you think the daily bag limits should be lowered, please indicate your preferences in the next three questions, starting with: Combined Daily bag limit**

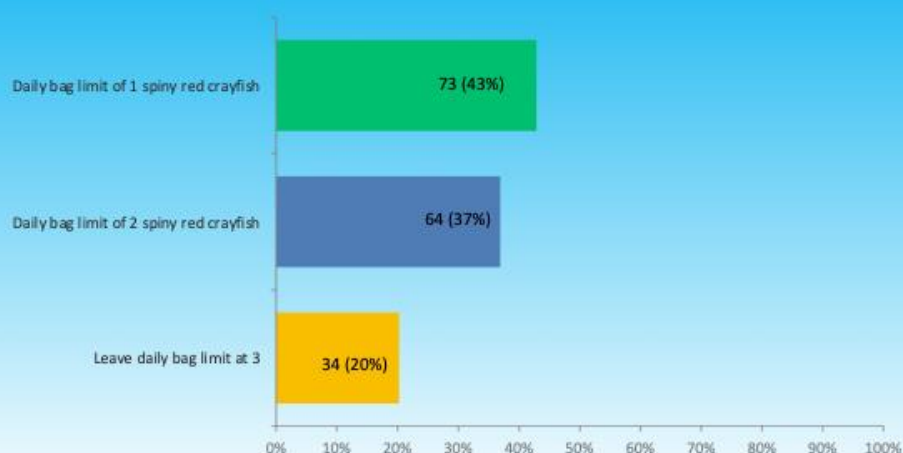


Powered by SurveyMonkey

Notes:

Overall, 50% of respondents favour a combined daily bag limit of two. Amongst those who currently fish for crayfish, 40% support lowering the combined bag limit to two, while 28% favour a combined daily bag limit of three.

### Q9: Daily bag limit for spiny red crayfish



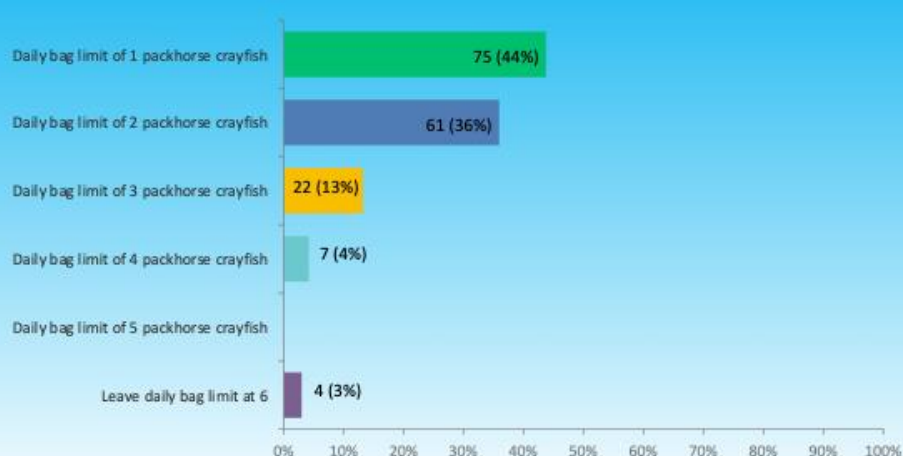
Powered by SurveyMonkey

#### Notes:

Overall, there is a slight preference for a daily bag limit of one. However, for permanent residents and on-island tangata whenua there is a slight preference for a bag limit of two.

#### Notes:

### Q10: Daily bag limit for Packhorse crayfish

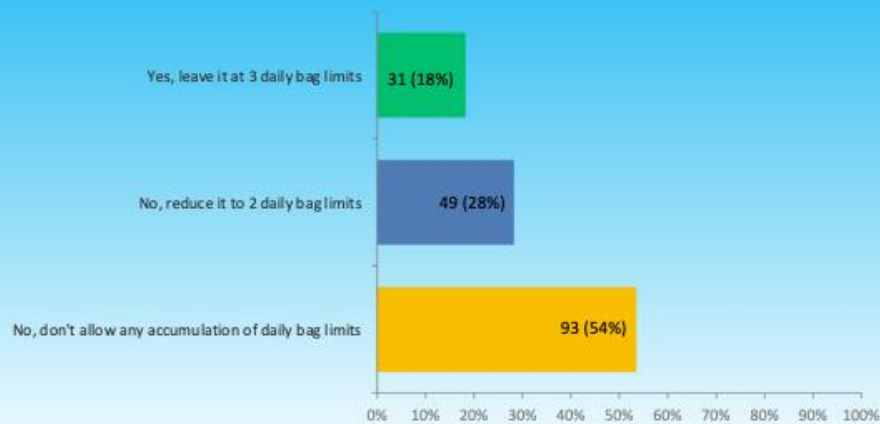


Powered by SurveyMonkey

#### Notes:

As with spiny reds, there is an overall preference for a daily bag limit of one. This is also the preference amongst permanent residents and on-island tangata whenua with 42% favouring one and 38% favouring two.

**Q11: Accumulation limits for multiple day fishing trips. Currently the maximum number of rock lobster any person can be in possession of at any one time is 3 daily bag limits. Considering your answers to the previous three questions, do you think this is sustainable?**

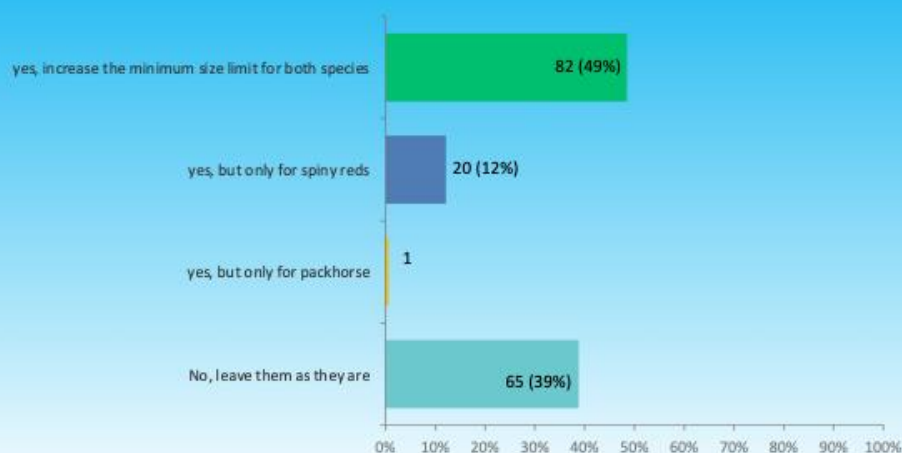


Powered by  SurveyMonkey

Notes:

There is a clear majority in favour of removing any accumulation of daily bag limits. Two comments addressed the accumulation issue, highlighting this as an effective tool in regard to boats coming from Auckland and dive charter boats with multiple divers for multiple days.

**Q12: Should the minimum size limit be increased?**

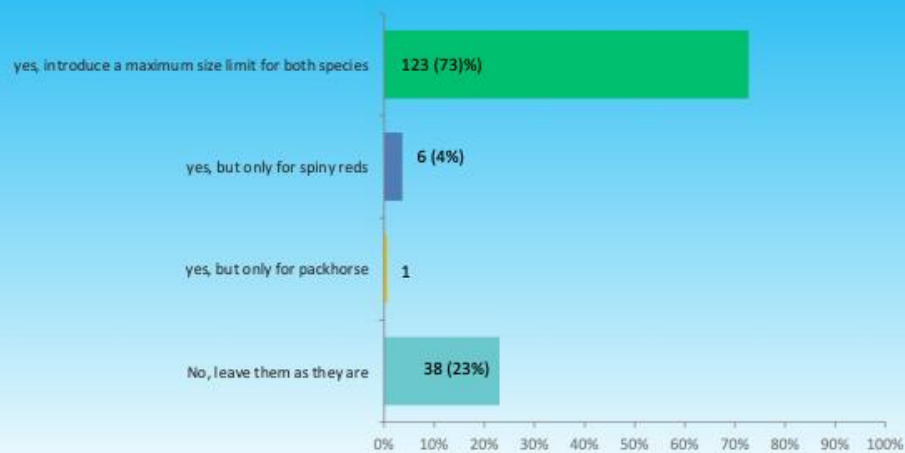


Powered by  SurveyMonkey

Notes:

Increasing the minimum size limit was the most preferred option overall. Currently active cray fishers have a slight preference for leaving the minimum sizes as they are.

**Q13: Large males and females are the most important breeders. Should a maximum size limit be introduced?**

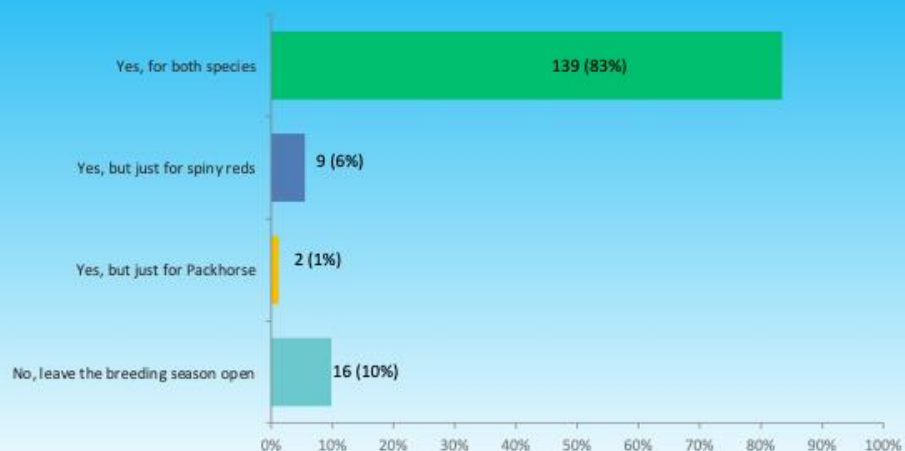


Powered by  SurveyMonkey

**Notes:**

There is strong support for introducing a maximum size limit for both species across all respondent groups.

**Q14: Should there be closed seasons to maximise breeding success?**

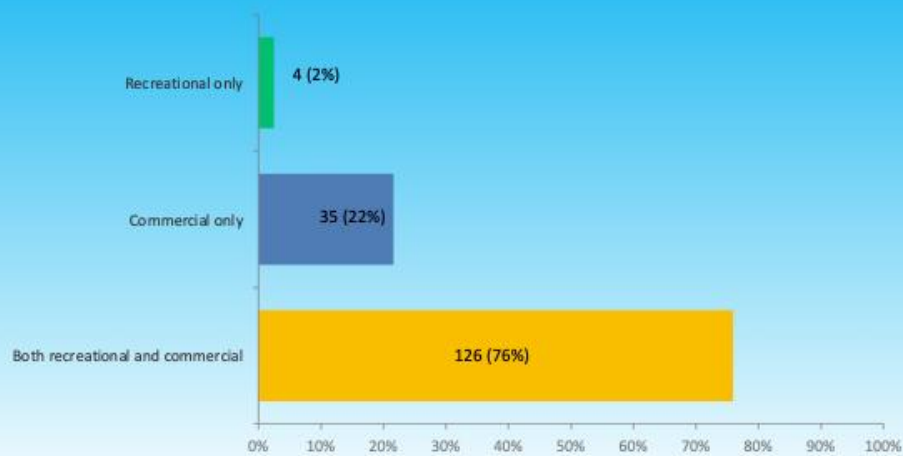


Powered by  SurveyMonkey

**Notes:**

There is very strong support for closed seasons for both species to maximise breeding success and this remains consistent across all respondent groups.

**Q15: Should closed breeding seasons apply to commercial as well as recreational cray fishing?**

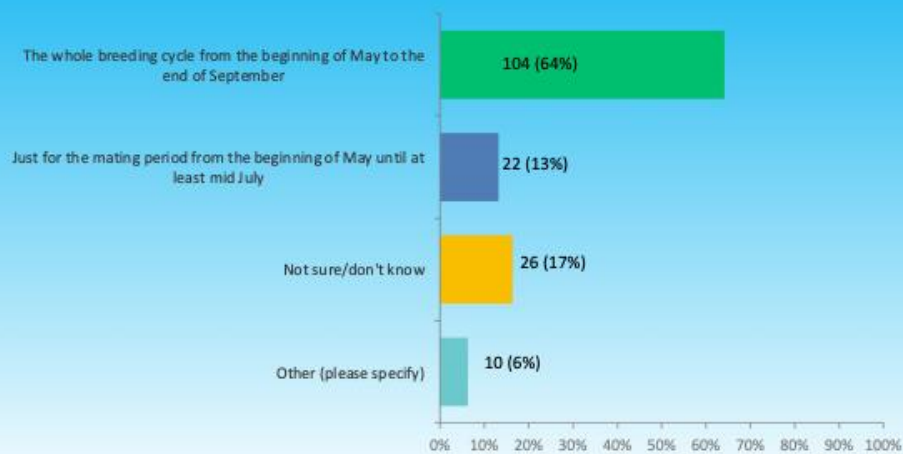


Powered by SurveyMonkey

Notes:

Once again the results remained consistent across all respondent groups.

**Q16: If you support a closed season for spiny reds, how long should it be?**



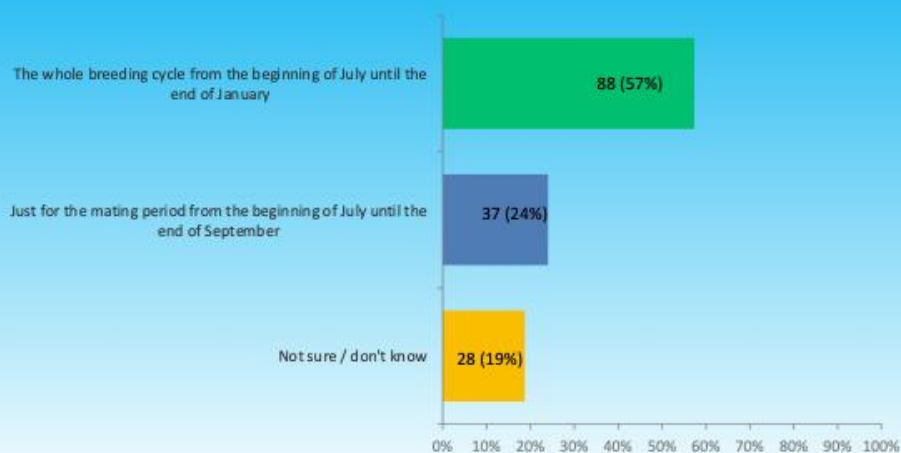
Powered by SurveyMonkey

Notes:

Support for closing the whole breeding season for spiny reds remained consistent across the respondent groups, with just a slight decrease in support for the full breeding season closure amongst active cray fishers, (61%) and a corresponding increase from 13% to 16% for just closing the mating season. For those who never take crayfish there was 74% in favour of closing the breeding season.

Notes:

**Q17: If you support a closed season for packhorse, how long should it be?**

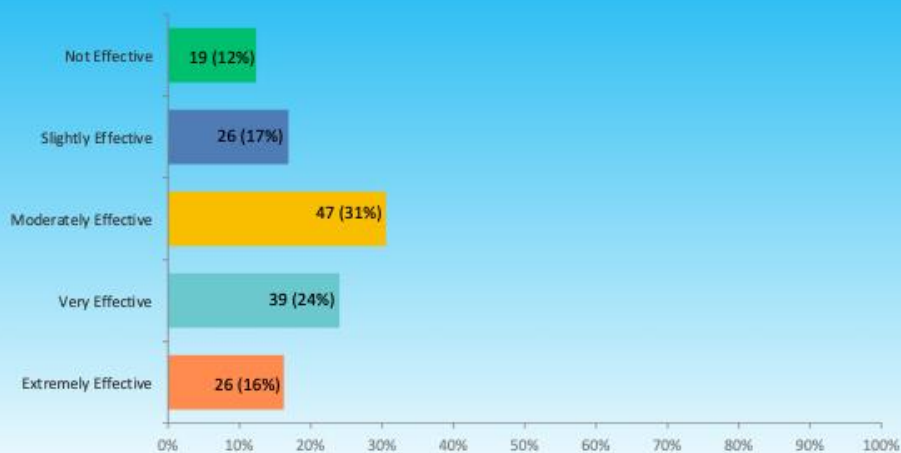


Powered by SurveyMonkey

**Notes:**

Results for a closed season for packhorse were also consistent across respondent groups.

**Q18: Spatial management - Rāhui / temporary closures / no-take zones: How effective do you think having these temporary closures in certain areas would be in protecting and/or replenishing crayfish populations ?**

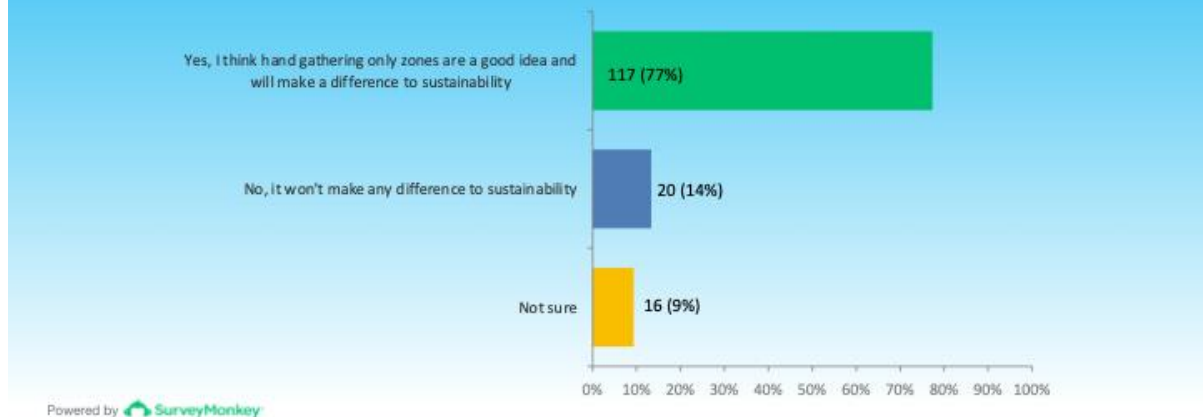


Powered by SurveyMonkey

**Notes:**

The majority of respondents felt that spatial closures would be moderately to extremely effective. There were several comments supporting the implementation of rāhui by tangata whenua and also the implementation of full no take areas for a periods of time, up to five years.

**Q19: Spatial management - different use zones: Specific areas around the island where only certain cray fishing methods can be used. There are two methods used for catching crayfish: hand collecting (Scuba diving and free diving) and potting (both recreational and commercial). From a sustainability perspective, do you think there should be specific areas around the island where potting is excluded and only hand collecting is allowed, and how effective do you think it would be for protecting/replenishing crayfish populations?**

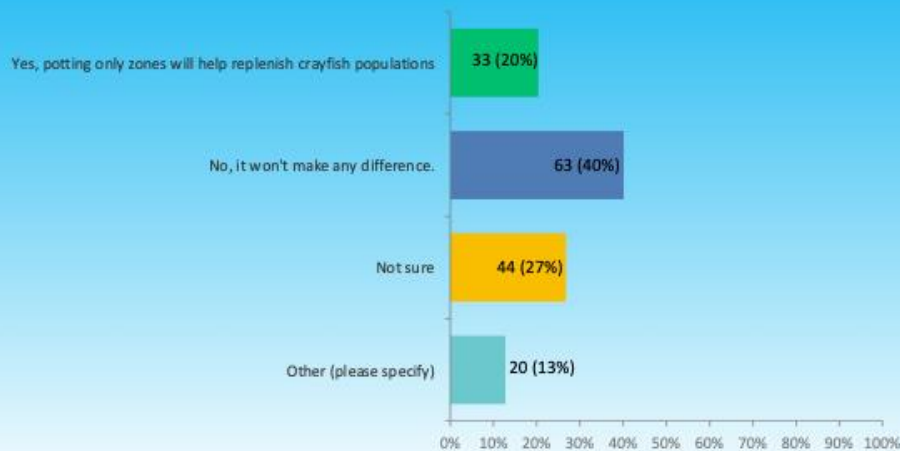


#### Notes:

Results were consistent across respondent groups. There were 18 comments on hand-collecting only zone, expressing a variety of thoughts. The majority of comments were in favour of hand gathering only zones. One respondent made the point that they would need to be easily identified to avoid misunderstanding and assist with monitoring. Several respondents suggested hand gathering should be free diving only, with a ban on Scuba diving. Another felt that they would work well when combined with lower bag limits. Another noted that these areas have existed informally for generations, with commercial potting actively discouraged in Katherine Bay, Port Abercrombie and Port Fitzroy. There were some concerns raised that these zones would be difficult to enforce and would require community buy in and improved response from MPI. Another respondent considered they would be unfair to older people or people unable to dive and suggested commercial and non-commercial zones would be a fairer option. Another made the point that hand gathering is potentially more stressful and damaging to crayfish than potting. Another respondent was worried about the “displacement” effect increasing potting pressure on areas outside the hand gathering only zones.

**Q 20:** There were 44 comments on where hand gathering zones could be. Several suggested the whole west coast of Aotea, with one recognising the area of the west coast where the local commercial quota holders predominantly work as an important exception. Another suggestion was the entire west coast south from Katherine Bay. Also suggested were bays and harbours, such as Katherine Bay, Tryphena, Okupu, Whangaparapara, Fitzroy, Medlands, i.e. the main population areas. Also suggested was to exclude potting from around all tidal points. There were several suggestions relating to excluding potting above a depth of 20 or 30m. Also suggested was from the high tide line out to various distances from shore, e.g. 200m, 500m, 750m for hand gathering only. Another suggested following the example of the Chatham Islands and designating recreational only zones which are accessible from shore. Another suggestion was within the harbours and beaches and 1km either side. Another suggested shallow water zones down to 10 metres at low water. This respondent also questioned the use of Scuba in these shallow water zones.

**Q21: Spatial management - different use zones: Do you think there should be Potting only zones and would they help in protecting/replenishing crayfish populations?**



Powered by SurveyMonkey

**Notes:**

Potting only zones received little support, with the majority of comments questioning how they would contribute to sustainability. Once again the suggestion of a minimum depth for potting was raised in the comments.

**Q 22:** The majority of comments opposed potting only zones. There were three areas suggested for where potting only zones might work: around the Needles, from Tryphena to Cape Barrier and up the eastern side. The remainder of comments focused again on setting a minimum depth for potting, with one comment also suggesting that potting only be allowed outside of the breeding seasons.

**General Comments**

There were 80 additional comments, which fall into three main categories: total or partial closures for a period of time to allow recovery; proactive fisheries management (at local and wider scales); compliance and enforcement.

**Total or partial closures:** In this category there were several comments calling for a complete closure to all crayfishing for periods ranging from two to five years. Within this there were several comments regarding the value of rāhui as the mechanism. There were also several comments suggesting full no-take areas, closed to all fishing of any species, either as marine reserves or temporary closures. There were also more comments supporting the seasonal closures for the breeding seasons.

**Proactive fisheries management:** Within this category there were many comments asking for a total ban on commercial cray fishing for a period of time to allow recovery. Many respondents blamed the commercial fishery solely for the current situation. There was one comment suggesting that there should only be locally based commercial quota fishing. One respondent suggested commercial and residential zones, with the residential zones set aside for islanders to fish with whichever method suits them. The commercial only zones would be managed separately.

**Compliance and enforcement:** There were a number of comments concerned about the lack of surveillance and enforcement of the current rules and concern that any new rules would need an even greater level of enforcement. Most of the comments were in favour of new rules, but worried about how they would be enforced. Several respondents spoke of the need for education as an important aspect of compliance.

Finally, there were three comments questioning the seriousness of the current crayfish decline, suggesting that the concerns are more based on people's personal observations, feelings and perceptions rather than hard data. Two respondents felt that crayfish numbers had actually improved over the past couple of years. It is worth noting that this fits with the 4% of respondents who answered "not concerned" to Question 4: How concerned are you about the decline in crayfish numbers around Aotea?