

CATFISH OUT OF THE BAG - TROUT AND KOURA THREATENED - RESPONSE INADEQUATE

LWQS POSITION 1/4/2018

The BoP Regional Council effort to control and eradicate the catfish incursion in Lake Rotoiti has lacked urgency and funding. Brown Bullhead Catfish have now spread throughout the western end of Lake Rotoiti evidenced by 11,000 being caught since the beginning of 2018. They have spread up to the weir at the top of the Ohau Channel and probably into Lake Rotorua. The control response of two part time fisherman is inadequate. We urgently need to increase the effort, using biological control and volunteers.

It is of grave concern that this has happened. Control measures to date have simply been inadequate given the real potential for full colonisation of these lakes by this species. They prefer still muddy bottomed water to about 15 metres in depth. This is found over much of western Lake Rotoiti and in most of Lake Rotorua. They have the potential to build up quickly to extremely high numbers. Koura will be heavily predated and dramatically reduce in numbers. There will strong competition with trout for food, and inevitably the fishery will be impacted. Smelt in our lakes are abundant and provide much of the food for trout; smelt spawn along the shore line where catfish can easily eat the eggs and hatchlings. Waters will be more turbid from the stirring of sediments as they feed, and sediment nutrients will be released to the water column driving algae blooms.

Our City is driven by an \$800 million tourist industry which will be detrimentally impacted, so will our enjoyment of the lake.

Control at the moment by BoPRC is limited to two part time fisherman. A much bigger effort is required to keep a lid on the population as further research identifies improved surveillance and control options. We have an army of volunteers who are willing to assist. Currently BOPRC's OSH liability seems to be preventing good people from doing a good job.

We need to be using more fyke nets, establishing set nets, empowering citizens, and investing more in science. Our best biological control is the release of large numbers of brown trout and long-fin eel. These are known predators and will help to limit a population explosion, importantly both are already part of the ecosystem.

Parallel action must be an increased effort to prevent catfish spreading to other lakes. These are tough critters that can survive for 48 hours or more out of water. To prevent their spread regulatory control is required backed by informed citizens. Let us not be the generation that "let the cat out of the bag".

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Chair LWQS