2019-2020

Catfish Annual Summary

From: Lucas MacDonald

Subject: Brown Bullhead Catfish – Annual Summary

Date: 1 July 2020

Annual Summary

Throughout 2019 and 2020 Bay of Plenty Regional Council continued to engage a contractor to undertake systematic fyke netting within Lake Rotoiti and Rotorua from September 2019 to June 2020.

In this time period, 61,948 catfish were removed from Lake Rotoiti and Rotorua. The primary populations are being found in Te Weta Bay, Lake Rotoiti and the Okere Inlet, Lake Rotoiti. There are an order of magnitude less catfish found in Lake Rotorua, although the largest catfish to date was removed near Mokoia Island, Lake Rotorua at 43.5cm in length. On average, we would see approximately 50 catfish caught per net set in Lake Rotoiti. In the previous 12 months, 1490 nets were set compared to the previous 2018-19 year of 4081 nets being set. Covid-19 played a role in the reduced amount of nets being set, as the level 3 and 4 lockdown coincided with the busiest netting period of the season.

To date, no catfish have been found in any of the other Rotorua Te Arawa Lakes. Surveillance is undertaken by contractors using nets, environmental DNA tools and volunteers (the Te Arawa Catfish Killas). In early 2020, a marked recapture trial was undertaken to assess the population of catfish in Lake Rotoiti, this resulted in an estimated total of 186,000. This number is likely to have grown and is indicative of catch rates which were much lower than what we are currently seeing.

Throughout 2019-2020 various pieces of research were undertaken, including a biocontrol feasibility study (NIWA), impacts of catfish globally (Dr Michel Dedual) and further efforts were made to establish eDNA as a monitoring tool for early pest detection. Bay of Plenty Regional Council continues to work in partnership with Te Arawa Lakes Trust who are coordinating volunteer efforts to net catfish which is proving immensely successful to remove catfish, with over 25,000 removed to date. This work is undertaken year round and engages a wide range of the community to become involved in freshwater biosecurity.

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