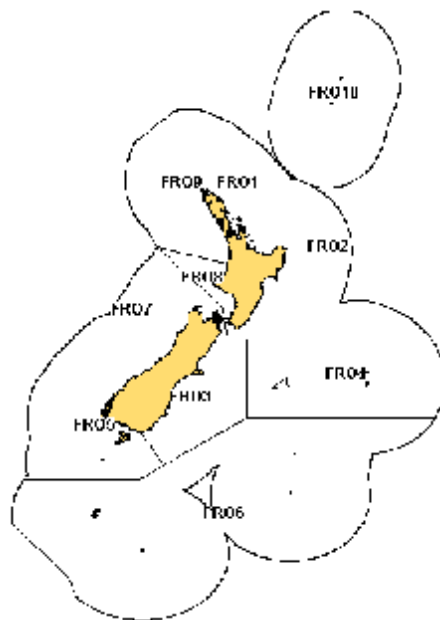


## FROSTFISH (FRO)

*(Lepidopus caudatus)*



### 1. FISHERY SUMMARY

#### (a) Commercial fisheries

Frostfish are predominantly taken as bycatch from target trawl fisheries on jack mackerel and hoki and to a lesser extent, arrow squid, barracouta and gemfish. These fisheries are predominantly targeted by larger vessels owned or chartered by New Zealand fishing companies.

The main areas reporting frostfish catches are to the west of New Zealand primarily in QMA 7 on the west coast of the South Island and to a lesser extent QMA 8 in the north and south Taranaki Bight. The highest annual catches are associated with hoki fishing during winter (since 1986–87) and jack mackerel fishing during late spring and early summer. The most significant change from earlier years has been the increase in reported frostfish catches associated with hoki fishing in QMA 7 and a corresponding decrease reported from the jack mackerel fishery in QMA's 7 and 8. Most of the commercial catch (81%) was taken by mid-water trawl for the fishing years 1989–90 to 1993–94.

Target fishing on frostfish accounted for 8% of the frostfish catch for the period 1983–84 to 1988–89, with less than 2% from 1988–89 to 1993–94. Target fishing for frostfish are reported from the west coast of both the South Island and North Island and at Puysegur Bank, with the best catches taken from the west coast of the South Island.

No catch data from deepwater vessels for frostfish are available prior to the introduction of the EEZ in 1978. Landings have ranged from 216 t in 1979–80 to 4391 t in 1987–88 (Tables 1 and 2). Sources of error in the catch figures include unreported catch and discarded catch. Recent compliance investigations have shown that damaged and small hoki have been recorded as frostfish by some specific vessels.

Frostfish were introduced into the QMS from 1 October 1998. The TACCs for each QMA are given in Table 2. An allowance of 2 t was made for non-commercial catch in each of FRO (1, 2, 7 and 9) and therefore TACs for these stocks are 2 t higher than the TACCs.

**Table 1: Reported landings (t) of frostfish by fishing year and area, by foreign licensed and joint venture vessels, 1978–79 to 1983–83. The EEZ areas (see figure 2 of Baird and McKoy (1988)) correspond approximately to the QMA as indicated. Fishing years are from 1 April to 31 March. The 1983–83 is a 6 month transitional period from 1 April to 30 September. No data are available for the 1980–81 fishing year.**

EEZ area QMA	B 1 & 2	C(M) 3	C(-) 3	D 4	E 6	F 5	G 7	H 8 & 9	Total
1978–79	5	1	6	0	1	0	1 283	226	1 522
1979–80	13	0	1	23	1	1	26	151	216
1980–81	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
1981–82	0	5	2	19	1	4	55	464	550
1982–83	0	1	0	9	3	1	56	1 545	1 615
1983–83	0	1	1	1	1	1	22	123	150

**Table 2: Reported landings (t) of frostfish by QMA and fishing year, 1983–84 to 2004–05. The data in this table has been updated from that published in previous Plenary Reports by using the data through 1996–97 in table 26 on p. 244 of the “Review of Sustainability Measures and Other Management Controls for the 1998–99 Fishing Year – Final Advice Paper” dated 6 August 1998. Data since 1997–98 based on catch and effort returns (where area was not reported catch was pro rated across all QMAs). There are no landings reported from QMA 10.**

Fishstock FMA	FRO 1 1		FRO 2 2		FRO 3 3		FRO 4 4		FRO 5 5	
	Landings	TACC	Landings	TACC	Landings	TACC	Landings	TACC	Landings	TACC
1983-84	2	-	0	-	0	-	10	-	28	-
1984-85	0	-	0	-	2	-	1	-	100	-
1985-86	0	-	0	-	9	-	2	-	258	-
1986-87	4	-	4	-	5	-	6	-	71	-
1987-88	2	-	0	-	3	-	1	-	20	-
1988-89	115	-	0	-	1	-	0	-	15	-
1989-90	397	-	0	-	58	-	0	-	146	-
1990-91	45	-	24	-	224	-	0	-	496	-
1991-92	46	-	3	-	143	-	0	-	337	-
1992-93	80	-	9	-	51	-	0	-	0	-
1993-94	100	-	19	-	168	-	0	-	0	-
1994-95	55	-	14	-	120	-	0	-	87	-
1665-96	80	-	40	-	72	-	29	-	0	-
1996-97	198	-	6	-	12	-	4	-	8	-
1997-98	309	-	273	-	35	-	<1	-	9	-
1998-99	146	149	134	20	39	128	<1	5	19	135
1999-00	84	149	161	20	97	128	<1	5	57	135
2000-01	76	149	194	20	107	128	48	5	33	135
2001-02	64	149	67	20	176	128	81	5	59	135
2002-03	127	149	66	20	268	128	15	5	63	135
2003-04	98	149	52	20	19	128	7	5	14	135
2004-05	130	149	38	20	427	128	15	5	20	135

Fishstock FMA	FRO 6 6		FRO 7 7		FRO 8 8		FRO 9 9		Total	
	Landings	TACC	Landings	TACC	Landings	TACC	Landings	TACC	Landings	TACC
1983-84	7	-	432	-	539	-	457	-	1 475	-
1984-85	0	-	214	-	455	-	129	-	901	-
1985-86	0	-	344	-	574	-	226	-	1 415	-
1986-87	4	-	1 089	-	898	-	190	-	2 272	-
1987-88	0	-	3 466	-	875	-	22	-	4 391	-
1988-89	3	-	1 950	-	413	-	455	-	2 952	-
1989-90	29	-	1 370	-	132	-	0	-	2 132	-
1990-91	67	-	3 029	-	539	-	0	-	4 424	-
1991-92	7	-	2 295	-	750	-	1	-	3 582	-
1992-93	0	-	1 360	-	1 165	-	0	-	2 665	-
1993-94	0	-	1 998	-	696	-	12	-	2 993	-
1994-95	0	-	3 069	-	388	-	7	-	3 740	-
1665-96	0	-	1 536	-	22	-	9	-	1 788	-
1996-97	0	-	2 881	-	126	-	93	-	3 328	-
1997-98	0	-	2 590	-	143	-	205	-	3 564	-
1998-99	0	11	2 461	2 623	156	649	33	138	2 989	3 858
1999-00	<1	11	917	2 623	28	649	48	138	1 392	3 858
2000-01	<1	11	1 620	2 623	303	649	43	138	2 424	3 858
2001-02	<1	11	2 303	2 623	138	649	25	138	2 913	3 858
2002-03	<1	11	1 025	2 623	621	649	67	138	2 252	3 858
2003-04	<1	11	959	2 623	293	649	367	138	1 809	3 858
2004-05	<1	11	934	2 623	770	649	327	138	2 661	3 858

(b) **Recreational fisheries**

Frostfish are occasionally taken by recreational fishers. Small numbers have been reported from recreational diary surveys, mainly QMA 1, and rarely in QMA's 2 and 9.

(c) **Maori customary fisheries**

No quantitative information is available on the current level of Maori customary take. Maori have collected beach cast frostfish in the past (Graham 1956).

(d) **Illegal catch**

No information is available.

(e) **Other sources of mortality**

No information is available on other sources of mortality.

## 2. BIOLOGY

Frostfish are widely distributed throughout the continental shelf and upper slopes of all oceans, except the North Pacific, and have a benthopelagic lifestyle. In New Zealand, frostfish are found from about 34° S to 49° S, but are most common between 36° S and 44° S. They occur mainly in depths of 50–600 m with the largest catches made at around 200m bottom depth. Preferred bottom temperatures range between 10–16° C.

There is one species of *Lepidopus* recorded from New Zealand waters. However, scabbardfishes (*Benthodesmus* species) and the false frostfish (*Paradiplospinus gracilis*) may be confused with small *Lepidopus caudatus*.

Frostfish reach a maximum length of 165 cm (fork length) around New Zealand, although the same species may reach 205 cm and 8 kg weight in the eastern North Atlantic (Nakamura and Parin 1993). In the northwestern Mediterranean males reach sexual maturity at 97 cm and a maximum length of 176 cm, whilst females reach sexual maturity at 111 cm and a maximum length of 196 cm (Demestre et al., 1993).

The adults probably congregate in the late spring months, and spawn during the summer and autumn over the mid to outer shelf. Fertilisation was calculated to take place between noon and sunset at depths greater than 50 m where the surface waters have a temperature of 17.5 to 22.0° C (Robertson, 1980).

No length-weight relationships or information on age or growth rates are available for New Zealand frostfish. However, these data are available for *Lepidopus caudatus* from the northwestern Mediterranean (Demestre et al., 1993). These fish exhibit fast growth and attain a maximum age of 8 years. Von Bertalanffy growth parameters for the Mediterranean fish are given by Schofield et al. (1998). Assuming 8 years is the age reached by 1% of the virgin population, this gives an estimate of 0.58 for M. However, Mediterranean sampling was carried out on an already exploited stock and fish were aged using whole otoliths which may have resulted in underestimates of age for larger fish.

Frostfish migrate into midwater at night and feed on crustaceans, small fish and squid (Nakamura & Parin, 1993). Euphausiids and *Pasiphaea* spp. (both crustaceans) are the most common prey of frostfish in the northwest Mediterranean (Demestre et al., 1993). In Tasmanian waters, the diet of frostfish consists mainly of myctophids and euphausiids (Blaber and Bulman 1987).

### 3. STOCKS AND AREAS

Spawning areas identified from eggs taken in plankton tows include the outer shelf from the Bay of Islands to south of East Cape, and an area off Fiordland (Robertson, 1980). No eggs were recorded from the south-east coast of the South Island and no spawning has been recorded on the Chatham Rise. Spawning is also known to take place on the west coast of the South Island in March.

Juvenile frostfish (less than) 30 cm have been reported from trawl surveys in the Bay of Plenty, Hauraki Gulf, off Northland, the west coast of the North Island and the west coast of the South Island.

The occurrence of spawning in three areas at similar times of year and the distribution of frostfish from catches suggest that there may be at least three separate stocks. A fourth stock is also possible based on known distribution of juveniles and adults and analogies with other species which often have a separate Chatham Rise stock. Bagley et al. (1998) proposed the following Fishstock areas for management of frostfish: FRO 1: (QMA 1 and 2); FRO 3: (QMA 3 and 4); FRO 5: (QMA 5 and 6) and FRO 7: (QMA 7, 8, and 9). There have been no reported landings from QMA 10. TACs were set for each QMA (1–9) in 1998 and are managed separately.

### 4. STOCK ASSESSMENT

There are no stock assessments available for any stocks of frostfish and therefore estimates of biomass and yields are not available.

#### (a) Estimates of fishery parameters and abundance

No estimates of fishery parameters are available for frostfish.

Biomass indices on frostfish are available from trawl surveys carried out by different vessels (Table 3). Few surveys cover the central west coast of New Zealand where the commercial catch records highest landings. The catchability of frostfish is not known but, because they are known to occur frequently well off the bottom, catchability is expected to be low and variable between surveys.

**Table 3: Doorspread biomass indices (t) and c.v.s (%) of frostfish from random stratified trawl surveys 1981–97.**

Vessel	Trip Code	Depth Range (m)	Biomass index (t)	c.v. (%)	Date
<b>QMA 1</b>					
<b>Bay of Plenty</b>					
<i>Kaharoa</i>	KAH9004	10–150	246	87	February/March 1990
<i>Kaharoa</i>	KAH9202	10–150	92	48	February 1992
<i>Kaharoa</i>	KAH9601	10–250	328	49	February 1996
<b>QMA 2</b>					
<i>Kaharoa</i>	KAH9304	20–400	573	38	March/April 1993
<i>Kaharoa</i>	KAH9402	20–400	1079	40	February/March 1994
<i>Kaharoa</i>	KAH9502	20–400	493	22	February/March 1995
<i>Kaharoa</i>	KAH9602	20–400	693	17	February/March 1996
<b>QMA 7 &amp; 8</b>					
<i>Tomu Maru</i>		30–300	2173	22	December 1980 - January 1981
<i>Shinkai Maru</i>	SHI8102	20–300	6638	12	October/November 1981
<i>Cordella</i>	COR9001	25–300	2189	20	February/March 1990
<b>QMA 7 (WCSI)</b>					
<i>Kaharoa</i>	KAH9006	20–400	121	27	March/April 1990
<i>Kaharoa</i>	KAH9204	20–400	24	29	March/April 1992
<i>Kaharoa</i>	KAH9404	20–400	53	37	March/April 1994
<i>Kaharoa</i>	KAH9504	20–400	89	31	March/April 1995
<i>Kaharoa</i>	KAH9701	20–400	259	32	March/April 1997
<b>WCSI south of 41° 30'</b>					
<i>James Cook</i>	JCO8311	25–450	183	34	September/October 1983
<i>James Cook</i>	JCO8415	25–450	181	25	August/September 1985

**(b) Biomass estimates**

No biomass estimates are available for frostfish.

**(c) Estimation of maximum constant yield (MCY)**

MCY cannot be determined. As only a small percentage (less than 2%) of the reported catch in recent years is from target fishing, annual catches are likely to vary according to effort, targeting other species in areas of frostfish abundance. It is therefore not possible to choose a catch history which represents a period of stable and unrestricted effort in order to estimate yields. Other problems include under-reporting of frostfish catches and restrictions targeting frostfish in QMAs 3, 4, 5, and 6.

**(d) Estimation of Current Annual Yield (CAY)**

There are no reliable data on current biomass; CAY was therefore not estimated.

**(e) Other yield estimates and stock assessment results**

None available.

**5. STATUS OF THE STOCKS**

Estimates of current and reference biomass are not available. The stock structure is uncertain, the fishery is variable and almost entirely a bycatch of other target fisheries, and there are no age data or estimates of abundance available. It is therefore not possible to estimate yields. It is not known if recent catches are sustainable or whether they are at levels that will allow the stock to move towards a size that will support the maximum sustainable yield.

**Summary of TACCs (t), and reported landings (t) of frostfish for the most recent fishing year.**

Fishstock	QMA	2004–05	2004–05
		Actual TACC	Reported landings
FRO 1	Auckland (East)	1	149
FRO 2	Central (East)	2	20
FRO 3	South-east (Coast)	3	128
FRO 4	South-east (Chatham)	4	5
FRO 5	Southland	5	135
FRO 6	Sub-antarctic	6	11
FRO 7	Challenger	7	2 623
FRO 8	Central (West)	8	649
FRO 9	Auckland (West)	9	138
FRO 10	Kermadec	10	–
Total		3 858	2 661

**6. FOR FURTHER INFORMATION**

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