



Fisheries New Zealand

Tini a Tangaroa

OIA24-0661

3 October 2024

Katherine Raue

fyi-request-28311-098853be@requests.fyi.org.nz

Dear Katherine Raue

Thank you for your email of 6 September 2024 requesting information relating to sick snapper being caught in Kaipara Harbour. Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA).

You requested the following:

I hereby request all information regarding reports of recent catches of snapper in Kaipara and elsewhere affected by what has been referred to in media reports as "zombie fish" and "white flesh syndrome", and fish with high levels of aluminium. I request all information regarding estimates of how many fish are affected and the locations they have been found, the source(s) of the aluminium, and all information regarding what MPI is doing about this, including all information regarding water testing and testing of the affected fish.

The Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) has received reports of some snapper in Kaipara Harbour that presented with cloudy eyes, among other symptoms.

MPI has tested samples of the affected fish, and to date our tests have not identified any food safety concerns associated with common foodborne pathogens and contaminants, nor any exotic or emerging diseases in the affected fish. While the tests found no food safety concerns, our advice is that if any animal you catch or hunt looks unhealthy, you should not eat it.

Histological examinations and tests for heavy metals, including aluminium, PCBs (chemicals) and naturally occurring biotoxins have not identified a cause of the condition.

Histological analysis has shown that snapper with cloudy eyes have different symptoms to snapper with Milky White Flesh syndrome. For more information, I encourage you to visit the following link: <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/fishing-aquaculture/recreational-fishing/information-on-popular-fish-in-nz/snapper-status-and-information/milky-white-flesh-in-snapper-and-some-other-finish/>

A document titled 'Cloudy eyed snapper from Kaipara Harbour and other areas' is being publicly released on MPI's website within four weeks. Your request for reports on cloudy eyed snapper is therefore refused under section 18(d) of the OIA – *that the information requested is or will soon be publicly available.*

Information about milky white flesh in snapper can be found at

<https://www.mpi.govt.nz/fishing-aquaculture/recreational-fishing/information-on-popular-fish-in-nz/snapper-status-and-information/milky-white-flesh-in-snapper-and-some-other-finish/>

A Fisheries Assessment Report titled '*Distribution and potential causes of milky fleshed snapper in SNA 1*' can be found at <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/62775-FAR-202425-Distribution-and-potential-causes-of-milky-fleshed-snapper-in-SNA-1>.

Should you have any concerns with this response, I would encourage you to raise these with the Ministry for Primary Industries at Official.InformationAct@mpi.govt.nz. Alternatively, you are advised of your right to also raise any concerns with the Office of the Ombudsman. Contact details are: Office of the Ombudsman, PO Box 10152, Wellington 6143 or at info@ombudsman.parliament.nz.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "RB Ford". The letters are cursive and slightly slanted to the right.

Rich Ford
Director, Science and Information