



Toothfish 'well managed'

Bill Moore

billm@nelsonmail.co.nz

The fishing industry has reacted to the imminent showing of a documentary which opposes fishing in the Antarctic's Ross Sea, saying its activities are "responsible and sustainable".

New Zealand documentary-maker Ross Young's film *The Last Ocean* is to be shown this week as part of the International Film Festival and was previewed last night on TV One's *Sunday* programme.

The film focuses on longlining for Antarctic toothfish, a large, high-value, slow-growing species which is sought after in the American market. Nelson is the base for a 50:50 partnership between Sealord and Talley's, New Zealand Longline, which sends boats to the Ross Sea each year and last year had a 300-tonne quota.

Mr Young, who filmed toothfishing six years ago and has been working on his documentary since, said the Ross Sea was "mother nature in its purest form". It had taken all preceding history to develop "and yet we treat it like a larder, destroying an incredible natural treasure for what is little financial gain".

He said toothfish, or "chilean sea bass", from the Ross Sea amounted to a little over 1 per cent of New Zealand's fishing revenue. The Ross Sea had far greater value as a pristine eco-

system than a fishing ground.

There was a growing movement of passionate people seeking a Marine Protected Area covering the entire Ross Sea, a deep, vast bay on the Antarctic coast. At its foundation were many of the world's leading Antarctic scientists, Mr Young said.

"We need to ask ourselves what is the true value of the Ross Sea and should we be leaving one last untouched and undamaged piece of ocean for the next generation?"

Seafood Industry Council chief executive Peter Bodeker said the industry had been refused the opportunity to see the film in advance of its release, and was concerned its intent would be to "generate public outrage in the absence of the full picture".

"We support an active conservation policy in the Ross Sea, in fact already large areas are closed to fishing under existing and internationally agreed conservation measures that the New Zealand industry has actively supported. We do not support its total closure as is being advocated."

Mr Bodeker said the Ross Sea toothfish fishery was highly managed, with very conservative catch limits set by the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources.

The annual total toothfish harvest

by CCAMLR members was less than 3 per cent of the total biomass of toothfish in the Ross Sea, and the fishing took place over less than 3 per cent of the total area of the Ross Sea. The international certification organisation the Marine Stewardship Council described New Zealand's approach as "well managed".

"This industry is doing the right thing by the New Zealand Government, by other international governments and agencies and by the unique Antarctic environment itself. We fish responsibly and sustainably, and the fishery is backed up by good science."

Closure of the entire Ross Sea would be "a total over-reaction", ignoring the good work of CCAMLR, government agencies and the industry, Mr Bodeker said.

"New Zealand has been fishing parts of the area in a careful and managed way for many years, demonstrating that it is possible to effectively balance conservation and fishing."

In 2011 the export value of toothfish was NZ\$19 million with 87 per cent of sales to the US market. Four New Zealand boats take part, with a total CCAMLR-member international fleet of 15 in the 2011-12 season.