

The Last Ocean

Ever heard of the Toothfish? Or the Ross Sea? Chances are pretty high that you haven't heard of either. But both are at the heart of a debate involving Antarctica, New Zealand's clean green eco friendly image, the fishing industry, and what is the most pristine ecosystem left on the planet.

The Ross Sea is a bay of the Southern Ocean in Antarctica directly south of New Zealand and home to a quarter of the world's emperor penguins, a third of Adelie penguins, and many species of fish, seals, whales, and birds. It's also home to a particularly ugly yet highly sought after fish called the Antarctic toothfish.

Along with it's closely related cousin the Patagonian toothfish, otherwise known as Chilean Sea Bass, the Antarctic toothfish is a favourite in upscale restaurants around the globe, highly valued by chefs and diners alike for it's delicious flavour and cooking versatility. And this is why the New Zealand fishing industry set its sights on commercially fishing the Antarctic toothfish in 1996, opening the gates to a \$20 million industry when the first commercial fishing vessel sliced through the Ross Sea's icy waters.

Scientists studying the fish since then have noticed dramatic declines in their populations, including around the southern shores of McMurdo Sound. They attribute the decline to the commercial fishing activities and are concerned about the adverse affects fishing is having on

the entire Antarctic ecosystem. They want a total fishing ban in the Ross Sea and a marine reserve put in place so that this living laboratory can be preserved for future generations.

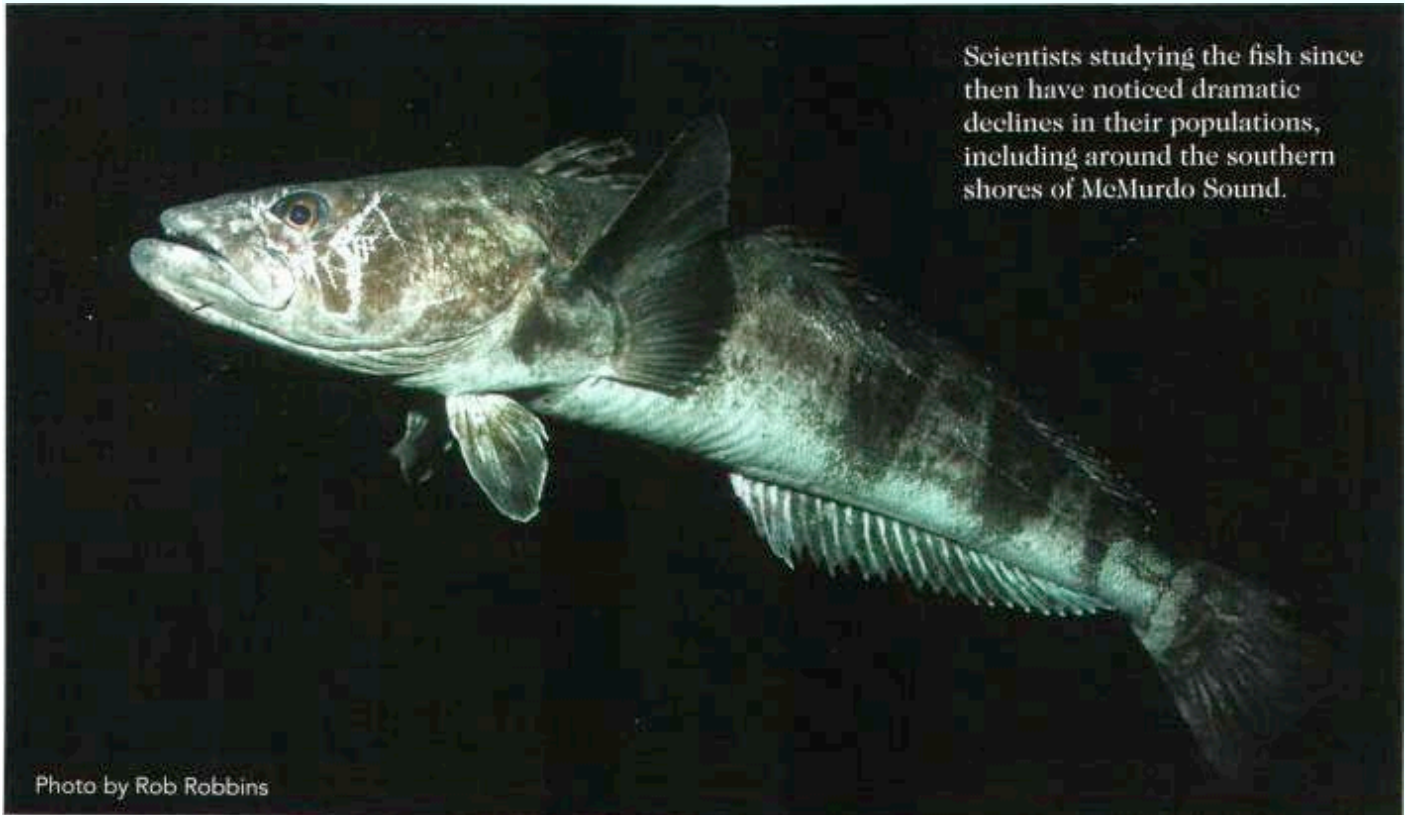
NZ Documentary maker Peter Young, scientists, and others concerned about the issue recently released *The Last Ocean*, a documentary outlining the compelling case for making the Ross Sea part of a proposed marine reserve. Six years in the making, the documentary aired during this year's New Zealand International Film Festival.

But not everyone agrees a total fishing ban should be put in place, including the New Zealand government and commercial fisheries.

A crucial decision is being made in early September by The Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), an international body established in 1982 and chartered to conserve Antarctic marine life. It will determine the Ross Sea's future. Member countries, including New Zealand, will decide whether or not the bay will be included in a proposed Antarctic marine reserve.

For more information on the documentary, the impact of fishing on the Ross Sea and updates on the CCAMLR decision visit <http://www.lastocean.org> and <http://lastocean.wordpress.com>





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