

Multiple factors highlighted in milky fish research

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Fisheries New Zealand has released a detailed scientific report indicating that Milky White Flesh Syndrome found in snapper fish is likely caused by a combination of complex climate factors. Simon Lawrence, Fisheries New Zealand's director of science and information, explained that snappers with the syndrome appear to be skinny and have mushy, white flesh instead of their usual translucent, firm flesh, and are malnourished. However, he assured that the fish with the syndrome are safe for consumption.

Extensive testing ruled out exotic diseases and food safety issues as the cause. Instead, the report suggests a complex interaction of various factors, including extended La Niña weather patterns and warmer waters leading to decreased production of the phytoplankton and zooplankton that are crucial food sources for these fish.

The report also points to warmer ocean temperatures affecting snapper metabolism, causing them to require more energy and food. Nevertheless, there is no evidence to suggest that fishing activities are causing the syndrome.

Research conducted by the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA) gathered data from both commercial and recreational fishers about affected snapper and their locations. The syndrome has been most prevalent in the inner Hauraki Gulf, near Auckland, and around Doubtless Bay near Northland.

Overall, the evidence indicates that the syndrome is more likely due to recent weather patterns and natural changes in fish biology throughout the seasons, and the prevalence of the syndrome appears to be decreasing, supporting these theories.