

weekender
SHADES OF GREY

JAPAN A YEAR ON FROM
ITS TSUNAMI DISASTER



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PLAYER JOINS EXODUS

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What is killing these eels?



SOMETHING IS CAUSING THIS:

Bill Ruru, who has long been involved with customary and commercial fisheries management, helps to dispose of one of the 14 eels found dead in a Gisborne stream this week.

Picture supplied

by Alice Te Puni

MORE than a dozen eels found dead in a Gisborne stream are believed to have been poisoned by a chemical pollutant.

The eels — some more than a metre long — were found floating in a ditch near the Awapuni Road and McDonald Road intersection.

Environmental scientist Ian Ruru carried out an autopsy and discovered the eels were of the *Anguilla australis* (short fin) species and that

the larger eels were healthy, maturing females at least 15 years old.

Mr Ruru heads the Diploma in Iwi Marine and Freshwater Studies through Te Wananga o Aotearoa and the Awapuni Stream is one of its monitoring sites.

He was also a lead fisheries scientist for a number of eel stock assessment projects throughout the country.

Mr Ruru said major amounts of contamination would have been required to kill the eels.

“Chemical contamination is my best guess, based on no external signs of trauma, no sign of internal parasites and the large number of dead eels in a single event.

“Shortfin eels (or silver bellies) prefer still water like lagoons or lakes but these eels were found upstream and exposed in a ditch.

“Given their age and size, they would have lived in Sistersons Lagoon, Matawhero, but a contaminant has flushed them out,” said Mr Ruru.

Gisborne District Council water conservation team leader Dennis Crone said “no cause of death” was evident.

“GDC water conservation staff have completed an intensive search of the area to determine possible causes of the eel deaths.

“Water samples have been taken and a decision will be made soon as to whether to forward the samples to Hamilton for testing for agrichemicals or hydrocarbons.

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‘Public health issues’ in cause of eels’ death

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“Our testing for regular parameters is completed by Hydrotechnologies Ltd in Gisborne. The water sample taken will be tested for 10 different chemicals and parameters.”

Mr Ruru said tracking the cause of the eels fatality was complex but should be a priority.

“We need a better testing system and monitoring to ascertain what did cause the fatality. They are a taonga species and therefore a culturally-significant resource.”

Not only were there environmental concerns, but public health issues too,

said Mr Ruru.

“People gather food from the waterways — it is a traditional hunting area and kapata kai (food cupboard).

Stan Pardoe of Rongowhakaata was informed of the dead eels on Tuesday night and contacted Mr Ruru.

“We need to know what killed them and who is responsible. If something did poison them, what was it and how did it get there?”

“The council has responsibility for our waterways.

“We are not going to let this issue go away. If we have to we will take our concerns to the Ministry of Fisheries for answers.”

Fisheries scientist Ian Ruru carries out an autopsy on one of more than a dozen eels he suspects was poisoned by chemical pollutants.

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