

Freshwater Crayfish



John and the crayfish known as Keewai

“My job is like that of the Prime Minister, there is only one of me in the country” says John Hollows, aquaculture manager for wood plantation company, Ernslaw One. John’s unique job is farming keewai, a freshwater crayfish, which is also known as kōura or kekewai (*Paranephrops zealandicus*). Native to New Zealand these small and delicate crayfish can be found in streams, lakes and swamps around the country. Keewai are considered a delicacy by many and in the past, a staple food item for Māori.

John completed a masters degree in zoology at Otago University as an adult student. He wrote his masters thesis on ‘Land-use Effects on the Diet and Growth of Freshwater Crayfish’, having seen that more research was being invested in sea-based marine life than that of fresh-water marine life. John believes he has the best job in the country working in Otago and Southland for Ernslaw One, who, under John’s leadership is diversifying. The company has developed a freshwater crayfish-farming operation in its exotic forest plantations, utilising the fire fighting water ponds (established for use in case of a forest fire). When approached by Ernslaw One Ltd to develop the farm, it was a dream come true—the job seemed tailor-made for him. He knew that commercially farming the crayfish was possible; now was his opportunity to prove it. The project has been a big learning experience as there has been no model to follow, but lots of pioneering and lateral thinking have helped to find practical solutions.



Left: John holding a crayfish trap

Right page:
John with trusty labrador friend, Chub, checking the trap

Close-up of a ready-to-harvest crayfish

A crayfish caught in the trap

Female crayfish carrying eggs, known as berries

