



Special permits to remove sea urchins for the management or prevention of urchin barrens

What is a special permit?

Special permits are issued for specific purposes under the Fisheries Act 1996. In July 2024, the Minister for Oceans and Fisheries approved a new special permit to remove sea urchins for the management or prevention of urchin barrens.

The aim of this special permit is to encourage the restoration of reefs and kelp forests in areas where urchin barrens have developed.

What is an urchin barren?

Urchin barrens are sea urchin¹ dominated areas of rocky reef that would normally support healthy kelp forest but have little or no kelp due to overgrazing by sea urchins.

Urchin barrens break down marine ecosystems and reduce biodiversity.

Research shows that removing sea urchins down to a density of less than one urchin per square metre helps restore kelp forests in urchin barren areas.

Removing sea urchins

Removing sea urchins could include culling, harvesting the sea urchins for further use, or moving the sea urchins to another area.

If you wish to harvest the sea urchins, your application needs to provide detailed information about how you will transport and store the sea urchins, as well as what they will be used for.

The sale of sea urchins will only be approved in very limited circumstances, and will be assessed on a case by case basis.



How to apply for a special permit

1 Ask for advice

Email specialpermits@mpi.govt.nz to discuss your plans for removing sea urchins. We can give you advice about your application.

2 Complete an application form

Fill out the [application form](#) that you can find on the MPI website.

3 Provide supporting information

As part of your application, you need to provide a comprehensive removal plan. The removal plan must:

- Define the area where you would like to remove sea urchins from.
- Provide evidence (for instance photos, video, diver observations) that show the current state of the area.
- Include information about how removing sea urchins will encourage the restoration of reefs and kelp forests, and how you intend to achieve the desired density of one urchin per square metre.
- Include information about the method you will use to remove sea urchins, how many you will take, and how you will dispose of them.
- Explain how you will continue to monitor the site after the sea urchins have been removed.
- Demonstrate that you have consulted with relevant tangata whenua.

Harvesting for human consumption

If you wish to harvest the sea urchins to sell or donate for human consumption you will still need to comply with other statutory requirements. These include the food handling and processing rules under the Food Act².

¹ The term sea urchin refers to both the New Zealand sea urchin, (*Evechinus chloroticus*, referred to as kina) and the long-spined sea urchin (*Centrostephanus rodgersii*)

² The Food Act 2014 gives food businesses the tools to manage food safety. Refer to the My Food Rules Tool (<https://www.mpi.govt.nz/food-business/food-safety-rules/>) and call New Zealand Food Safety on 0800 00 83 33, or contact your local council, to see what rules will apply.

What happens after I submit my application for a special permit?

Once we receive your application, Fisheries New Zealand will assess the proposal to make sure it supports habitat restoration in urchin barren areas.

We will look at the feasibility, effectiveness, and sustainability of the proposed plan, as well as any potential unintended consequences.

Does an application fee waiver apply?

Special permit applications usually have an hourly charge of \$133.88 for the time spent assessing and processing the application.

If there is no commercial benefit to your plans for removing the sea urchins, you can request for the application fee to be waived.

Special permit conditions

Special permits come with conditions. Fisheries New Zealand will discuss these with you before the special permit is finalised.

It is important that you keep to these conditions. Failure to do so could mean that you lose the special permit. You could also be liable for a conviction and fine of up to \$100,000.

The conditions may be specific to your application. However, in most instances the below conditions will apply:

Notifying Fisheries New Zealand

You need to notify Fisheries New Zealand 48 hours before you begin removing sea urchins.

Biosecurity

All vessels and equipment used for removing sea urchins must be properly maintained to manage biosecurity risks like exotic caulerpa.

Recordkeeping

You will need to keep a record of all the sea urchins you remove and any invoices for sea urchins which are sold (to include the date of the transaction, the special permit number, the species, processed state, net weight and unit price).

Reporting and monitoring

The special permit will require you to send Fisheries New Zealand a report of the sea urchin removal and results of ongoing monitoring of the site.

Enquiries and applications can be sent to specialpermits@mpi.govt.nz

