

# Researcher probes deep secrets to boost fish stocks


Sara Meij · 13:25, Jan 18 2017



SUPPLIED

Nelson Plant and Food senior scientist Maren Wellenreuther.


Maren Wellenreuther's face beams with enthusiasm when she talks about her research at Plant and Food's port office in Nelson.



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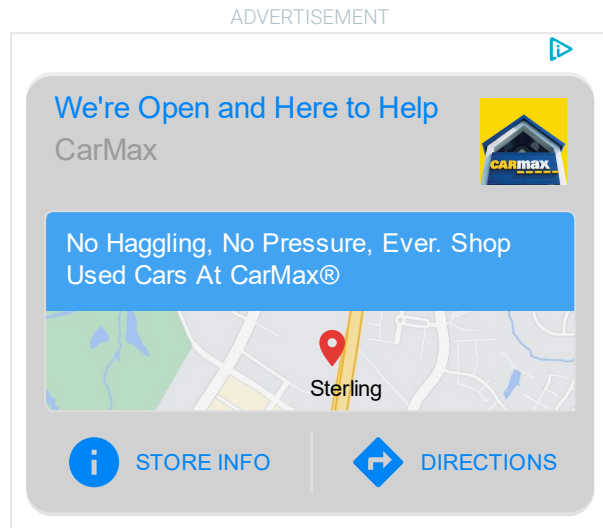
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"We've bred cattle and such but I guess there was never really a need to breed fish because there was an abundance in the sea.



"That is now changing."

Wellenreuther said one of the highlights of the past year was receiving a Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment grant of almost \$5.5 million to research accelerated breeding for enhanced seafood production.

Growing up in Germany, she said her father instilled a love for biology in her from a young age.

"We would walk through the forest and he would point out and name trees and insects."

She decided to become a biologist when she was 15. "I never changed my mind and never regretted it."

She was studying for her masters degree in reef fish ecology in Australia she first came to New Zealand on a Christmas break in 1999.

"A friend of mine was studying at Auckland University. I arrived at the airport and we went straight to the Christmas party [at the university] and I met my husband.

"My first day in New Zealand tied me to New Zealand for the rest of my life."

Wellenreuther finished her PhD on the evolutionary ecology of triplefin fish, New Zealand's most abundant reef fish, at Auckland University.

"It was a fun PhD and I got to see so much of the country under water as well as on land.

"I got to dive all around New Zealand, from the Three Kings [islands] to the Fiordland, Stewart Island. We would] look at them, actually record where they are, just to understand the factors that has led to their diversity."

She said she had travelled many countries around the world but loved Nelson.

"[It's] superb, being here with little children, being able to cycle to work, which I love. Nelson is big on science, you can do great science and have a great lifestyle.

"That ticks a lot of boxes."

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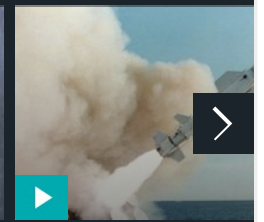
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I'm sure that she is doing a great job but how good would it be to improve the health of the marine environment to the point that fish numbers return to those of 50 years ago. Match that with fisheries management based on abundance and we could have a first class fishery for recreational and commercial sectors. It can be done but requires a mindshift by those directly involved.

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it can be done with some fishery's quite easy. the Canterbury bight inshore fishery is now at that stage with elephant gurnard and flat fish through good management and voluntary closes of area's and time limits for fishing. the fish to have the ability to breed and thrive. we are now reaping the rewards. it's only going to get better too as long as we continue doing what we do

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That sounds very positive. In the case of Tasman Bays it also means that destructive bottom contact fisheries like dredging and trawling should be banned permanently. It is up to the industry to come up with better harvest methods.

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