

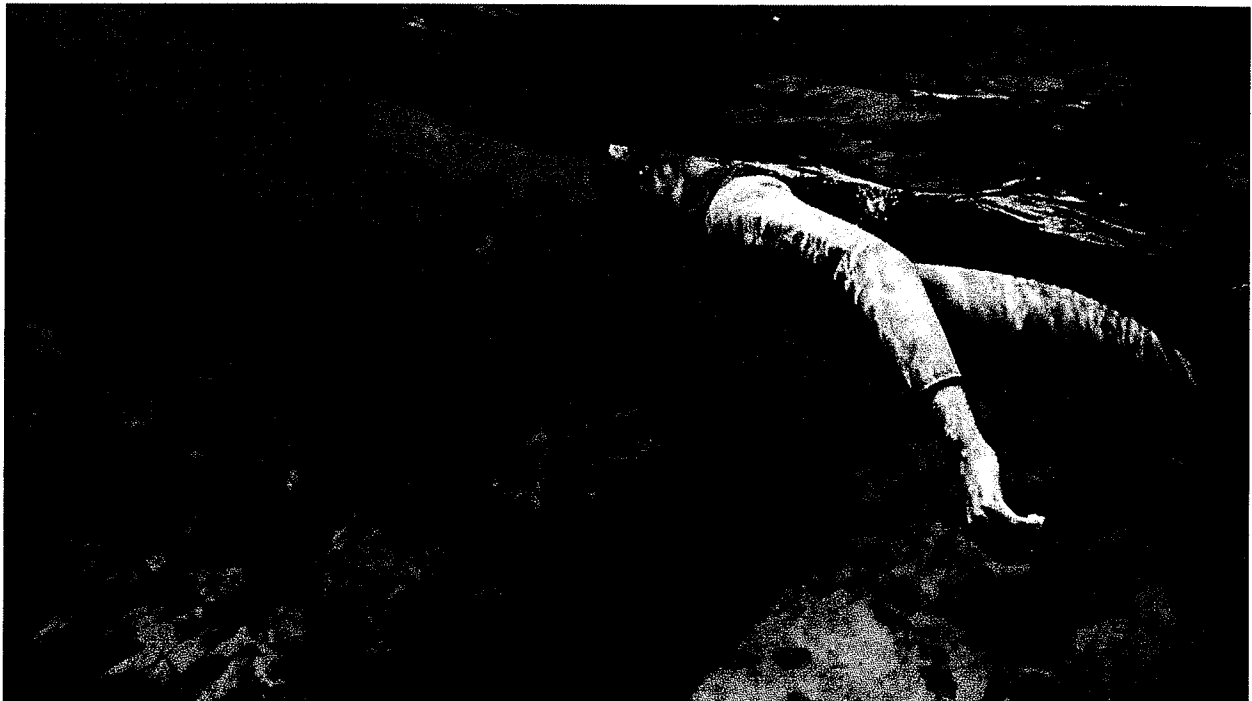
Kiwi seafood giants mount legal challenge to Kermadec Sanctuary plan

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A snorkeller at Raoul Island in the Kermadecs.

All New Zealand's leading seafood companies have banded together to mount a court challenge against the Government's plan to establish a giant ocean sanctuary around the Kermadec Islands.

In a statement on Friday the Fishing Industry Association said Sealord, Talley's, Sanford, Solander, Aotearoa Fisheries, Independent Fisheries, Ngai Tahu Seafood Resources, Vela Fishing and KPF Investments (United) had jointly filed a statement of claim in the High Court. They represent about 80 per cent of seafood quota.

Led by the association, they say the Kermadec Ocean Sanctuary is being pushed through without recognition of existing rights and contrary to international obligations.

Environment Minister Nick Smith, who has driven the proposal, said he was disappointed by the court challenge to the right of Parliament to create the sanctuary.

"It is effectively challenging the right of Government to provide marine protected areas in New Zealand's oceans and I think that is a big stretch of the QMS."

It would be a huge setback for marine protection if such action was successful.

The industry was missing an opportunity to secure a premium for New Zealand seafood exports from having an ocean environment where special areas were set aside for protection.

"The Government remains determined to proceed with the Kermadec Ocean Sanctuary. New Zealand does not need to fish, drill and mine every corner of its oceans," Smith said.

The Green Party said the fishing industry had overstepped the mark with a "self-serving attempt" to override the ability to regulate and protect the oceans.