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Current state of the echinoderm aquaculture industry in New Zealand

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Echinoderms such as sea urchins and sea cucumbers have been consumed all over the world for many years. They are highly valuable seafood which has led to the over exploitation of many wild stocks. In the past few decades, aquaculture of echinoderms has become a viable alternative to cope with the high international market demand and also to reduce pressure on wild populations. In New Zealand there are two species that are currently included in the quota management system, the sea urchin *Evechinus chloroticus* and the sea cucumber *Australostichopus mollis*. In addition, in northern New Zealand there are two sea urchin species which are not commercially fished but have commercial potential. Despite their commercial potential, the aquaculture of echinoderms in New Zealand is currently at an experimental level with huge room for development in all stages of production and the processing of the final product. The main areas that require improvement are the development of hatchery technology and grow-out alternatives including the formulation of adequate artificial diets. Of particular interest is the feasibility of including both sea cucumber and sea urchins as extractive species into integrated multi-trophic aquaculture systems. Therefore, incorporating these species into the existing shellfish and finfish farms in New Zealand would not only reduce the environmental impact of these industries but also would add a valuable secondary crop.

Biography

Leonardo N Zamora Allendes is a Scientist at the University of Auckland who has worked on the Aquaculture and Biology of NZ sea cucumbers for the past 4 years. From the beginning of his career he has focused on understanding the biology of marine invertebrates particularly echinoderms with commercial potential. Most of his research has been presented at specialized conferences and published in international peer-reviewed journals. He is keen to work with the aquaculture industry to develop new opportunities for echinoderm culture in New Zealand.

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