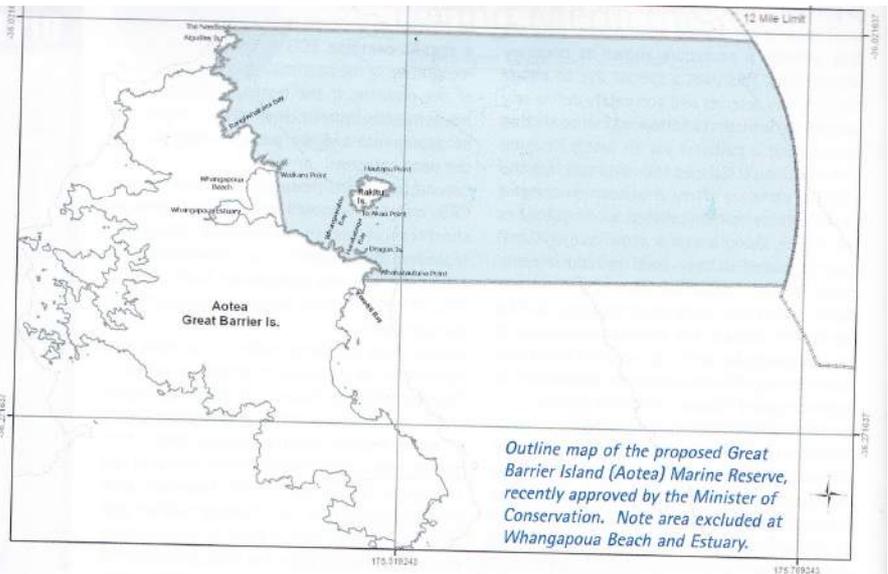


Different points of view

The Great Barrier Island Marine Reserve proposal was approved by the Minister of Conservation of the time, but was declined by the Minister of Fisheries and the proposal has not made any progress since. The articles below are from two different points of view.

Articles from: Dive New Zealand magazine (2005), page 20 & 21 by Dr Roger Grace and Trade-a-Boat magazine (2008), page 82 – 86 by Pete Saul.

Great Barrier Island Marine Reserve



one step closer

By Roger Grace

The large marine reserve proposed for the northeast side of Great Barrier Island came one step closer to reality on 16 June with the announcement that the Minister of Conservation, Chris Carter, has put his stamp of approval on the application. Now we await concurrence from the Minister of Fisheries, David Benson-Pope, and the long process of recovery of the marine life in the

area can begin. Once gazetted, this marine reserve will be the third largest in New Zealand, and at 49,500 hectares will be by far the largest close to the mainland.

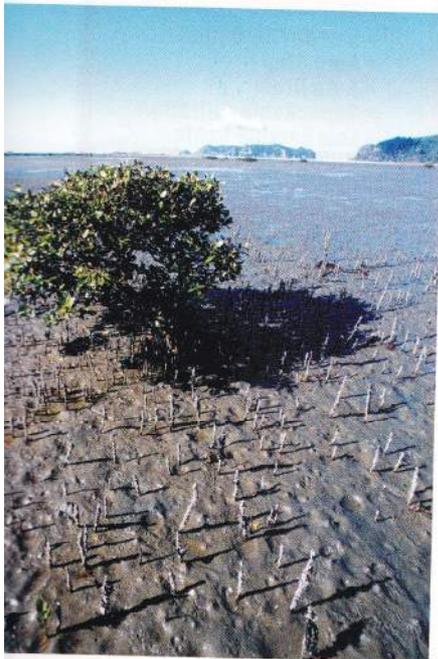
Near the middle of the proposed reserve, Whangapoua Estuary and an area off Whangapoua Beach have been left out of the reserve. This is in recognition of the importance of the estuary as a shellfish harvesting site for the local people. The area off the beach is also excluded as an important sustenance fishing area for local residents.

It is intended, however, that a local community fisheries plan of some sort, yet to be decided, will be established to control fishing in this area. After all, within a few years the fishing in this area would become extremely good, and without further control unfortunately could act as a 'sink' from which fish are removed at the expense of the surrounding marine reserve. That is what happened at the Poor Knights Islands for many years, where recreational fishing around much of the Poor Knights prevented full recovery of the fish stocks in the

totally protected parts of the reserve. This situation was finally corrected when all fishing was stopped at the Poor Knights in 1998, after which snapper populations exploded spectacularly, and the rest of the marine life could progress towards 'naturalness'.

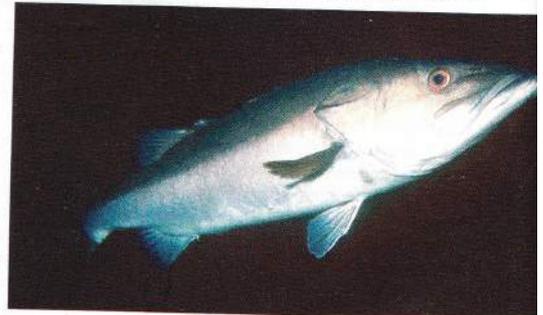
The site of the Great Barrier (Aotea) Marine Reserve is relatively close to Auckland, and within a few years time will provide a spectacular example of the positive results of timely and sensible marine conservation.

Because the proposed reserve is so large, it will show us a lot of surprises - things which have not happened in smaller marine reserves around New Zealand. I am particularly looking forward to seeing any increase in packhorse crayfish and hapuku. Those two species in my view need a complete rest from fishing - their quota generally should be set at zero. But the Aotea Marine Reserve may be big enough and in the right place to make a difference, at least locally, for these two seriously depleted species. The habitat for both is ideal, and historically they were common in the area. If a marine



left: The Whangapoua Estuary was excluded from the marine reserve because of its importance as a shellfish harvesting area for the local people.

right: Hapuku used to be common on deep reefs within the proposed marine reserve. The Aotea Marine Reserve has a good chance to foster a recovery of this seriously depleted species.



reserve is ever going to make a difference to these species, this reserve will be the one. I think we can confidently predict that red crayfish, snapper, and probably kingfish numbers will increase spectacularly in the Aotea Marine Reserve. And of course there will be many less-spectacular but nevertheless important gains for marine biodiversity in the area. Deep reefs offshore, for example, support large old black coral 'trees' and massive deepwater glass sponges hundreds of years old. Fishing has already been shown to cause damage to these deep reef communities, and the no fishing policy in the marine reserve will prevent long lines, drop lines, nets and pots from further damaging the rich life of these reefs.

New Zealand has a history of commercial and recreational fishing which has left no stone unturned. There is nowhere in our seas that has not been affected by fishing. In SNA1, which is the snapper fishery from North Cape to East Cape, with Great Barrier Island near the middle, the snapper population has been reduced to only 16% of its original biomass. Marine reserves allow the marine life in a few areas to bounce back from many decades of industrial scale fishing, and gradually become closer to what was natural before humans came here.

Marine reserves are equivalent to national parks on land, where native fauna and flora have somewhere safe to live their lives without serious interference from humans. They are sanctuaries in the sea where all fishing, dumping, dredging, and building of structures is prohibited. Without such interference, the fish and other life can go about their business and recover to their natural abundance and population structure, and thereafter maintain a healthy natural balance, with numerous large individuals which are the best breeders and probably have important social roles within the population. Only with total protection do they get a chance to grow old and big - pretty logical really when you think about it. None of this is possible outside no-take sanctuaries, because Government fisheries policy and fishing management practises have deliberately exterminated about 80% of the population of each commercially important



Good beds of pips in the estuary channel, and extensive cockle beds on the sand flats, are the only good shellfish resources on the island.

fish. Furthermore, fisheries policy dictates that the populations will not be allowed to recover to more than 20% of their original size. If this happened, commercial quotas would be raised to take advantage of what would be considered excess capacity in the fishery. That is how the Quota Management System (QMS) works in order to achieve maximum sustainable yield (MSY).

You don't need to be a scientist to understand that if you take 80% of the top predators out of the system then that will have serious consequences on the rest of the food chain and ecology. Although the concept of MSY may

According to Ministry of Fisheries figures, currently red crayfish numbers are very low in the greater Hauraki Gulf area (specifically CRA1 and CRA2), and the total allowable commercial catches are not being landed. They have effectively been 'overfished', and quota cuts are needed to try to encourage the population to climb back up to the target biomass (BMSY). This could take several years.

Within the first five years after establishment of the no-take marine reserve at Great Barrier Island, we can expect to see a massive increase in red crayfish numbers, despite their present serious depletion. This has occurred at most other marine reserves where crayfish habitat is available.

Not only crayfish numbers, but also their sizes, will increase for many years, and will result in the release of huge numbers of crayfish larvae from the large population of big crayfish which will establish there. These larvae will have the potential to boost crayfish numbers in other areas where crayfish have been depleted.

No doubt some fishermen will not be happy about the Minister's decision on this marine reserve. A national target of 10% of the territorial sea has been proposed to effectively protect marine biodiversity. The exact figure is not important, but I fail to see how fishermen can justify fishing in nearly ALL of New Zealand's ocean.

Surely the marine life has rights too. They need somewhere to live in peace, re-establish their natural behaviour and population structure which has been knocked to bits, and exist without prospect of being untimely ripped from their ocean home. 



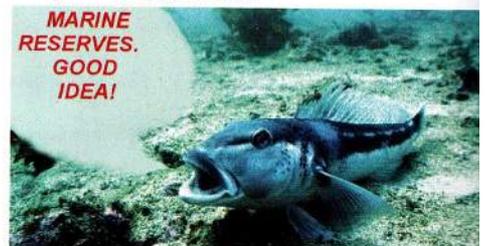
Large old black coral trees are common on deep reefs in the proposed marine reserve.

seem to work for single species management, it takes no account of its 'sustainability' in terms of impacts on the rest of the ecology. So even 'legitimate' fishing has serious impacts on the rest of the ocean system.



above: In north-eastern New Zealand the snapper population has been reduced to only 16% of its original biomass. Within the marine reserve snapper will recover from many decades of industrial-scale fishing, eventually reaching a population density and size structure close to that of the original population.

left: Large deepwater glass sponges, some hundreds of years old, are found on reefs 70 metres deep in the proposed marine reserve.



below: Surely the fish have rights too. They need somewhere safe to live. Marine reserves provide that opportunity.

Great Barrier sea snatch fails

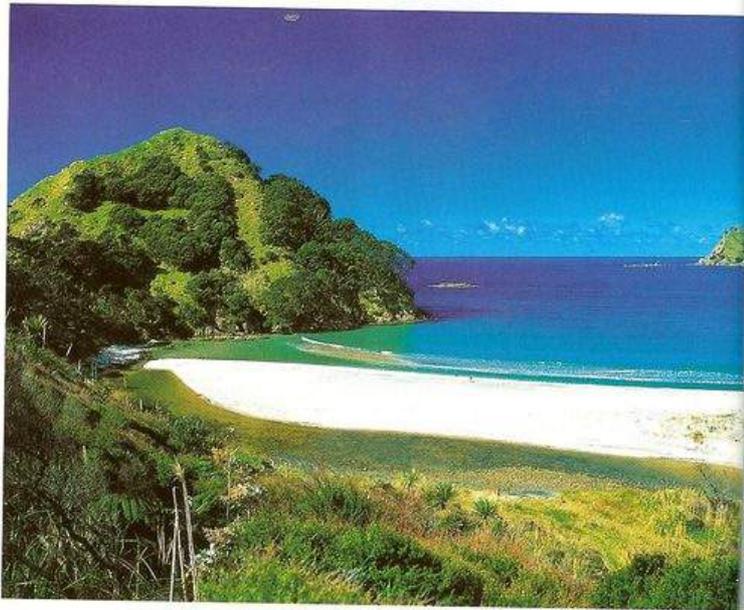


Photo: Tourism Auckland

As far as I am concerned, this is a victory for common sense over blind dogma. Past decisions have notably ignored the wishes and aspirations of local residents in favour of the perceived greater good. When you happen to be the affected minority suffering the rough end of the pineapple "for the greater good", it becomes a lot harder to see the benefits, if they indeed exist at all.

I find it intensely insulting when conservation lobbies refer to fishers as "greedy" whenever we vigorously oppose something that we perceive to be blatantly unfair and unjustified. Funnily enough, I reckon that the reason this application has failed is precisely because the applicant was greedy in going for such a huge area in the first place. Because of the existing military zone south of the proposed reserve, there would have been an almost total closure of the eastern side of Great Barrier Island to all fishing had the proposal succeeded.

Pete Saul is delighted by the Minister of Fisheries' decision not to approve a huge marine reserve on the north-eastern side of Great Barrier Island. Thousands of people will be happy and some no doubt will be dismayed, not least the policy makers in the Department of Conservation who were so determined to ram this reserve through, come hell or high water.

Trying to grab such a large area was a blunder. I use the term "grab" with absolutely no apologies. This was always a poorly justified proposal. The suggested eco-tourism benefits were minimal compared to the distress that would have been caused, and the biological arguments for closing the area were extremely tenuous at best. I am pretty sure the miscalculation was at least partly due to the pressure of trying to meet the government's deadline for achieving a specified percentage of the coast in marine protected areas by 2010.

Whatever the reason, the upshot is that DoC has wasted a huge amount of time and effort and has got itself offside with a whole new bunch of people. Meanwhile, conservation has not benefitted one iota. Had they genuinely listened to the numerous objections and taken some of them on board, they might have achieved a different result. As has happened before, they only listened to the things they wanted to hear and ignored the rest.

A smaller area, proposed after genuine consultation with island residents, may

well have been agreed. Possibly the policy makers thought they would be able to scale down the area later on, if the opposition was too fierce or support

was not sufficient to carry the day. If that was the plan, it appears to have backfired badly. The size of the proposal was singled out as a major reason for the Minister of



Photo: Kay Stowell, www.barrier.co.nz

Photo: Kay Stowell, www.barrier.co.nz



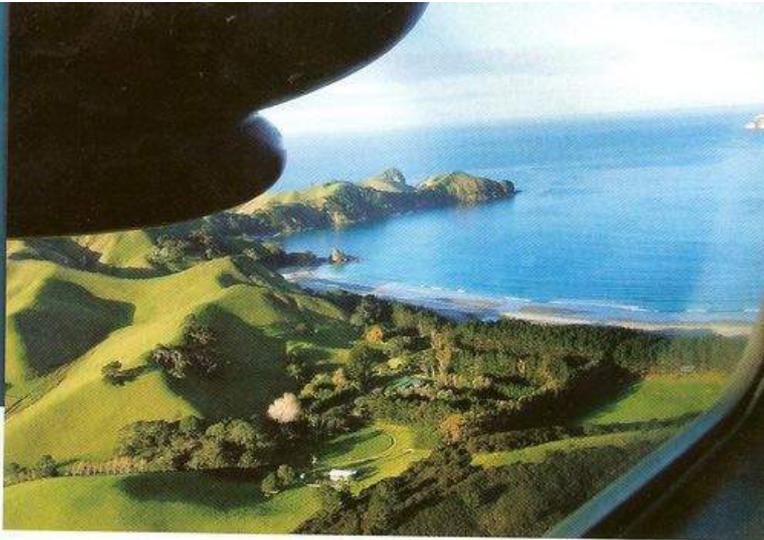


Photo: Kay Stowell, www.barrier.co.nz

“The size of the proposal was singled out as a major reason for the Minister of Fisheries rejecting it.”

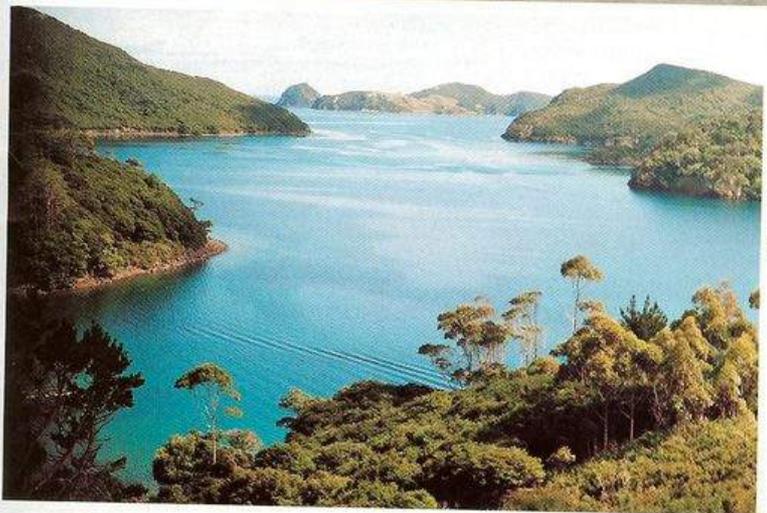
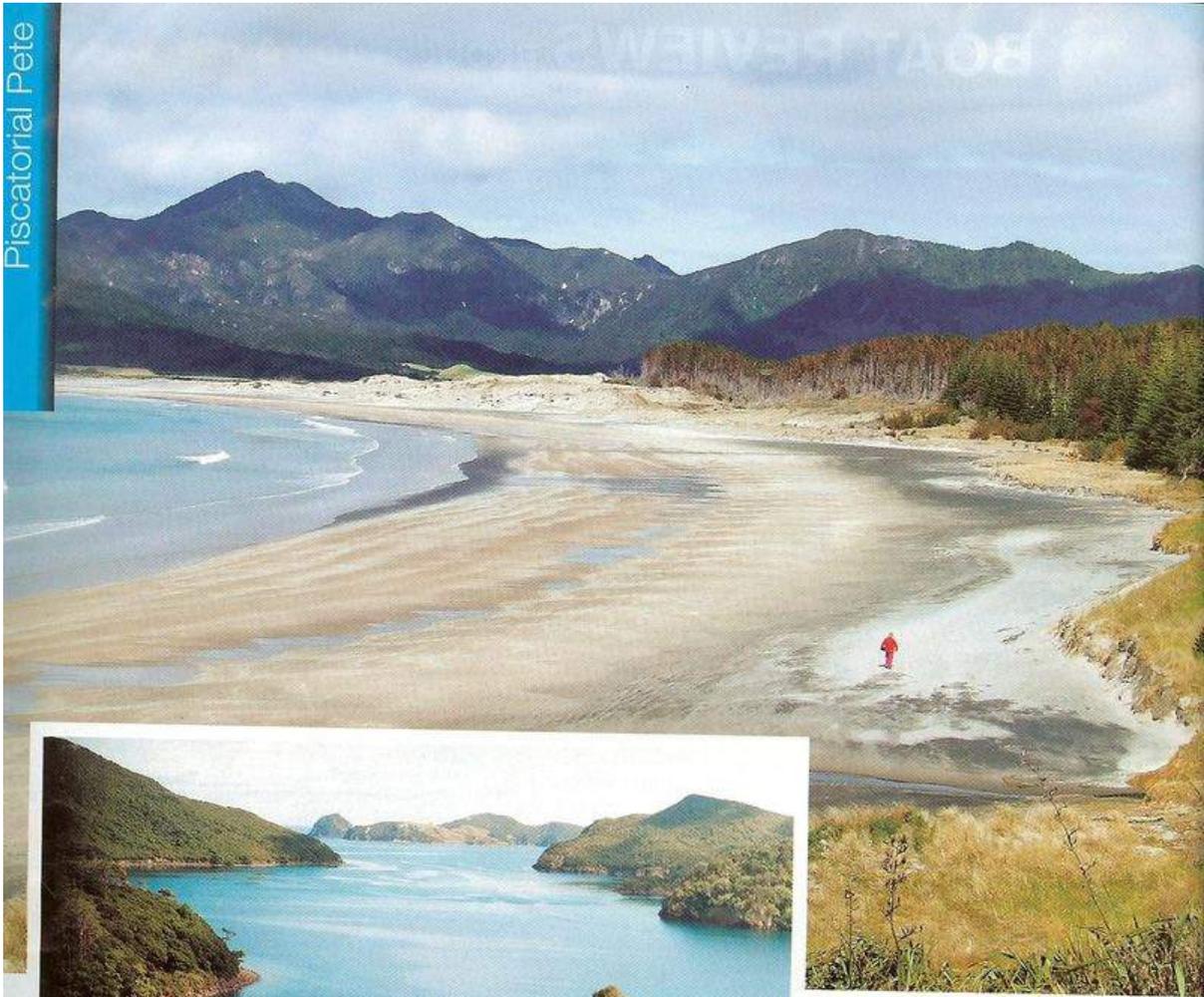
Fisheries rejecting it.

Green organisations will use this decision to try and justify the passage of the “new” marine reserves legislation, which to tell the truth has been around so long now that it can hardly be called new any more. A worrying feature of the proposal is to give DoC complete control of the marine reserve approval process, by eliminating the present requirement for

the Ministers of Fisheries and Transport to give their consent to each proposal.

Personally, I believe that would be a disaster. This decision, in my opinion, shows exactly why a contrasting opinion is required. If it had been left to the Minister of Conservation alone, the reserve would have been in place in 2004 and the rights of Great Barrier Islanders would have been trampled on without any recourse.

We all know that MFish and DoC have been bashing heads for years. They have clashing philosophies. But I would absolutely hate to see the Minister of Conservation given free reign to implement marine reserves without a Minister with equal clout given the opportunity to provide a countering opinion, if it is justified. This is the first case, as far as I know, in which a fisheries



Photos: Kay Stowell, www.barrier.co.nz

Minister has outrightly refused to concur.

I believe in this particular case the Minister was well and truly justified in withholding his concurrence. In numerous other instances, concurrence has been readily forthcoming. In some of those cases, I and many other fishers were keenly disappointed. Yet that is how democracy works, isn't it? Surely this is a balance that is required in order to prevent ill-conceived extremist proposals from being bulldozed through.

I have previously criticised DoC in this column over its consultation processes. I do not believe it is fair or reasonable, and I do not believe it is genuinely consulting

in most cases. This is not uncommon in government departments, which are compelled by law to consult but often simply go through the motions, having already made up their mind ahead of time. They go into consultation knowing exactly where they want to end up. This should not be the aim of consultation.

It is pretty clear that Mr Anderton was strongly influenced in his decision by the effect the proposal would have had on Ngati Rehua to manage their customary fisheries. By excluding the local hapu from traditional fishing grounds, the reserve would almost certainly have implications for the Crown under the 1992 Fisheries

Settlement and the Treaty of Waitangi legislation.

However, he also noted the importance of access to the sea for food and fishing-related tourism for all island residents, and concluded that the possible benefits of the reserve would be outweighed by the negative effects on the local lifestyle and economy.

Finally, he noted that there is now an agreed process for the progression of the Government's marine protected areas policy, which will hopefully take a much broader look at what is actually required in each "bio-geographical area" before ill-conceived proposals like this one are initiated. The process certainly needs to improve.

If it does not, then marine reserve proposals will continue to frighten people and meet strong opposition. The current process has proved to be time-consuming, distressful and a waste of precious financial resources for everyone. In the case of Great Barrier Island, I think justice has been done. J