

**Director General of Conservation
Department of Conservation
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cc Minister of Conservation.

Submission Objecting to the proposed Aotea (Great Barrier) Marine Reserve

**Kevin R Burke
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Great Barrier Island.**

Background.

My name is Kevin Burke. I have been a permanent resident of Okiwi, Great Barrier Island since 1979. For the last three years I have been editor, and together with my wife owner of the Island's newspaper, the Barrier Bulletin. 'The Bulletin' was established 32 years ago, and is a registered newspaper, and a member of the Community Newspapers Association.

My wife is now the owner of the land at Okiwi which her family have passed down over the last 140 years. Our own family were raised and schooled here at Okiwi, before leaving for boarding school and work opportunities in Auckland. They have the ambition to return to the Island later in life.

Objection.

My principle objection is under the terms of clause 5.(6)(e) that declaring the area a marine reserve would be otherwise contrary to the public interest. I have for some time been concerned that the establishment of this huge reserve would have a severely detrimental effect on the economic and social well being of the population of the northern area of Great Barrier Island.

We have been assured by DoC and other reserve advocates that the establishment of the reserve would open opportunities for local people. It was recently pointed out to me that a DoC representative had stated during a public meeting that 'no research had been carried out specifically regarding the socio-economic effects of this proposal, and there would be none until after the reserve was established'.

I began checking through DoC's own documentation on established reserves, which rang alarm bells, then began gathering information specific to this proposal.

Method.

A short and simple survey form was drawn up (App. 1) and distributed to boat owners via marine outlets, e-mail & fax commencing August 22nd. The aim was to gain an impression of how important the visiting boating public are to the economy of the North Barrier. 57 responses had been received by Sep 28. Copies of these responses are included, and a summary of the major indicators is at Appendix 2. Further responses are still being received, however time will not allow their inclusion.

Explanation of Appendix 2.

Respondents have been numbered mainly in alphabetical order of boat name, in order to facilitate checking for duplicate responses. Respondents No 8 & 9 were contacted by phone, and I am satisfied that Bluefin and Blue Fin are two different boats. Boat owners were asked how often they visit over a five year period, recognising that all regular visitors are not annual visitors. The reply was divided by five, and this figure used for annual calculations. (Hence figures in the summary such as 1.8 visits per annum etc) Where a range was given in a reply to any question, the mean of the range has been used when practicable. Eight have omitted to reply to crucial questions or in one case given conflicting information. These are shown by question marks, and the data for these respondents omitted from calculations.

Results of the Summary.

The data provided by the 49 respondents remaining indicate that the establishment of the proposed marine reserve would result in a direct and immediate loss in annual turnover for North Barrier businesses of \$148,583.50. By extrapolating this number of respondents to 200, the predicted loss is \$606,463. I have consulted with the Port Fitzroy Harbour Master who regards this figure of 200 to be very conservative, since the count of boats in Port Fitzroy Harbour over the summer holiday period rises to between 700 and 1000 depending on the weather, and there are upwards of 100 boats in the harbour at any one time through to Easter.

Respondents were also asked whether others join their boat using air services or ferries. Most answered 'yes' or 'sometimes', indicating a further negative effect on the Island's external and internal passenger services.

Effects on the Community

At present, the businesses of the North Barrier are not in a robust enough position to survive a downturn of this nature. Severe hardship among the owners will cause prices for the North Barrier Community to rise. Nobody can predict the snowball effect from this, but there may be closures, loss of infrastructure, (freight services, passenger services, air and sea) loss of population is probable. Closure of the Okiwi School may result. In other words, the destruction of the North Barrier Community.

While this study may be considered imperfect in some ways, it is honest, open and fair. It is **the only fact based prediction of outcome that has been attempted and therefore must stand.** It is irresponsible of the Department of Conservation to attempt to inflict this huge influence on a small isolated community without ever attempting to gauge the economic and social implications. This is our home, and has been for most of us, long before the Department was conceived.

Positive Effects for the Community.

There are none. It should be noted that although the application document, Section 5 is headed "Economic, Social & Cultural Implications for Tangata Whenua, Current Users and Other Groups" there has been no attempt to address or even mention the economic or social implications for North Barrier residents nor the residents of Great Barrier Island as a whole. If there were any actual positives, one would assume that this would be the place to find them.

Comparison with Existing Reserves

Location. Great Barrier Island is situated 100 kilometres across the Hauraki Gulf from its service port, Auckland. The only regular passenger service by sea is a 4-5 hour trip to Tryphena currently operating 4 times per week, or to Port Fitzroy once per week, an extra 4 hours. Crossings are often rough. The vessel is a combined freight/car/passenger ferry. Cost is \$69 adult, \$45 child return. Taxi to get to the reserve area about \$60.

By air, the flight is about 35/40 Mins. Cost when no 'specials' apply \$170 ret per adult. If Okiwi Airstrip is not open, taxi costs similar to above.

In either case a visit to the reserve is unlikely to be a day trip, so accommodation costs are additional.

Great Barrier Island has no reticulated electric power, water supply or waste disposal system. The population is fragmented by terrain into North, Central and South, the North being the most isolated.

DoC and other reserve advocates are fond of verbally offering up the Okakari (Goat Island) marine reserve as a model for the type of socio/economic benefits we will enjoy. Because of cost alone, there will never be that ecotourism potential. Goat Island is a day return trip in the family car from Auckland, Whangarei, Wellsford, Warkworth. GBI is clearly not. There has never been an attempt to establish a marine reserve adjacent to a community in such isolation, let alone one which undermines that community's economy.

One thing that can be learnt from existing marine reserves is that if there are to be economic benefits, they will not occur for many years. The Pohatu Marine reserve for instance had been established for four years in 2003 with no advantages to residents. "Tourism ventures from nearby Akaroa will only include Pohatu when there is something to show the tourists". The Goat Island Marine reserve was having little economic impact in 1992 when a report was done 17 years after its establishment.

It should also be noted from appendix 2, that none of the respondents indicated that they would visit the area more often if the marine reserve was in place.

The reserve may result in extra DoC staff in the area but this will not help the economy. DoC support the infrastructure as little as possible. Their freight is brought to the Island on their own boat. Their power systems and vehicles run on diesel brought to the island by their own boat. They even run their own unlicensed watering hole.

Conclusion

If established, this marine reserve will cause an immediate downturn in the economy of the North Barrier which is likely to cause the collapse of the community. Any perceived advantages are unproven, as this proposal is unlike any other which has been attempted. Should there be any advantages, they will come too late to save this community. This is a circular argument, because without the community, there will be no infrastructure. Without the infrastructure there will be no 'eco-tourism'. The establishment of this marine reserve would be contrary to the public interest. The risks are too great.

Other Matters.

I also wish to register my objection to some aspects of the consultation process and to some aspects of the application itself.

Consultation Document.

The consultation document "A Marine Reserve for Great Barrier Island" contained at least three errors in fact, all of which would help the case for the proposal, and which therefore must be considered deliberate.

page 3. A decade of discussions. Misleading. Discussions were broken off after the rejection of a previous proposal by Great Barrier Island Residents. This proposal has little resemblance to the previous one, and discussions held at that time have been ignored by DoC.

page 3 same section. Over 250 people, mainly Islanders, sent in their comments. This is contradictory to DoC's own figures contained in the "Draft Application for the Rakitu (Great Barrier Island) Marine Reserve" dated July 1994. see Appendix 4, Section 1 and bar graph at Section 3. **In fact, only 48 of the 256 responses were from Great Barrier Island.**

page 13. Whangapoua Estuary. Conservation land surrounds the estuary. Any cadastral map of the area will show that **Conservation land is only adjacent to about 50% of the estuary.**

This document was the sole reference used for guidance by many individuals and at least one Auckland City committee when considering their submissions. I am not sure of legal implications, but do know that if a newspaper editor allowed deliberate lies to be published he would be in deep trouble.

There were many other instances of the media, the public, and probably the Department and the Government being mis-led by statements from DoC representatives. I know some of these will be the subject of other objections, which I support.

The proposal has failed to gain any significant support from the residents of Great Barrier Island, as is demonstrated by the outcome of 5 public meetings held on the Island and responses to the submission Questionnaire.

The Application.

The Marine Reserves Act, 1971, Section 5 repeatedly uses the words ‘objection’, ‘objections’. At no point does it mention ‘submissions in support’. The Department of Conservation are well aware of this, and in the DoC document “Tapui Taimoana: Reviewing the Marine Reserves Act 1971” published September 2000, page 37, this is given as one of the reasons DoC wish to replace the MRA 1971.

DoC have however in the statutory notifications to the media, encouraged the public to send submissions in support. In the Application document, para 1.5 it has said ‘Submissions in support will also be accepted’

I respectfully suggest that the intentions of the authors of the MRA 1971 are clear. i.e. That the applicant must make sure that there is support for the proposal before entering the statutory process. The authors were presumably not stupid. They did not leave out ‘submissions in support’ by oversight.

This application purports to be in accordance with the MRA 1971. It clearly is not. This appears to be an attempt to confuse the process and possibly to cloud the judgment of the Director General. On the point mentioned in the second para above, this application should be withdrawn.

There are other instances of ‘mistakes’ in the application which should not be tolerated in any legal document. eg Appendix 1, p36; The objection submission process and the D.G. consideration of objections has been omitted completely!

I object to this application on all of the above grounds, and ask that the Application be declined.

Signed..... (K. R. Burke)

Dated.....

“To overlook the human dimension is dangerous folly however, and represents a disregard for the fundamental relationship between human social, cultural and economic behaviour and the biophysical environment”

*Cocklin and Flood. “The Socio-Economic Implications of Establishing Marine Reserves”
A report prepared for the Department of Conservation - 1992.*
