

Hokianga Accord Update #39

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Ministerial approval generates celebrations in the north

Christmas celebrations have started early in the Bay of Islands because Phil Heatley, the Minister of Fisheries, has approved a temporary closure application for Maunganui Bay, including Deep Water Cove. The two-year closure applies to commercial and non-commercial fishers. The taking of fish, aquatic life and seaweed, except kina, is prohibited between 1 December 2010 and 30 November 2012.

Authorised under section 186A of the Fisheries Act, the closure enables local kaitiaki [guardians] to exercise their customary obligations to manage, protect and enhance the environment for the benefit of the whole community.

Ngati Kuta and Patukeha ki Te Rawhiti are the local hapu who applied for the temporary closure in October 2009 and their objective is to rebuild the depleted fisheries.

There is no restriction on anchoring, diving or swimming in the closure area. This area extends around one square nautical mile, from Kariparipa Point across to Motuwheteke Island. (See map opposite)

Maunganui Bay is a special place for tangata whenua and a safe haven for keen divers, coastal sailors and fishermen, so it was no surprise that there was widespread community support for the application.

The Bay of Islands Swordfish Club was one of the largest organisations to support this application, along with the Hokianga Accord.

In 2007-08 a baseline stock survey confirmed what was already common knowledge, that Maunganui Bay was depleted and some species such as scallops had disappeared from the Bay. In response to the survey local hapu worked with NIWA to implement a scallop reseeding programme to rebuild the fishery.

In November 2007 local hapu and other parties successfully sank the ex-Navy frigate the *Canterbury* at the mouth of Maunganui Bay. Since the sinking there has been a noticeable increase in the numbers of juvenile fish and reef species.

This artificial reef has become a popular attraction for local and international divers. Increased tourist activity has added value to the local economy by ramping up demand for a range of goods and services.

In addition, local hapu have initiated research to monitor the ongoing effects of the closure. The results will be used as a basis to determine what management is required in the future. Both hapu aspire to eventually have a mataitai in the area.

Like many local management initiatives this project has consumed many years of effort by willing residents and Maori elders [kaumatua]. Often the frustration leads to bitter disappointment for the kaumatua, so it is encouraging for all concerned that this application has finally been approved.

This development is also heartening for hapu who have applied for Te Puna Mataitai in the northern Bay of Islands. As we have heard at numerous Hokianga Accord hui, these hapu have been seeking a local management solution since the 1970s.

To make this a truly memorable Christmas the Accord is hoping that Phil Heatley will double-up and approve Te Puna Mataitai. This would be an enduring and effective way to spread the Christmas cheer. Come on Phil, we'll back you, you do it!

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