

**BEFORE THE ENVIRONMENT COURT
AT AUCKLAND
I MUA I TE KŌTI TAIAO O AOTEAROA
TĀMAKI MAKĀURAU ROHE**

UNDER the Resource Management Act 1991
IN THE MATTER of appeals under Clause 14 of Schedule 1 of the Act
BETWEEN **BAY OF ISLANDS MARITIME PARK
INCORPORATED**
(ENV-2019-AKL-000117)

**ROYAL FOREST AND BIRD PROTECTION
SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND
INCORPORATED**
(ENV-2019-AKL-000127)

Appellants

AND **NORTHLAND REGIONAL COUNCIL**
Respondent

**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE of JULIA RIDDLE
(DIVE TOURISM)**

TOPIC 14 – MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

19 March 2021

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INTRODUCTION

1. My name is Julia Riddle.
2. My partner Shane Housham & I are owner operators of Northland Dive, a diving tourism business based at the top of Whangaruru Harbour in a little place called Tutaematai Valley. We have been operating dive charters out of our Lodge since 2000.
3. My evidence covers our business and the significant benefits that we get from the Rahui at Maunganui Bay. I also describe my experience of the lack of fish in areas outside the Rahui, and outline the limited opportunities for diving and snorkelling in the Bay of Islands and south of Cape Brett as a result. I outline what the proposed extensions and new protected areas would mean for our business.
4. I am providing this evidence on behalf of the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society of New Zealand Inc (“Forest & Bird”), Bay of Islands Maritime Park Inc (“BOIMP”) and Ngāti Kuta Hapū ki te Rawhiti (“Ngāti Kuta”).

EVIDENCE

Our business

5. Our area of operation is large, covering Cavalli Islands, Bay of Islands around Cape Brett to Whangaruru Harbour, and Poor Knight Islands.
6. Our business has grown over the past 14 years, and we can firmly contribute that to three factors:
 - a. The sinking of the former HMNZS Canterbury Frigate in Deep Water Cove (Maunganui Bay) in 2007.
 - b. The local hapu, Ngāti Kuta and Patukeha, placing a Rahui in Maunganui Bay in 2008.
 - c. Northland Dive’s purchase, after repeated requests from our clients, of an overnight vessel (Liveaboard) for trips to the Poor Knight Islands Marine Reserve 3 years ago.
7. Instigated by Northland Dive, the sinking of the Former HMNZS Canterbury Frigate in Deep Water Cove (Maunganui Bay) in 2007. This created an artificial reef, one of the best wreck dives in New Zealand. The wreck is totally encrusted in marine life. Sunk in a sheltered cove, the Canterbury has become an amazing training ground for hundreds of divers.
8. The local hapu, Ngāti Kuta and Patukeha, placing a Rahui in Maunganui Bay in 2008 creating a much-needed sanctuary for marine life. We can now show people crayfish in waist deep water, which we do not see outside the Rahui, and resident fish on the Canterbury and reefs. Having the wreck has definitely had a massive positive effect on our business but not all divers like wrecks, many prefer fish and reefs, so with Maunganui Bay being a Rahui we have seen a huge

increase in marine life, giving us more options to cater to all needs. The diversity and size of marine life in Maunganui Bay has increased in the ten years since the Rahui has been in place.

9. We can now brief customers about seeing “The Captain”, a 20lb snapper in the bridge of the Canterbury Wreck or the super friendly hiwihiwi (kelp fish) at Putahataha Islands that sit on your hands, or seeing the massive packhorse crayfish at Motuwheke Island. This abundance and diversity of marine life is what paying customers love to see and expect to see, and when you can provide this week after week it is priceless.
10. After repeated requests from our clients, Northland Dive purchased an overnight vessel (Liveaboard) for trips to the Poor Knight Islands Marine Reserve 3 years ago. These trips are fully booked (every weekend) six months in advance. The same cannot be said about our coastal trips, because outside the no-take areas of Maunganui Bay and the Poor Knights, there are very few good dive sites to take our customers to.
11. I was pretty much bought up on the ocean in Whangaruru Harbour, spending all of our school holidays at the bach. As a teenager I have vivid memories of the entire harbour boiling with kahawai, and kingfish hitting our legs as we waded out in the water. We would fish and snorkel off the rocks. Back then there were lots of fish to see at these local reefs.
12. I took up diving with my father in 1986, in those days hunting & gathering from Whangamumu down to Mimiwhangata, but most of our dives were north of Mimiwhangata as we never had much success down there. I cannot remember seeing much at all, even by the late 1980s.
13. In 1999 Shane and I purchased a small farm block with a disused Cowshed in Tutaematai Valley and started converting it into accommodation. We would dive up and down the coast every weekend.
14. It was not uncommon for Shane to free dive down and collect his limit of scallops in two breath holds in the Bay of Islands. Now it can take 30-40 minutes to get a handful of scallops using scuba.
15. Initially our business provided dive trips for people to collect seafood. However, we learned early on in business that if we (and our clients) continued to take marine life as seafood there would be little left for our clients to see, as we could already see a decline in crayfish & scallop numbers. So we voluntarily reduced the take limits and increased size limits for customers on our dive trips. We did not dive at Mimiwhangata, and we were having to travel further along Cape Brett to very remote locations to experience more diverse marine life.
16. In the end it was an extremely easy decision for our business to go complete no take. Shifting to a no take operation did not reduce our customer numbers as lots of divers want to enjoy swimming among lots of relaxed fish. We noticed our customers shifted to coming out for their dives with cameras rather than catch bags, and that they enjoyed getting great shots of lots of relaxed fish. In 2019 we took about 1,100 people on our dive trips.

17. We employ a skipper and a certified underwater tourism guide (at about 0.5 FTE each) who work with us doing boat and dive work, as well as work around our lodge which accommodates our customers on their trips.

Area A: Proposed extension of no take area Maunganui – Oke Bay

18. A selection of photographs of marine life within Maunganui Bay are included in Appendix A.
19. The Rahui in Maunganui Bay is fantastic for diving, but it is very small with limited dive site options for our repeat business.
20. You can clearly see the difference in marine life between the current Maunganui Bay Rahui and the proposed extended Rahui Tapu to Oke Bay, even though the types of reefs are the same and could provide great habitat for lots of fish species in the extension area that is currently fished.
21. Before the Rahui we did not dive Maunganui Bay because there was very little to see. Since it has been closed to fishing the recovery of fish life and the kelp and sponges has been amazing and now provides a great dive site for our customers. We very rarely dive in the area of the proposed extension between Maunganui Bay and Oke Bay because the fishing means there is not much fish life to see. If it were closed to fishing and able to recover just as well as Maunganui Bay, when the fish came back we would go down and take divers there.
22. Outside the Rahui you just do not see the large snapper or resident Packhorse crays, or crayfish in waist deep water that are plentiful inside the Maunganui Bay Rahui, and fish of any sort are in very low numbers. Also, the fish that are living outside the current Rahui are extremely wary of your presence in the water as they see you as a predator and swim away or rush for cover. Kina barrens are also a problem in the fished areas because of the lack of large crays and snapper. There is nothing for divers to see in the kina barrens.
23. Our customers want to see seaweed, sponges, lots of fish and lots of different types of fish. There are big underwater reefs all along the coast from Mimiwhangata to Cape Brett and around to Oke Bay that should have amazing fish of all sorts on them. But sadly because of the amount of fishing along this coast it is very hard to find dive spots full of fish outside the Poor Knights Marine Reserve or Maunganui Bay Rahui.
24. Over the past couple of years, I have noticed a substantial increase in the number of recreational boaties visiting Maunganui Bay and snorkelling with their kids. This is a fantastic opportunity for the younger generation to enjoy the fish life as it should be, and pass on their positive experiences.
25. The proposed extension of the Maunganui Bay protected area would allow the public without vessels to walk a short distance to Oke Bay and swim off the shore. Those with smaller vessels would not have to travel as far. This would let many more people see and enjoy underwater life as it should be.

26. Within the proposed extension of the Rahui, out on the sand just south of Maunganui Bay we have seen a big patch of garden eels which are pretty rare in NZ.
27. Closing the bigger Maunganui-Oke Bay proposed area to fishing would give divers and snorkellers better opportunities to enjoy the underwater world in the Bay of Islands, which is very short on good places to see fish and marine life.

Area B: Ipipiri Benthic Protection Area (proposed no bottom contact methods)

28. I have seen the damage to the seabed ecosystems that results from dredging. Dredging kills the animals that live in and on the sandy bottom, and this reduces the food and habitat of the fish that depend on them.
29. Over the past 20+ years of diving we have seen the huge decrease in scallop numbers and all the other marine life that use to live with them on the bottom in the scallop beds.
30. We once could gather our scallop limit free diving on two breath holds and now it takes almost a full scuba tank and if you are very lucky you will get your limit. Although this indicates the level of decrease in scallop numbers, scallop beds are not just about scallops, the dredging has damaged the whole ecosystem.
31. People may think they are just dragging or dredging over a lifeless sandy bottom, but as a diver you only need to sit still and watch all of the little critters going about their daily chores to see that it is far from lifeless.
32. Lots of fish depend on the animals in the sandy bottoms for their food source. Any improvements to these habitats is beneficial for those ecosystems.

Area C: Ipipiri Rakaumangamanga Protection Area

33. Depending on weather conditions, we sometimes dive on very isolated spots south of Cape Brett. This area is fantastic for our technical divers (those who can dive deeper/longer) and more experienced divers. When we head to these areas we have a greater chance of seeing schooling kahawai & trevally at Cape Brett and Waiwiri Rocks, but the schools are not widespread.
34. Along the Cape Brett to Mimiwhangata coast, we just do not see the size, density and multi-species schools (kahawai, trevally, blue maomao, pink maomao, parore and a few snapper) that we see at the Poor Knight Islands Marine Reserve. These multi-species schools are seen in pretty much every little cove and outcrop at the Poor Knight Islands Marine Reserve where there is no fishing. The Cape Brett to Mimiwhangata coast has great rocky reefs and we would expect to see the same dense multi-species schools as at the Poor Knights.
35. We've seen kahawai and trevally schooling at The Nine Pin, Cape Brett and Waiwiri Rocks, but the work-ups of these schools are not widespread and do not have the diversity of the Poor Knights schools and work-ups.
36. Because of the lack of fish, we have to travel long distances by boat, from the few road access points, to take our customers to very isolated spots so they can

have an interesting dive outside the two no-take areas (Poor Knights & Maunganui Bay). While these isolated dive sites are great for experienced divers, they are not places we would take the average recreational diver.

37. Travelling these long distances to the very isolated dive sites adds costs to our business, like petrol and boat wear, and this affects our income.
38. Going to these remote dives sites should be unnecessary for most divers as the rocky reefs all along our coast could have lots of interesting fish on them, and these reefs would be very manageable for average divers.
39. Northland Dive also has a seal watching & swim permit within an area south of (but not including) Waiwiri Rock past Mimiwhanangata.
40. Our seal watching & swim permit should be a good tourism drawcard. However, we have never been able to use it due to a lack of seals. The seal haulout areas are generally where there are lots of fish and we just don't seem to have the consistent schools (food source) along the coast from Cape Brett to Mimiwhangata. to keep the seals on this coast. As a result, we do not even advertise this service.

Julia Riddle

19 March 2021

Appendix A – Marine life of Maunganui Bay



Figure 1 With kina controlled by large snapper and crayfish, kelp forests return to provide cover for fish in Maunganui Bay. Photo: Northland Dive



Figure 2 Delicate Gorgonian fans and other encrusting organisms make great habitat for many fish species on the boundary of the Maunganui Bay Rahui. Photo: Northland Dive



Figure 3 A diver enjoying a kingfish coming through a large school of sweep in Maunganui Bay. Photo: Northland Dive



Figure 4 Tarakibi like hanging out over these finger sponges growing on an old ladder from the Canterbury wreck in Maunganui Bay. Sponges and other species that provide habitat on the seafloor can be easily damaged by fishing methods that contact the bottom. Photo: Northland Dive