

**BEFORE THE ENVIRONMENT COURT
AT AUCKLAND
I MUA I TE KŌTI TAIAO O AOTEAROA
TĀMAKI MAKAURAU 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 CRAIG RONALD JOHNSTON
(DIVE TOURISM)**

TOPIC 14 – MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

19 March 2021

Royal Forest and Bird Protection
Society of NZ Inc
Solicitor acting: PD Anderson
PO Box 2516
Christchurch 8140
p.anderson@forestandbird.org.nz

Bay of Islands Maritime Park
Counsel: Sally Gepp
Level 1
189 Hardy Street
Nelson 7010
sally@sallygepp.co.nz

INTRODUCTION

1. My name is Craig Ronald Johnston.
2. I am a Padi Dive Instructor (since 1993) and Skipper since 1994, with over 30 years of scuba diving experience in the Bay of Islands and Northland (Poor Knights).
3. I have been the owner of Paihia Dive for 10 years. Paihia Dive is a diving and snorkelling tourism business operating from Paihia. We employ 12 staff during the summer and 6 in winter. My business takes out 1,800 plus passengers a year to the Maunganui Bay Rahui Tapu (no take area).
4. I understand that there is a proposal to extend the Rahui Tapu at Maunganui Bay to Oke Bay. My evidence describes my experience diving inside and outside the Maunganui Bay Rahui Tapu and how my business and other local businesses benefit if visitors having a range of healthy diving and snorkelling sites to visit, and how my business would benefit from the proposed extension.
5. 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

Inside the existing Maunganui Bay Rahui Tapu (no take area)

6. I have been diving in Maunganui Bay (also called Deep Water Cove) since I was 15 years old.
7. Before the Rahui Tapu we would only go into White Reef, in Maunganui Bay, if the weather was bad and we didn’t have any other options, because kina barrens were widespread, and there were not a lot of fish. Maunganui Bay had very few large snapper or crayfish. Schooling fish were limited in numbers, reef fish had very poor habitat and kina barrens were extensive.
8. Since it has been made a Rahui Tapu we have seen a steady improvement in the fish species and quantity of fish in the area. The kina barrens have decreased in size and now cover a fraction of the area that they used to. Large snapper and crayfish have returned and become used to seeing divers and snorkelers in the water, so do not shy away like they do in areas outside the Rahui Tapu (see image at end of evidence).
9. Now White Reef and Putahataha Islands in Maunganui Bay are our preferred spots for taking our customers on reef dives.
10. My dive instructors and I rate Putahataha Islands as one of the best dive sites in the Bay of Islands. This is because we are seeing the complete spectrum of fish life, from the tiny triplefins and blennies all the way up to the large kingfish and

snapper. The habitat has improved with lush kelp forest covering the majority of the rock walls, and sponge gardens beneath.

11. The value to the locals of the Maunganui Bay Rahui cannot be understated.
12. We now get recreational boats anchored for the day with families in the water snorkelling, seeing fish that are usually rare and shy, relaxed and cruising in a natural habitat.
13. As a commercial underwater tourism operator in the Bay of Islands, having a no-take reserve like this has a large positive economic impact:
 - a. Diving is a low ratio activity, we often have 4 passengers to 1 staff for diving, or 6 to 1 for snorkelling. Pay rates are near living wage so better than most other tourism activities.
 - b. International divers generally don't bring their own gear, so renting them expensive equipment in addition to taking them out on dive trips increases their spend as high value tourists.
 - c. Divers spend well on accommodation, food and other activities when traveling to the Bay of Islands.

Outside the Maunganui Bay Rahui Tapu (no take area)

14. Outside the Maunganui Bay Rahui Tapu, there are still lots of kina barrens and not a lot of fish. With a lack of large predator fish, the kina barrens are extensive, and this destroys the habitat of the smaller reef fish. Given the lack of smaller reef and bait fish in the Oke Bay to Maunganui Bay coast area, the recreational fishing is very limited.
15. I often freedive/spearfish this coast and due to the sparse habitat I rarely see fish of any note. Crayfish that we do find tend to be undersized and not big enough to eat kina.

Proposed extension to Oke Bay

16. This coast south of Maunganui Bay through to Oke Bay has some sheltered bays with nice reef features that with protection from fishing would likely recover to be as vibrant an ecosystem as we now see in the Manganui Bay Rahui Tapu.
17. The proposed extension to Oke Bay also offers some deeper sand areas for different fish such as giant boarfish and tarakihi. We have started to see these species in Maunganui Bay but it is a very small area, so having the area down to Oke Bay (which will make the whole no take zone 6.2km² or 4 times bigger) we will see these populations improve massively, which in turn will create a healthy population that will flow into adjoining areas.
18. The extension to Oke Bay would make it an easy reserve for people to access on foot from Oke Bay.

19. Having a healthy reserve in a few years' time will create demand for people to visit.
20. We would also consider expanding our business to take our snorkellers to see the fish life in the new reserve areas once they had recovered. This could create job opportunities in the Bay of Island. Many dive tourists would stay longer in Northland and the Bay of Islands if we had a greater number of interesting dive sites to take them to. This means we need more places with vibrant ecosystems and relaxed fish. On the Northland coast these are pretty much restricted to areas with no fishing.
21. It will also bring people to Rawhiti to snorkel out from Oke Bay which they will be able to walk to. Water activities require close supervision so this will create jobs locally.
22. My business is already busy running scuba trips to Maunganui Bay, but an expansion of the snorkel market would create growth for my business. This would then have a flow on effect to support other businesses in the area. We get our lunches supplied from a local café, our engines are serviced and maintained through a local mechanic, customers that come diving normally stay for 2 to 3 days in the area needing accommodation, they eat out at local restaurants, and do other activities while up in the Bay of islands
23. Tutukaka has prospered having the Poor Knights Marine Reserve on its doorstep, and I expect there could be similar economic benefits for the Bay of Islands.

Craig Johnston

19 March 2021



Snapper and Sandaggers Wrasse have returned to Maunganui Bay since the Rabui was established and do not shy away from divers like they do in areas outside the Rabui Tapu. Photo: Paibia Dive



Kina barrens are being replaced by kelp forest inside the Maunganui Bay rabui, creating a natural habitat for fish and encrusting species to live under. Photo: Paibia Dive



Tourist divers love to look for the tiny fish that live on the colourful walls of encrusting life at Putabataba Island in the Maunganui Bay Rabui. Photo: Paibia Dive



A kingfish glides past healthy kelp at Maunganui Bay Rahui. Paibia Dive