



Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust (MTSCT)

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Whangarei

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Department of Conservation

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### Submission on Revitalising the Gulf Marine protection proposals

The Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust (MTSCT) vision is that the biodiversity of our ocean, coastal areas, streams, rivers, lakes, and wetlands are respected as taonga (treasure). We view these systems with no boundaries. Restoration of any part of the system supports the whole.

Our mahi is primarily through our unique freshwater and marine inquiry-based, outdoor education programmes and a multitude of community events that encourage participation in communities through Experiencing Marine Reserves (EMR) and Whitebait Connection (WBC) over the last 20 years.

The Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust wishes to formally support the application for the Revitalising the Gulf proposal for 19 new marine protection zones, specifically for the educational, ecological, and scientific benefits.

About 6.5% of the Hauraki Gulf is currently protected from fishing, and almost all of this area is in the cable protection zones, as the existing six no-take marine reserves make up less than 0.5% of the Hauraki Gulf marine environment.

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The State of the Gulf reports highlight the urgent need for marine restoration. Habitat destruction, overfishing and loss of biodiversity and ecological function. This proposal will increase the total area of the Hauraki Gulf protected to about 12% (or 18% if the cable zones are included). Overall, this is a small increase in total area to be protected from fishing, but the proposal includes some large, well-designed and significant High Protection Areas (like marine reserves). The MTSCCT fully supports the inclusion of these large offshore areas, such as at the Mokohinau Island, Hauturu-o-Toi – Little Barrier, the Noises and the Te Ruamāhua - Aldermen Islands. We also support the smaller near shore areas proposed and specifically the extensions to two existing marine reserves at Leigh and Hahei which will enhance the effective protection of larger mobile predators like crayfish and snapper. Research from both Leigh and Hahei marine reserves have highlighted the effects of the reserve size and need to extend them. The MTSCCT support this ecological and scientific justification but also supports the wider social and educational benefits of increasing these two existing marine reserves.

The MTSCCT support the nested marine protected areas approach being proposed, as in some areas it will offers a buffer of protection. These High Protection Areas will prohibit commercial and recreational fishing and the seafloor protection areas will prohibit bottom impact fishing (trawling and dredging) but still allow other forms of fishing including recreational fishing.

For over twenty years, the MTSCCT have observed an abundance of marine life within the current no-take marine reserves in comparison to non-protected areas in Northeast New Zealand. In no-take areas there are more large predators, like snapper and crayfish, and kelp forests reestablish and are more abundant. Marine reserves provide a safe environment for important keystone species to recover. This change to a more natural state supports the food chains to become balanced again and reverse the effects of the trophic cascade currently affecting our shallow rocky reefs. At the Leigh and Tawharanui marine reserves there are noticeably higher numbers of snapper and rock lobster and lower numbers of kina, as opposed to adjacent unprotected waters. Importantly a more natural age structure is returning



for these two keystone predator species. This results in a noticeably healthier marine environment, as the kelp forests not only support a diversity of life but functionally act as important nurseries and can support surrounding areas.

Through our EMR – Te Kura Moana programme, students can observe the benefits of experiencing healthy functioning marine ecosystems and abundant kelp forests. This is an amazing experience for a young person and sadly not often experienced outside of our existing marine reserves or no-take rāhui due to the effects of fishing, especially in Northeastern New Zealand. Since the Trust was established, EMR has taken nearly 90,000 people into our marine reserves and nearly 31,000 people have been engaged in EMR organised marine conservation events. We have snorkeled with nearly 160,000 people throughout NZ and have run over 320 community engagement events nationwide.

The impact our EMR programme has on New Zealanders is significant. Snorkeling in marine reserves provides the most inspiration *“I saw a massive snapper!”* We see marine reserves as rich educational tools and often refer to them as ‘wet libraries.’ We also snorkel at a variety of other marine habitats and marine protected areas, such as rāhui, mātaimai and taipure. The MTSCT and EMR support all forms of marine protection that are led by communities and enhance marine biodiversity and the Mauri of the oceans for future generations.

We will continue to enhance the waterways that enter the Hauraki Gulf through our Whitebait Connection programme. We engage communities and generate community ownership of marine protected areas through EMR and support marine reserve monitoring, including through the Dr Roger Grace memorial fund.

The late Dr Roger Grace was an absolute champion for our marine environment and was highly engaged in the development of the Seachange proposal. He dedicated his life to marine conservation and tirelessly shared his wealth of knowledge with others. Roger was a trustee of the Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust from 2002 – 2018 and an honoured patron from 2018. A memorial fund has been established



which supports marine conservation and the establishment of no-take long term marine protection. This memorial fund is administered by the MTSCT.

The MTSCT current chairwomen, Kat Goddard was also involved in Seachange as a key Stakeholder Working Group member who helped design marine protection for the Hauraki Gulf. While marine protection alone will not fully restore the ecological health and function of the marine environment in the Hauraki Gulf, it will go a long way to supporting this, alongside other management measures.

The MTSCT supports the boundaries of the areas chosen based on the best available information and supports the educational, biological, environmental, and socio-economic benefits highlighted for each of the proposed marine protected areas.

The MTSCT supports the 12 High Protection Areas, 5 Seafloor Protection Areas and 2 existing marine reserve extensions, because this new protection in the Hauraki Gulf will help restore the health and Maui of the Hauraki Gulf for everyone to enjoy, which aligns with the Trust strategic goals. We look forward to the government stepping up and implementing more protection in the Hauraki Gulf, and around the rest of Aotearoa New Zealand.

If you would like to discuss this submission and the work the MTSCT and EMR programme does in the Hauraki Gulf or around Aotearoa New Zealand please don't hesitate to contact Samara Nicholas (Poutokomanawa/Co-director - Marine Lead) at [info@emr.org.nz](mailto:info@emr.org.nz)

On behalf of the whole MTSCT team, thank you for the opportunity to submit.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kat Goddard".

Kat Goddard



Chairwomen MTSCT



Whakamana te maunga  
Whakamana te wai  
He mauri o ngā tangata  
Ngā mea katoa he pai

*If we look after the water from the mountains to the sea, it will look after us.  
It is our life force.*

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## Appendix 1

Please read the student quotes below we have permission to use.

### *Student quotes:*

*"We have visited Goat Island Marine Reserve with EMR. Visiting the reserve opened our eyes as we saw lots fish and sustainable ecosystems. Seeing this made us care alot about marine reserves and other habitats and we think how incredible it would be if everybody got the experience.*

*When we visited Goat Island we were amazed by the clarity of the water and the diversity of the species, combined with the balance of the ecosystem. It really showed us what a healthy ecosystem looks like, not only underneath the water but also in the rock pools and other bodies of water like the streams that fed into the ocean.*

*We saw so many fish species; eagle rays, spotty, snapper, eleven armed starfish, crabs and a forest of kelp. It really shocked us how many species lived there compared to our local beaches. Personally it was a real eye opener, seeing the difference between a protected and unprotected area. This motivated us to take action and spread awareness.*

*Finally, if we had more marine reserves, we could get people to realise the impact of marine reserves, not only for the creatures but on people's point of view. Establishing more reserves will not only introduce new species but let others species thrive and get people excited and passionate about the health of our ocean and land. At our local beaches you can barely ever see fish and most of the seaweed is just washed up on the beach. Extending our marine reserves will motivate our people to care, similarly it will motivate anyone else (tourists) who visits us. It's crucial. if we don't act now it will be an inevitable that the health of our ocean will decline."*

*Lucy and Laura - Meadowbank school*



*"Now I have seen this role model ecosystem at Goat Island that we can look up to and help develop, other ocean ecosystems can rise up to the same level and help our water wildlife thrive."*

*Ngatai Hawke - Orakei School*

*"We enjoyed learning about healthy water ecosystems with EMR during our visit to Goat Island Marine Reserve and we would like to share some of what we experienced."*

*I was expecting less of this marine reserve. It was awe-inspiring to experience the difference in this ecosystem and environment, compared to our local beaches. It was beautiful swimming though the healthy water. Snapper poked in and out of the swaying kelp forests. Blue Cod and Red Moki mingled around each other. There was also an enormous amount of kina feeding on the kelp."*

*If we increase the amount of marine reserves in the Hauraki Gulf, then our local ecosystems will thrive. Also, if there are more reserves, more of the public can feel and see, what I felt and saw, and will do what I did - take action to protect it. I think it would be amazing to be able to just bike down to the beach with my friends and my snorkel gear, and feel what we experienced at Goat Island. I think it is crucial that we increase the marine reserves around Hauraki Gulf. IT'S NOW OR NEVER!"*

*Finley and Edward - Meadowbank School*



*Meadowbank students spotting big tamure and whai repo during their Goat island snorkel*



*Orakei student and parent enjoying their snorkel over Goat Island's rocky reef*





*Meadowbank students excited to explore Te Hawere a Maki/Goat Island*

