

Nicole Miller is passionate about protecting New Zealand's kelp gardens.
📷 Salty Slate

SEAWEED: A LOVE STORY

Citizen scientist Nicole Miller shares the beauty of Wellington's underwater forests in a new documentary. ✍️ **Caroline Wood**

There's an old conservation adage: you can't love what you can't see, and not many Wellingtonians have seen the octopus, kōura crayfish, sponges, and other critters that live on the rocky reefs of Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington Harbour.

Marine advocate Dr Nicole Miller is on a mission to change this. *Seaweed: A Love Story* is a short but powerful film that follows Nicole as she attempts to be the first person to scuba dive and film 70km of coastline around the harbour.

Along the way, she explores the hidden underwater kelp forests along Wellington's coast. The film draws attention to the previously undocumented decline of these vital nursery grounds and habitats.

"The seaweed forests along our coastlines are nursery grounds for many treasured kaimoana species, including pāua and crayfish," says Nicole.

"Like rainforests on land, our seaweeds support many other species and build the foundation for a food web that benefits penguins, dolphins, and us.

"We hope to inspire Wellingtonians to protect these incredible ecosystems and the species that depend on them – from seahorses, octopuses, and kaimoana to the diverse marine life that thrives there – before it is too late."

With almost 1000 hours logged underwater, Nicole has dedicated her life to raising awareness of the rich but fragile biodiversity of New Zealand's marine environments.

She is the founder of Explore Your Coast, the Chair of the Friends of Taputeranga Marine Reserve Trust, and a Winston Churchill Fellow.

While revealing the intricate beauty and diversity of our native seaweeds, the documentary also exposes the growing threats these vulnerable ecosystems face from overfishing, pollution, and climate change.

It captures drastic changes unfolding on the rocky reefs of Te Whanganui-a-Tara and shows how important it is to properly protect them.

Produced by Salty Slate, in collaboration with Nicole's citizen

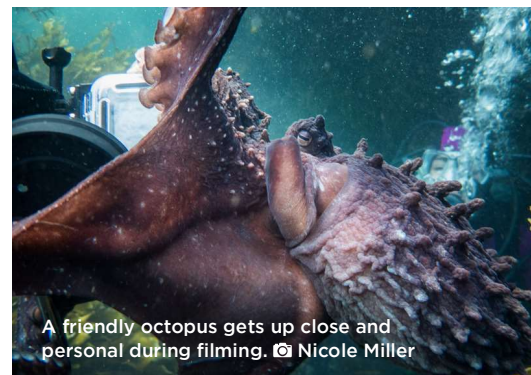
science project Explore Your Coast (see the Winter 2024 issue), *Seaweed: A Love Story* was filmed over two years.

Director and producer Rebecca Pratt said, "Growing up, I always saw Wellington as this lively, bustling capital city, full of people. And while that's true, I now see it as a place teeming with another kind of life – these delicate, awe-inspiring underwater forests.

"If only I had gills, I'd stay down there filming all day! But beyond showcasing the wonder of Wellington's giant kelp forests, I want the film to spark a sense of urgency, highlighting the mounting pressures these vital ecosystems face and the need for their monitoring.

"Through sharing Nicole's journey, I hope this film encourages others to find their own ways of connecting to and caring for their local ocean."

Nicole plans to carry on advocating for stronger protections for marine biodiversity across Aotearoa and hopes others will be inspired by the documentary to do the same for their local coastlines.



A friendly octopus gets up close and personal during filming. 📷 Nicole Miller

Seaweed: A Love Story premiered in May. You can watch the trailer here and find out about forthcoming viewings and Explore Your Coast events at www.exploreyourcoast.co.nz/docu. Nicole's ocean-inspired artwork can be viewed at www.oceanart.co.nz, with all profits going to her marine advocacy mahi.