

Submitters Details

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Submission on Tātou ki Uta - Coastal Reserves Management Plan

About Explore Your Coast

Explore Your Coast is a group of communications, science, education and marine conservation professionals, all volunteering their time to:

- **Inspire** New Zealanders to connect with the ocean.
- **Raise awareness** and understanding of coastal ecosystems and their ecological importance.
- **Empower** and support communities to become active stewards of the ocean.

We support communities across New Zealand to connect to, explore and document their coast. The observations gathered contribute to research for local conservation and restoration projects, helping decision-makers better manage and protect marine life and ecosystems.

Our vision is of a future where all New Zealanders have a strong connection to the ocean. Marine ecosystems are seen, talked about, and understood as the foundation for abundant and diverse marine life. Communities are empowered to restore and care for their local coastlines and benefit from healthy oceans and sustainable land-to-sea connections.

Most of our volunteers are based in Wellington and we engage with community groups and Wellington residents at events, through presentations and other initiatives raising awareness for Wellington's coastal marine ecosystems and promoting marine restoration. Many of the community groups we connect with are active users of WCC's coastal reserves or are involved in maintenance, pest removal and weed control in coastal reserves and catchments.

Why Coastal Reserves Matter to Explore Your Coast

Wellington's coastal reserves are essential for community connection with the natural world. As noted at many recent '*Vision for Wellington*' events – Wellington's natural capital provides a unique advantage for Wellington in attracting and keeping highly paid workers and talent across the tech, gaming and creative sector. Coastal reserves provide:

- Access to wild and inspiring coastlines, supporting wellbeing, identity, and creativity.
- Habitat for unique and vulnerable wildlife, including seabirds and marine mammals.
- A critical interface between land and sea — what happens on the land directly impacts the marine environment and vice versa.
- Opportunities for education, citizen science, and long-term stewardship.

During Explore Your Coast activities, we see how human activity, infrastructure, and climate change are shaping this interface — and how important proactive, inclusive management is to preserve its values on land and beyond the surface.

Support for the Plan

We support the intent and direction of the Coastal Reserves Management Plan and commend Council for:

- Recognising the ecological and cultural importance of Wellington’s coastlines.
- Elevating the role of mana whenua as kaitiaki and embedding mātauranga Māori.
- Taking a nature-first approach to shoreline protection, using dune restoration and soft engineering.
- Highlighting the need for community involvement and partnership in restoration and monitoring.

Key Issues and Opportunities

1. Overharvesting & Illegal Fishing

- The plan correctly identifies illegal and unsustainable harvesting - particularly pāua and shellfish.
- Increased urban access and increased use of our marine resources are and have pushed marine ecosystems to tipping points – underwater forests are now kina barren due to overfishing in many parts of the inner city. Adding to this is poaching pressures, which threaten marine biodiversity in areas that are just hanging on.
- This ongoing pressure undermines conservation goals and community trust.

Recommendations:

- Improve signage and public education on the impact of overfishing as well as marine reserve rules (i.e. at the Te Kopahou Reserve).
- Strengthen collaboration with DOC and MPI on compliance. This should include online information of the coastal reserves, particularly close the marine reserve.
- Strengthen compliance and enforcement and support volunteer community wardens and citizen surveillance.

2. Stormwater and Land-Sea Connections

Pollution from stormwater, historic landfills, and urban runoff is a critical threat to marine ecosystems.

Recommendations:

- Prioritise upgrades to stormwater infrastructure near sensitive marine areas.
- Support integrated catchment management approaches that include riparian planting and community engagement.
- Restore natural hydrology and use visible, educational green infrastructure (e.g. swales, rain gardens).

2. Wildlife Protection and Public Awareness

Wellington's coastlines are home to vulnerable species like kororā (little penguins), reef herons, and migratory seabirds. However, many people remain unaware of their presence or the risks posed by dogs, vehicles, and light pollution.

Recommendations:

- Formalise and promote wildlife sanctuary zones, especially for kororā.
- Use creative signage and storytelling (digital and physical) to make wildlife and marine life visible to the public and explain how wildlife relies on a healthy harbour and marine environment.
- Work with educators and creatives to help people understand seasonal sensitivities (e.g. breeding seasons).
- Enforce leash rules.

3. Community-Led Monitoring and Stewardship

We see strong public appetite for meaningful involvement in marine protection. Communities want to be part of solutions.

Recommendations:

- Support and fund citizen science and monitoring initiatives — especially around dune systems, water quality, and wildlife.
- Include cultural indicators alongside scientific data, reflecting local knowledge and values.
- Use data to explain what the impact of actions on land are on the catchment, the coastal reserve and the adjacent marine space
- Promote co-governance and community restoration partnerships.
- Support inclusive access to coastal education — e.g. through mobile experiences, school partnerships, and pop-up science storytelling. The Island Bay Education Centre with its aquarium is a cornerstone of marine education on the South Coast and has to be valued as such.

Suggestions for Strengthening the Plan

- **Boost education:** Use the reserves as living classrooms and storytelling landscapes.
- **Protect marine interfaces:** What happens in the reserves, how people use them and how they are managed (i.e. pest and invasive species management) directly affects the health of the marine environment and should be included in management plans.
- **Celebrate success:** Highlight positive case studies, including marine restoration and education success stories to build momentum.

Closing Comments

We appreciate the effort that has gone into the Coastal Reserves Management Plan and strongly support its intention to care for these places in partnership with mana whenua and the wider community.

Explore Your Coast sees this plan as a foundational step towards a more connected, resilient, and ocean-literate city - one that recognises and takes responsibility for its impact on the surrounding marine environment. Our volunteers are already helping Wellingtonians engage with the coast and we are excited about the potential to do even more in alignment with the plan's goals.

We look forward to supporting the Council in sharing stories, building awareness, and strengthening the connection between Wellingtonians and their coastal and marine environment.

Ngā mihi nui,

Nicole Miller

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