

## 4.7 Waters and Seabed of Fiords of Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) - An addition to

Te Wahipounamu (South-West New Zealand) World Heritage Area

### SITE LOCATION

The site includes the area of seabed and waters within the fiords on the western margin of Fiordland National Park, from Yates Point north of Milford Sound to Puysegur Point south of Preservation Inlet (see Map 4.7).

### SITE DESCRIPTION



Most of the 15 fiords of Fiordland are 200-300 m deep, usually with a pronounced shallower 'lip' near the mouth of the fiord, indicating 'over-deepening' by the glacial ice. The longer fiords reach back into the heart of the mountains of Fiordland National Park; the head of Hall Arm, for instance, is 40 km from the mouth of Doubtful Sound.

The marine environment of Fiordland is quite different from the rest of New Zealand. The deeply indented coastline has given rise to two contrasting marine environments:

- (a) the wild, exposed **outer coastline**, with typical west coast New Zealand marine community and zonation patterns, and the preferred breeding habitat for fur seals and a wide range of ocean birds such as petrels, prions, shearwaters and penguins; and
- (b) the sheltered, steep-walled **fiords**, which have a total shoreline length of nearly 1000 km, depths up to 420 m, and a unique inversion of usual patterns of coastal marine life.

Because of the large discharge of fresh water into a relatively calm fiord, the fresh water tends to float on the surface. This results in a distinct lack of shoreline inter-tidal seaweeds

and shellfish; on the other hand, there is a profusion of marine life below five metres depth. The low-salinity water (and the shadows cast by the steep walls of the fiords) stops light penetrating far into the water. As a consequence, unique assemblages of sea animals and plants (many usually associated with darker water below 30 m depth) thrive at relatively shallow depths.



Halls Arm, Doubtful Sound -  
a typical fiord landscape.  
*Les Molloy*

## VALUES THAT MAY JUSTIFY WORLD HERITAGE LISTING

The fiords are an integral part of the Fiordland landscape and ecosystems, which were included until the early 1960s within Fiordland National Park. However they were not included in the site when Fiordland National Park was listed as natural World Heritage in 1986. When the World Heritage Committee listed the park as World Heritage, one of its recommendations to the New Zealand government was “...to note the importance of the waters of the fiords as an integral part of the area and welcome any initiatives to bring them under the control of the park authorities”.

In 1990, when Fiordland National Park was incorporated into the much larger (2.6 million ha) **Te Wahipounamu (South-West New Zealand)** World Heritage Area, the issue of listing the seabed and waters of the fiords was again raised by the IUCN (The World Conservation Union) to enhance the integrity of this outstanding World Heritage site.

In April 2005, after the passing of the Fiordland Marine Management Act, the Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua) Marine Area and management regime was enacted:

- recognizing the importance of the Fiordland marine environment,
- establishing a Fiordland Marine Guardians Advisory Committee, and
- creating eight new marine reserves in addition to the existing ones of Milford Sound/Piopiotahi and Te Awaatu Channel (The Gut). These are, from north to south: Te Hapua (Sutherland Sound); Hawea (Clio Rocks) in Bligh Sound; Kahukura (Gold Arm) of Charles Sound; Kutu Parera (Gear Arm) of Bradshaw Sound; Taipari Roa (Elizabeth Island) in Malaspina Reach of Doubtful Sound; Moana Uta of Wet Jacket Arm; Taumoana in Dusky Sound (between Five Fingers Peninsula and Resolution Island); and Te Tapuwai o Hua in Long Sound of Preservation Inlet.



Black coral with different coloured snakestars and butterfly perch in the foreground. Fiordland Marine Area. Steve Wing

With these legal protection measures now adopted, the Advisory Group consider this to be an appropriate time to place the seabed and waters of the fiords on the New Zealand tentative World Heritage list, as an addition to Te Wahipounamu (South-West New Zealand) World Heritage Area.

The Advisory Group considers that the seabed and waters of the fiords and their flora and fauna, have features of outstanding universal value with respect to all four criteria and especially (ix) and (x). These can be summarized as follows:

- The fiords of Fiordland are a globally unique marine environment containing exceptional marine biodiversity.
- Many marine species in the fiords are found in unique associations; these include colourful sponges, 'black corals', tubeworms, sea pens, and sea stars which line the walls of the fiords.
- The fiords are now known to support the world's largest population of 'black coral' trees (about seven million colonies), some over five metres tall and up to 300 years old.
- The diversity of marine species and habitats of the rock walls of Fiordland are considered to rival those of the most species-rich regions of the globe.

Left: Red Coral, Fiordland Marine Area. Steve Wing  
Right: Scarlett wrasse, Fiordland Marine Area. Steve Wing





Sea pen, Fiordland Marine Area.  
*Steve Wing*

## INTEGRITY, MANAGEMENT, AND RISK ISSUES



Feather star,  
Fiordland Marine Area.  
*Steve Wing*

The Advisory Group has no doubts that the addition would increase the physical and biological integrity of Te Wahipounamu (South-West New Zealand) World Heritage Area.

The proposed addition is now under legal protection and a comprehensive management regime, reinforcing its potential value as natural World Heritage. There appears to be no legal or management impediments to listing. Indeed, making this addition to the existing World Heritage site would seem to be in keeping with the conservation vision of the Fiordland Marine Guardians Advisory Committee, even though the fiord waters are not formally part of Fiordland National Park.

A commitment was made to the above Guardians that no changes in legal status or management objectives would be implemented during the first five years of the new regime's operation. The Advisory Group considers, therefore, that any nomination of this site addition should be delayed until the five year period has passed. This would allow time for all parties to be consulted and for higher priority listings to be advanced to nomination in the meantime.