

Bay of Plenty - Islands



Public Conservation Land

Marine Reserve

Marine Reserve

2.4 ISLANDS



The New Zealand archipelago is recognised globally as a hotspot of biological diversity. Many of its organisms, including an exceptional range of land snails, spiders, lizards and seabirds, are found nowhere else.

The future of New Zealand's biological heritage depends on these islands. Continental or former land bridge islands – those which until relatively recently were connected to the mainland, during periods of lower sea level - constitute over eighty per cent of New Zealand's islands. These are distinctive for their high biodiversity and they often support unusual combinations of species not found on the mainland.


These “ecological lifeboats”, which developed through isolation and rising sea levels, protect many rare and threatened organisms in pest-free environments. They are internationally significant as the last refuges for species once widespread but now extinct on the mainland.

Islands are important as sites for ecological restoration programmes, sources for translocation, sources of knowledge for restoration goals and methods, sites for research and climate change monitoring, and educational tools and for the preservation of archaeological landscapes.

Islands provide a dramatic backdrop to the Bay of Plenty's mainland landscapes. Most contain important geological features, ranging from sandbanks to significant volcanic formations. There are 57 islands or island groups (both offshore and within freshwater lake systems) in the conservancy. Many of these are small and relatively insignificant and the majority are not in public ownership.

The larger privately-owned islands of Tuhua and Mokoia, and the publicly owned but jointly managed Moutohora, are of highest conservation value. The Department of Conservation works in partnership with tangata whenua on these and other islands including Rurima, Motunau and Matakana. These islands are referred to specifically in this place because of their conservation importance and the long history of management partnerships which the department and the islands' owners have developed.

The department administers a small number of islands within the Bay of



Plenty including Moutohora, Karewa, Motuotau (Rabbit Island) and several islands within Ohiwa Harbour.

Culture and history

The Bay of Plenty's islands have a long history of human settlement and visitation. Tangata whenua have a special relationship with the islands, which they have used - and continue to use - for many purposes, including growing and gathering resources. The remains of significant pa, garden, urupa and battle sites can be found on Tuhua, Moutohora and Mokoia. Islands provide important examples of intact cultural landscapes, incorporating a full range of archaeological sites; on the mainland, many such sites have been disrupted by development.

Many islands have historic associations with European settlement. Some have provided bases for whaling, farming, quarrying, sulphur mining, scientific exploration and collection.

Biodiversity

Pests have been removed from a number of islands in the Bay of Plenty. The biodiversity values of the islands are nationally significant because of this pest-free status.

Most of the larger islands support mature or secondary vegetation. They are often covered by pohutukawa-dominated forest. Other species include rewarewa, karo, mahoe, five finger, kanuka, coastal mahoe and ngaio.

Threatened flora occurs on many islands. Species include mowhai, Cook's scurvy grass and shore spurge. Several threatened plants have been successfully introduced to Mokoia and Moutohora. They include *Pimelia tomentosa*, pingao, mowhai, Cook's scurvy grass and shore spurge.

New Zealand fur seals haul out on many of the islands and there are recent records of breeding on Moutohora. There are major breeding populations of seabirds on Moutohora (grey-faced petrel), Whakaari (Australasian gannet) and Karewa (flesh-footed shearwater).

Five islands support northern tuatara populations, two of which were recently re-established. Tuhua supports populations of North Island kaka and is one of the few offshore islands where the Australasian bittern is present. Brown teal have recently been introduced here. The North Island kokako has been released onto Mokoia and tieke have been released onto Mokoia and Moutohora. North Island brown kiwi have been introduced to Mokoia, Moutohora and Tuhua. Gecko and skink populations are showing signs of recovery since animal pests and browsers have been removed.

Many of the islands in the Bay of Plenty have been modified by vegetation clearance and development, forestry, fire, grazing, pest plants and animals, and development of tracks and recreation activities. Protection, restoration and monitoring are required to further enhance the biodiversity values associated with these fragile and unique ecosystems.

The major threats to islands and their biodiversity are the reintroduction of pests (and new incursions) and fire.

Visitors

Public access to the islands in the Bay of Plenty is generally limited.

Community

There are few opportunities for general public involvement in island conservation work. However, where residential settlements are present, such as on Matakana, the involvement of local residents is vital to success.

Where islands are privately or jointly owned, conservation work is undertaken through memoranda of understanding, protocols and other formal and informal agreements and management plans.

The department gives priority to conservation work on islands with high biodiversity values. Where these islands are privately owned, the department works in collaboration with landowners.

Islands on Public Conservation Lands and Waters


Moutohora (Whale Island)



Moutohora (143 hectares) is Crown land reserved as a wildlife management reserve under the Reserves Act 1977 and is a wildlife refuge pursuant to the Wildlife Act 1953. The island is administered by a joint management committee established by the Ngati Awa Claims Settlement Act 2005. The committee consists of three representatives of Ngati Awa, two representatives of the Minister of Conservation, and one representative from the Bay of Plenty Conservation Board.

Moutohora has traditional and cultural significance for tangata whenua, with many recorded sites and a colourful history. It is one of the few known areas in the country containing the range of human occupation from Polynesian through to European settlement, where all sites are well preserved and under no threat from development.

Moutohora is densely clothed with rapidly regenerating kanuka, pohutukawa



and some localised ngaio vegetation. A revegetation programme was carried out in the early 1980s. Eleven nationally and regionally threatened plant species, including shore spurge, pingao and Cook's scurvy grass, have been reintroduced to the island since 1999 as part of an ongoing threatened plant restoration programme. Eradication of introduced pest animals was completed in 1987 and the island is now an important ecological unit and is becoming a haven for threatened species.

Birdlife on Moutohora includes a large breeding colony of about 70 000 pairs of grey-faced petrels, small breeding groups of blue penguin and variable oystercatcher, the threatened New Zealand falcon and the New Zealand dotterel. Moutohora is the northern limit for speckled skink (*Oligosoma infrapunctatum*). Red-crowned parakeets have been released on the island along with northern tuatara, tieke (North Island saddleback) and North Island brown kiwi.

Karewa

Karewa (3.5 hectares) lies off Matakana Island near Tauranga and is a Government purpose (wildlife refuge) reserve under the Reserves Act 1977. The island is administered by the department in close co-operation with tangata whenua, in recognition of its important cultural values.

A colony of northern tuatara lives communally with the conservancy's only flesh-footed shearwater (*Puffinus carneipes*) population, whose tunnels honeycomb the island. Common diving petrels breed here in good numbers. Karewa is dominated by taupata and coastal mahoe shrublands and supports several threatened plant species including parapara and Cook's scurvy grass. The island was traditionally a harvest site for titi (mutton birds) and kai moana.

Other Smaller Islands

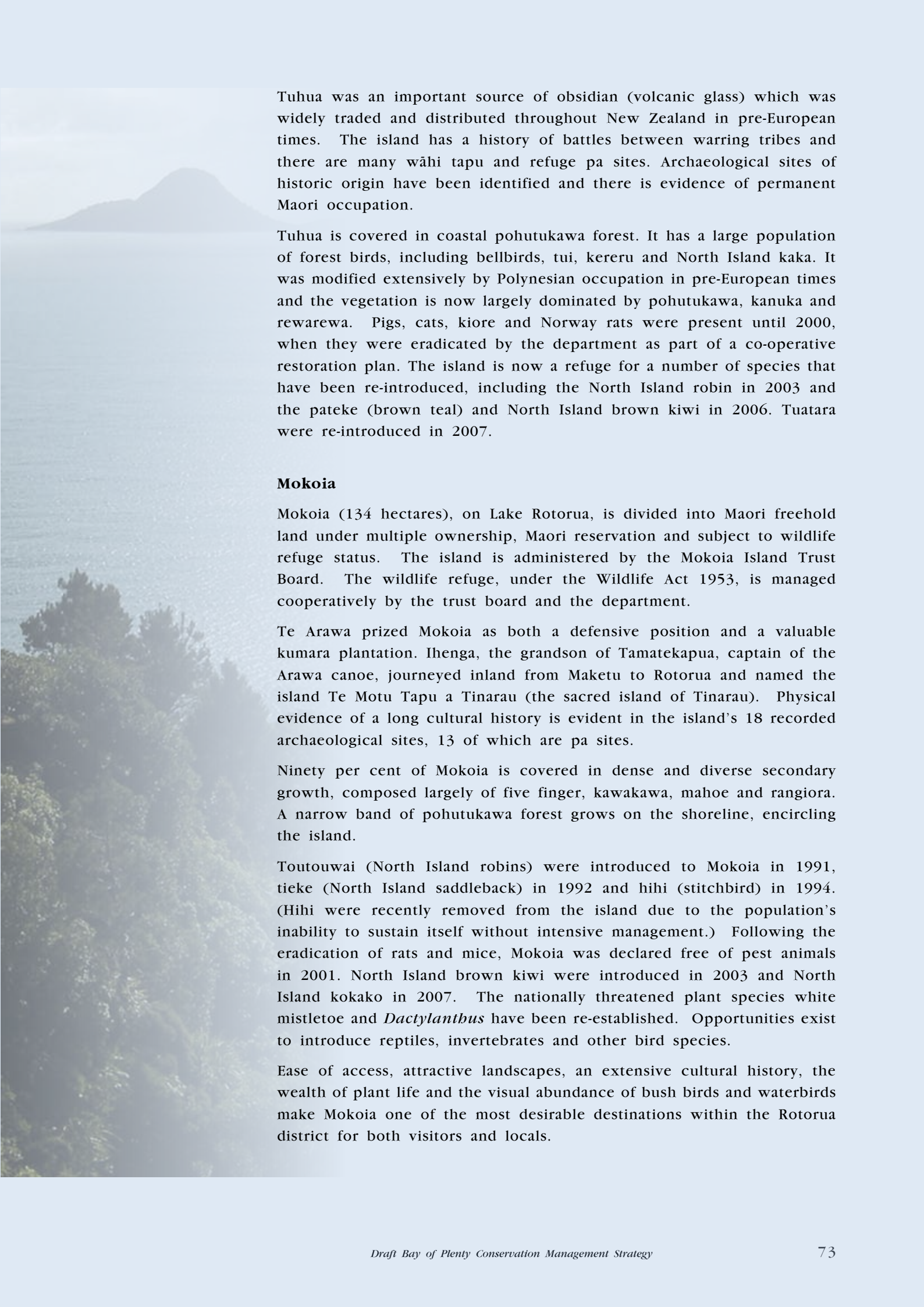
The department administers several smaller islands on public conservation lands and waters. These include Motuotau, Patiti, Whangakopikopiko (Tern Island), Uretara (Duckers Island), Motuotu and Pataua.

Privately owned islands

Tuhua (Mayor Island)

Tuhua (1276 hectares) is owned by Te Whanau o Tauwhau ki Tuhua and administered by the Tuhua Trust Board. It is a wildlife refuge pursuant to the Wildlife Act 1953. A formal agreement is in place between the department and the trust board for the collaborative ecological restoration of the island. Most of Tuhua is protected under a Nga Whenua Rahui kawenata under section 27A of the Conservation Act 1987.

Tuhua was connected to the mainland during the last glacial period. About 6300 years ago, it was virtually sterilised by a major volcanic event. As a result, Tuhua's flora and fauna is not particularly diverse, and it is more like an oceanic island than many of the other islands in the conservancy.



Tuhua was an important source of obsidian (volcanic glass) which was widely traded and distributed throughout New Zealand in pre-European times. The island has a history of battles between warring tribes and there are many wāhi tapu and refuge pa sites. Archaeological sites of historic origin have been identified and there is evidence of permanent Maori occupation.

Tuhua is covered in coastal pohutukawa forest. It has a large population of forest birds, including bellbirds, tui, kereru and North Island kaka. It was modified extensively by Polynesian occupation in pre-European times and the vegetation is now largely dominated by pohutukawa, kanuka and rewarewa. Pigs, cats, kiore and Norway rats were present until 2000, when they were eradicated by the department as part of a co-operative restoration plan. The island is now a refuge for a number of species that have been re-introduced, including the North Island robin in 2003 and the pateke (brown teal) and North Island brown kiwi in 2006. Tuatara were re-introduced in 2007.

Mokoia

Mokoia (134 hectares), on Lake Rotorua, is divided into Maori freehold land under multiple ownership, Maori reservation and subject to wildlife refuge status. The island is administered by the Mokoia Island Trust Board. The wildlife refuge, under the Wildlife Act 1953, is managed cooperatively by the trust board and the department.

Te Arawa prized Mokoia as both a defensive position and a valuable kumara plantation. Ihenga, the grandson of Tamatekapua, captain of the Arawa canoe, journeyed inland from Maketu to Rotorua and named the island Te Motu Tapu a Tinarau (the sacred island of Tinarau). Physical evidence of a long cultural history is evident in the island's 18 recorded archaeological sites, 13 of which are pa sites.

Ninety per cent of Mokoia is covered in dense and diverse secondary growth, composed largely of five finger, kawakawa, mahoe and rangiora. A narrow band of pohutukawa forest grows on the shoreline, encircling the island.

Toutouwai (North Island robins) were introduced to Mokoia in 1991, tieke (North Island saddleback) in 1992 and hihi (stitchbird) in 1994. (Hihi were recently removed from the island due to the population's inability to sustain itself without intensive management.) Following the eradication of rats and mice, Mokoia was declared free of pest animals in 2001. North Island brown kiwi were introduced in 2003 and North Island kokako in 2007. The nationally threatened plant species white mistletoe and *Dactylanthus* have been re-established. Opportunities exist to introduce reptiles, invertebrates and other bird species.

Ease of access, attractive landscapes, an extensive cultural history, the wealth of plant life and the visual abundance of bush birds and waterbirds make Mokoia one of the most desirable destinations within the Rotorua district for both visitors and locals.

Rurima

The Rurima Rocks (5.4 hectares) are Maori-owned and Ngati Awa are tangata whenua. These three small islands - Moutoki, Rurima and the rock stack of Tokata - have wildlife refuge status under the Wildlife Act 1953. They are predominantly covered with pohutukawa forest and taupata shrublands.

Rurima became free of predators (kiore) in 1986 and is the northern limit for the speckled skink.

Moutoki has one of the few Bay of Plenty northern tuatara colonies and the only natural population of mawhai (indigenous cucumber).

Whakaari (White Island)

Whakaari (237 hectares), a scenic reserve pursuant to the Reserves Act 1977, is privately owned by the Buttle family of Auckland. It is an active volcano with a stark striking landscape. Vegetation diversity is limited: there are patches of regenerating pohutukawa forest, shrubland and herbfields around the coastline. Several large Australasian gannet breeding colonies can be found on the headlands and there are small grey-faced petrel breeding colonies around the coast. Kiore are present. The island once had a sulphur mining operation but that closed decades ago and all that remains is a derelict building.

Motunau (Plate Island)

Motunau (2.8 hectares) comprises two small Maori-owned islands. Ngati Whakahemo are tangata whenua. Motunau, a wildlife sanctuary under the Wildlife Act 1953, is dominated by coastal pohutukawa and karo shrublands. It is predator-free and is a breeding site for northern tuatara and New Zealand fur seals. It is also home to breeding colonies of grey-faced petrel and red-billed gulls. The Pukehina Marae Committee, representing Ngati Whakahemo, controls the seasonal taking of titi (mutton birds), pursuant to the Grey-faced Petrel (Northern Muttonbird) Notice 1969, and the taking of kai moana.

Matakana

Matakana (6000 hectares) is 27.5km long from Panepane through to Waikoura. Most of the island is in private production forestry and the rest is farmed.

The significant wetland system on the island is protected as a wildlife refuge. The coastline of Matakana is home to many unique, rare and endangered plant species. The endangered New Zealand dotterel nests on the island. To maximise the survival rate of the dotterel, annual predator trapping is carried out during the nesting season.

Motiti and associated islets

Motiti (690 hectares) is a large plateau reaching 57 metres above sea level, surrounded by low coastal cliffs. About 30 people live here.

With its subtropical climate and fertile volcanic soils, the island is ideal for fruit and vegetable production. It has been extensively farmed and cropped for the past 150 years. Remnant indigenous vegetation (predominantly pohutukawa) is restricted to the cliffs.

The 34 recorded historic places on Motiti include pa, terraces, pits, urupa and one settlement.

Motiti is surrounded by a number of small (under three hectares) uninhabited islets that are either in Maori or private ownership. These include Motuputa, Motukahakaha, Turitea, Motupatiki and Taumaihi. Each islet supports nesting seabird colonies and a range of lizard species including shore skink, moco skink, Duvaucel's gecko and common gecko.

Outcomes - Islands

1. The diverse habitats and ecosystems of islands are flourishing and sustain viable populations of indigenous flora and fauna.
2. The department is working in partnership with the owners of islands to achieve conservation outcomes.
3. Islands are recognised and valued for their contribution to protecting nationally significant biodiversity.
4. Island conservation initiatives are understood and supported by tangata whenua and communities of interest.

Management Objectives

1. To improve progressively the overall quality and functioning of island ecosystems and habitats.
2. To maintain the current pest-free status of islands.
3. To work with tangata whenua and the community to recognise and protect the sites and stories of special historical and cultural significance on islands.

Management Policies

1. Will work in partnership with the owners and tangata whenua in island management, including planning, developing and implementing conservation programmes.
2. Will develop and implement biosecurity plans to prevent the incursion and spread of pests on Moutohora, Mokoia and Tuhua.
3. Will develop with the Joint Management Committee a conservation management plan for Moutohora.
4. Will support priority research on islands.
5. Will manage visitor access to islands to protect biodiversity values.

Refer
1.4 Historical and cultural
heritage: objectives and
policies