

Diving at Tuhua Marine Reserve

Tuhua (Mayor Island) Marine Reserve, north of Tauranga, was established in January 1993 to protect marine organisms and their habitats for present and future generations.

It covers about three square nautical miles at the northern end of the Island and extends from mean high water springs mark to one nautical mile offshore. The reserve includes about five kilometres of coastline from Tumutu Point east to Turanganui Point.

Tuhua is renowned for its high water quality, mix of over sixty fish species including deep sea and subtropical species unusual in the Bay of Plenty and stunning geological features. Tuhua is one of more than thirty marine reserves protecting our seas around New Zealand and is a great place for diving and snorkelling.

What is there to see?

Opoupoto Bay (Cathedral Bay)

At the western end of the marine reserve a jagged reef with angular boulders slopes off steeply to the northwest from Tumutu Point. To the east of this within Opoupoto Bay, a sandy bottom with projecting boulders extends from a shoreline formed of vertical, column like lavas which give rise to the other name of Cathedral Bay.

A series of 3-4 metre angular rock blocks separated by gaps and crevices 1-4 metres wide and 2-3 meters deep is present in water of shallow to moderate depth (20 metres) from the area off Whakataratara Island (Maori Chief) east to and beyond Motuneka Rocks. There are almost continuous canopies of kelp forest over these shaded and sheltered crevices. The forests support many colourful organisms, which more usually occur in deeper water.

Orongatea Bay

Within Orongatea Bay a quite different habitat appears in the form of rounded boulders and cobbles with a diverse range of seaweeds. An extensive shallow rock platform suitable for snorkelling occurs here and bubbles emitted from a series of underwater hot springs can be seen close to shore.

Offshore from Orongatea bay between Tokopapa (Flat Top) Island and Tawakewake (Queen) Island, the bottom drops to 30 metres or more, and a large irregular rock platform with patches of rounded boulders and sand extends to the north-east. Arising on the edge of this platform to a depth of about 4 metres and dropping steeply on its northern side to a sandy beach at 50 metres, is an out crop known as the Two Fathom Reef. The steep drop off here, which lies close to the edge of the continental shelf, illustrates well the depth-related patterns of plant and animal distributions. Schools of pelagic fish species can also often be seen. Diving in this area should only be attempted by experienced and qualified divers, as there are often strong currents and eddies.

Turanganui (Elephant) Bay

At the eastern end of the reserve is a sheltered embayment, Turanganui or Elephant Bay. The bay is flanked by steep borders of jagged reef, while the beach and shallows are formed of boulders giving way to coarse sand in the centre of the bay at about 15 metres depth.



Credit K Westerskov



Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai



Credit K Westerskov

Marine Life at Tuhua

Within the marine reserve a “mixed weed” zone occurs from low tide mark to depths of 6-9 metres. Rock girdles are the most common seaweeds, but other brown red and green species also characterise the zone. Amongst these weeds and beyond the depth limits of the zone there are often dense concentrations of sea urchins or kina. Kina graze on seaweeds and so reduce some areas to the appearance of bare rock.

From about 3-30 metres, paddleweed kelp forms dense forests wherever rock bottoms are present. Beneath these canopies there may be other smaller algal species in addition to “bushy” or “encrusting” animals such as hydroids, bryozoans, sponges, ascidians, soft corals and anemones. In depths of 30 metres or more or in areas where light levels are insufficient to support algal growth, these and other filter feeding animals are common and become more so with greater depth. Cup corals, extensive areas of lace coral and beds of black coral also occur in these deeper areas of water off the eastern end of the island.

Other subtidal animals include large black spiny sea urchins, chitons, snails, and limpets, feather stars, starfish, and sea cucumbers, and rock lobsters and crabs.

Over sixty species of fish are known in the area. Common species in shallow, rocky areas include black angelfish, leatherjacket, hiwihivi, marblefish, paketi, banded wrasse and red moki. Two spot demoiselles, sweep and blue maomao occur widely and red mullet or goat fish are common in sandy areas. Moray eels and stingrays are seen in parts and schools of koheru, kingfish, trevally and pink maomao often congregate near pinnacles and deeper water drop offs. “Sub-tropical” species sometimes seen include Lord Howe coralfish, long finned boar fish, clown toado and crimson cleanerfish. Many fish numbers are relatively impoverished at present but are hoped to increase over time.



From top to bottom: Blue Maomao, Lord Howe Coralfish, Goat fish. Credit DOC.

Protecting the Marine Reserve

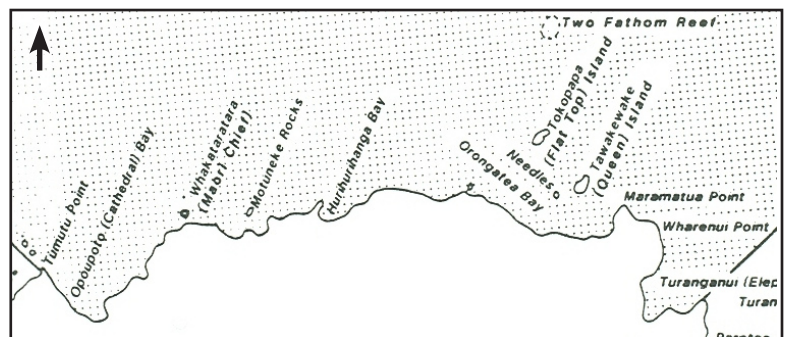
The success of the reserve depends on a caring responsible attitude and a commitment to the conservation of the area by everyone who uses it. Within a marine reserve, all marine life is protected and fishing and the removal or disturbance of any living or non-living marine resource is prohibited, except as necessary for permitted monitoring or research. This includes dredging, dumping or discharging any matter or building structures.

Tuhua Marine Reserve is managed by the Department of Conservation (DOC) under the Marine Reserves Act 1971. Failure to comply with regulations under this act may result in prosecution. Surveillance and enforcement is undertaken by the Department and other supporting agencies. Please report suspicious activity in the reserve to the DOC Hotline (0800 362 468). The restricted fishing area is managed by the Ministry of Fisheries.

Further Information

For additional information on the Tuhua Marine Reserve please contact the Tauranga DOC office: phone 07 578 76777 or email taurangainfo@doc.govt.nz

Updates from annual monitoring surveys and visitor information is available online at www.doc.govt.nz/tuhua



Northern coastline of Tuhua (Mayor) Island showing some features of the marine reserve

