

Te Whanganui-A-Hei (Cathedral Cove) Marine Reserve

Introduction

When Te Whanganui-A-Hei (Cathedral Cove) was gazetted in 1992 it became New Zealand's sixth marine reserve. The reserve, on the east coast of the Coromandel Peninsula between Hahei and Cook Bluff, covers nine square kilometres and is administered by the Department of Conservation in partnership with the Te Whanganui-A-Hei Marine Reserve Committee.

What are marine reserves?

In the same way that national parks protect species and habitats on land, marine reserves protect representative coastal and marine landscapes and the marine life within them. Safe from harvesting and other disturbances, plant and animal communities in these reserves thrive – precious taonga protected now and into the future for the benefit and enjoyment of all.

The value of protecting marine areas was slow in gaining momentum, however, and even today, less than 8% of New Zealand's territorial waters are protected in marine reserves. We have a total

of 33 marine reserves (2010 figures) but more need to be created to ensure that a variety of unmodified and typical coastal habitats are protected.

Why is this area important?

This site was chosen for a marine reserve because of the rich and varied habitats associated with the coastline and outlying islands. Reefs of hard rock, soft sediments, intricate caves and underwater arches provide homes for complex communities of plants, crustacean, molluscs and fish. Sheltered from the worst of the southerly winds, Te Whanganui-A-Hei gives visitors an unparalleled opportunity to appreciate an unspoilt marine environment.

Reserve boundaries

Information signs are located at Hahei Beach, Wigmore Stream, Cooks Beach and Whitianga launching ramps. These signs have maps showing the reserve boundaries and other information about the reserve. The coastal and island boundaries are indicated by yellow poles (see map over page). Floating yellow lights operate from dusk to dawn; these are visible for one nautical mile. If you are unsure of the boundaries please refer to the signs or seek additional information from the Department of Conservation.

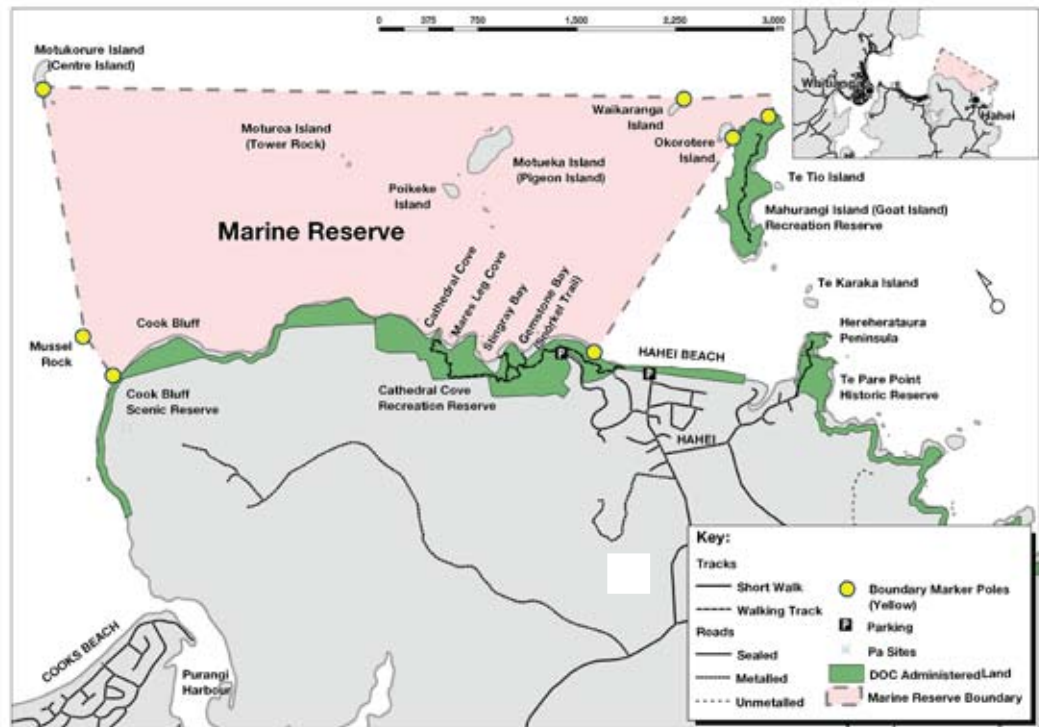
Special for tangata whenua

Te Whanganui-A-Hei is part of a special area first claimed by Hei, a Taura (teacher/skilled person) from the waka Te Arawa, some time around 1350 AD. On a northbound voyage from the Bay of Plenty to Hauraki, Hei chose the area around Mercury Bay to settle with his people. He proclaimed ownership by referring to Motueka Island as "Te kuraetanga-o-taku-lhu" (the outward curve of my nose). It is said that he made this claim near the present day site of Hahei. Hei's descendants still retain a strong ancestral and spiritual attachment to the area and continue their role of kaitiaki (guardians) of the bountiful resources within it.

Cathedral Cove - where fish too, can swim in peace! (Des Williams / DOC)



Te Whanganui-A-Hei (Cathedral Cove) Marine Reserve boundaries.



Snorkelling and diving

The snorkelling and swimming opportunities in Te Whanganui-A-Hei Marine Reserve are plentiful, especially in the shallow waters around Stingray Bay (Te Karaka) and the western side of Mahurangi Island. Gemstone Bay (Waimata) has a snorkel trail marked by buoys that illustrate the marine habitats and associated species that live in the waters below them.

Much of the reserve is suitable for diving; the sponge gardens and reef systems are of particular interest. Remember, taking fish or other marine life from a marine reserve is prohibited. Take care to avoid damaging underwater features and no souvenir hunting please!

Hidden caves, coastal cliffs

A huge variety of habitats lie hidden beneath the waves – boulder banks, steep rocky cliffs, sandy shores, convoluted reefs and hidden caves, to name just a few. Each is home to a unique marine community. Crayfish and black angel fish hide in the cracks and crevices of reefs such as those around Mahurangi Island. In the large boulder fields near Motueka Island curious schools of sweep may follow divers.

Delicate corals, usually found at great depth, are close to the surface in Poikeke Island cave. Closer to shore, brittle starfish might be found on rocky platforms; the small uncommon paua cling to steep inter-tidal walls; and red moki graze amid forests of seaweed. Predators, like the leather-jacket, top the food chain picking their food from a range of smaller animals.

Where light penetrates sufficiently seaweeds flourish, providing shelter, camouflage, food and oxygen – the maritime equivalent of our beech forests or tussock grasslands.

Boating

Boating is permitted in the reserve but you must take care if anchoring. Waste, ballast and sewage must not be discharged within the reserve. Observe the speed limit of five knots within 30 metres of other vessels or people in the water and 200 metres of the shore or any vessel flying a diver flag.

Walking tracks

There are several scenic walks on land adjacent to the reserve, including the Cathedral Cove track which gives access to Gemstone Bay, Stingray Bay, Mare's Leg and Cathedral Cove. Access to Cathedral Cove carpark is available at the western end of Hahei Beach and Te Pare Point Historic reserve is at the eastern end of Hahei Beach.



Visitors returning to the Cathedral Cove carpark after visiting the marine reserve. (DOC photo).