

# Tonga Island Marine Reserve



NELSON/MARLBOROUGH CONSERVANCY



Department of Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*

## Kupu Whakataki

E ngā iwi, e ngā reo, e ngā karangatanga maha o ngā hau e whā.

*All peoples, all voices, all the many relations from the four winds.*

Tēnei te mihi atu ki a koutou katoa.

*Greetings to you all* (from the people of Ngāti Rārua and Te Ātiawa).

Māori have a history of occupation and a customary tradition with Tonga Island; the name "Tonga" is a reference to the "Southerly Wind". This area has always been important to Māori and is of particular significance to the mana whenua iwi of Te Tai Tapu.

Eke Panuku! Eke Tangaroa!

*Move forward (ride the wave)! Enhance the mana of Tangaroa (God of the Sea)!*

Toitū te marae a Tāne, toitū te marae a Tangaroa, toitū te Iwi.  
*When the realm of Tāne and the domain of Tangaroa are sustained, so too is the future of our people.*

## Tonga Island Marine Reserve

Renowned for its golden sand beaches, sculpted granite rocks, enclosed estuaries and coastal vegetation, Abel Tasman National Park is one of New Zealand's most popular natural areas. The creation of Tonga Island Marine Reserve in November 1993 marked a new era in the protection of this beautiful coastline.



A hermit crab peers out from the safety of its mobile home. Photo: Eric Simmons.

Tonga Island Marine Reserve is located centrally along the Abel Tasman National Park between Awaroa Head and the headland on the northern side of Bark Bay. It extends offshore for one nautical mile (1852m) from the mean high water mark of Tonga Island and the mainland coast, covering an area of 1835 hectares.

Many features typical of New Zealand's northernmost sheltered granite coastline are found here: crescent-shaped sandy beaches, rocky headlands and reefs, small estuaries and a sand-mud sea floor.

**Tonga Island Marine Reserve protects all marine life within its boundaries. No fishing or taking of marine life is allowed.**

## Abel Tasman National Park

Steeped in a long history of Maori and Pakeha occupation, Abel Tasman National Park invites exploration. It is the smallest national park in New Zealand, covering around 23,000 hectares. The coast and world-renowned Abel Tasman Coast Track attract very high numbers of visitors, including trampers, day walkers, kayakers and boaties alike.

The national park was gazetted in 1942, on the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Abel Tasman's visit to this country. Several decades later, in 2007, the Abel Tasman Foreshore Scenic Reserve was created, adding greater protection to the estuaries, beaches and rocky shores bordering the park.

It is hard to imagine the Abel Tasman National Park without thinking of the sea. The sea has shaped its coast and flushes its estuaries. It bore both Maori and Europeans to this land and provided sustenance once they arrived. Yet surprisingly the sea has had little protection; many years of fishing and shellfish gathering have left their mark. Tonga Island Marine Reserve now protects a significant stretch of the Abel Tasman coastline and is a perfect neighbour to the national park.

## What are marine reserves?

Our record in protecting natural areas on land is a good one, but only in recent years have we realised the importance and benefits of protecting areas of our diverse coastline and seas.

Marine reserves are areas of sea within which all marine life and habitats are fully protected. As such, marine reserves are able to recover from past exploitation and function as close to their natural state as possible. They provide a

benchmark against which the effects of other activities in our seas can be measured, and allow us to study marine life and learn about an environment we sometimes overlook.

You are welcome to visit and enjoy a marine reserve. Walking, picnicking, swimming, boating, diving and photography are all encouraged. Educational and scientific activities are allowed too, provided they do not harm or threaten the reserve's plants or animals.



In places, little black mussels form a dense mat over rocks in the mid-intertidal zone. Photo: Rob Davidson.

## How to get there

### By sea

The nearest boat ramp is at Totaranui, five kilometres north of Awaroa Head. There are others at Tarakohe near Takaka, and at Kaiteriteri and Marahau in the south.

Water users should be wary of unmarked reefs and tidal changes. Sea conditions are often calm in winter but stiff sea breezes occur daily in summer and there is little shelter to be found along rocky sections of the coastline during storms.

### By land

Foot access to the reserve is along the coast track from the north or the south. The nearest car park, at Awaroa, is 33km from Takaka. Allow a full day for a return trip from the car park to Tonga Quarry. Before setting out, check the tide tables because it is only safe to cross Awaroa Inlet within one hour 30 minutes before low tide and two hours after. Onetahuti estuary can only be crossed safely three hours either side of low tide.

From Awaroa Hut, head east to the mouth of Venture Creek and climb up to Tonga Saddle. From here there is an easy

descent to Onetahuti Beach—your first contact with the marine reserve. Tonga Island lies directly offshore from here.

### Transport services

The Abel Tasman coast is well served by bus, boat and kayaking companies. Information on their services is available at i-SITE visitor centres in Motueka, Takaka and Nelson.

## Accommodation/camping

### Coast Track

The huts at Awaroa and Bark Bay and the camping sites along the coast are part of the Abel Tasman Coast Track. A hut or campsite booking must be made to stay at these places; to make a booking contact the Great Walks Helpdesk +64 3 546 8210, or email [greatwalksbooking@doc.govt.nz](mailto:greatwalksbooking@doc.govt.nz). Further information can be found in the Abel Tasman Coast Track brochure or on the DOC website: [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz).

### Totaranui

Totaranui campground has fireplaces, toilets and drinking water but no electricity. From 1 December to 10 February it is necessary to book a site. For more information phone: +64 3 528 8083.

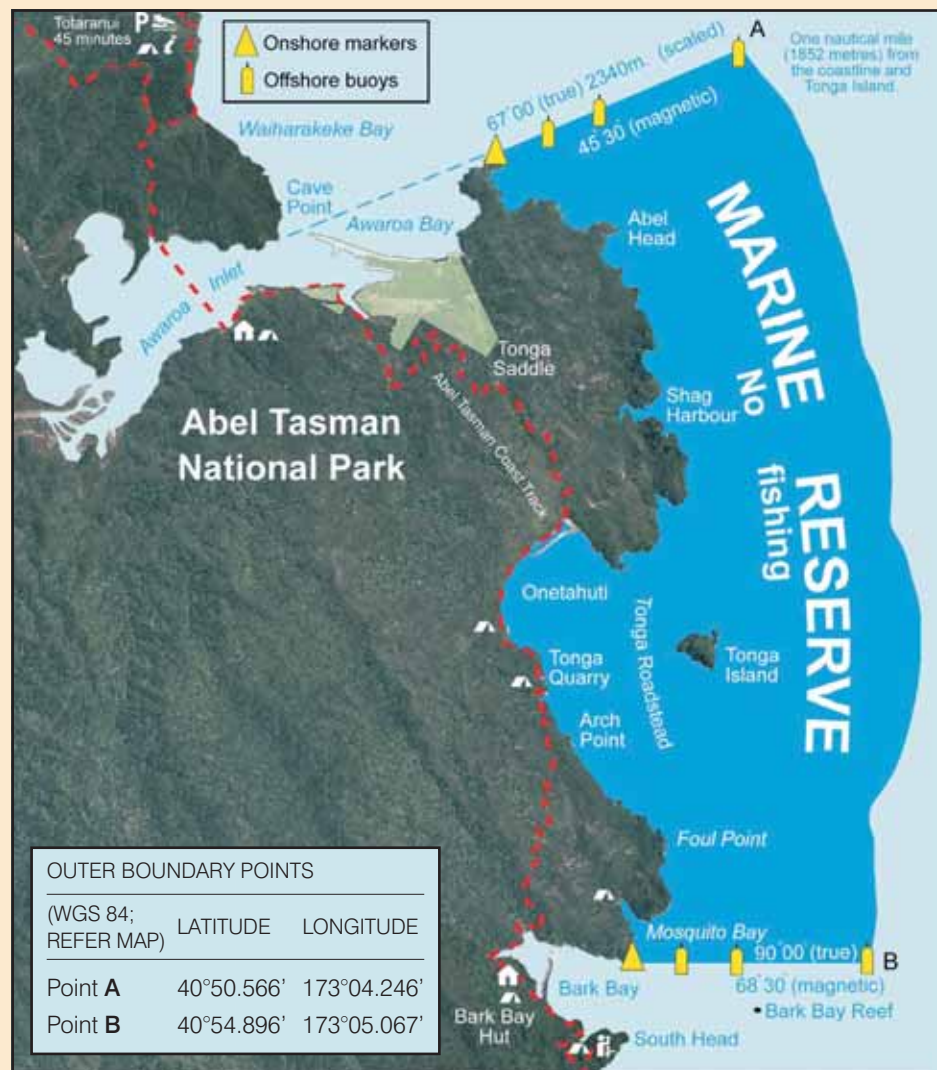
## What to see and do

Most popular activities along the coastline are enhanced or unaffected by the marine reserve. Because fishing is not allowed, fish life in the reserve is recovering, possibly improving fishing outside its boundaries.

### In the water

The best way to get close to the reserve and its inhabitants is to get into the water. From land, the best snorkelling is among the rocks between Tonga Quarry and Foul Point. Scuba diving is the most rewarding on reef systems around Tonga Island or in the north of the reserve, at about 15 metres depth.

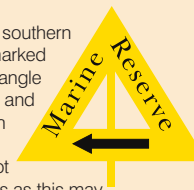
The underwater environment is notable for its sparse cover of seaweeds, usually confined to a narrow band along the low water mark. Compensation for this is the attractive film of pink algae that coats much of the rock and the ease of seeing the abundant grazing animals, like kina and turban shells.



Grazing invertebrates—kina, limpets, cushion stars and top shells—are conspicuous on the smooth seaweed-free boulders.  
Photo: Rob Davidson.



The northern and southern boundaries are marked by large yellow triangle markers on shore and yellow buoys (with flashing lights) at sea. Please do not tie up to the buoys as this may damage or shift them; penalties apply. [Note: these markers may not always be present due to operational requirements. At times buoys may be out of position due to rough seas or illegal vessel mooring.]



Tonga Island Marine Reserve covers 1835 hectares between Awaroa Head and the headland separating Bark Bay and Mosquito Bay. It extends offshore for one nautical mile (1852m) from the mean high water mark of Tonga Island and the mainland coast. The northern boundary follows the same bearing as a line joining Awaroa Head and Cave Point. The southern boundary extends due east from the headland separating Bark Bay and Mosquito Bay. (This is not a legal description of the marine reserve.)

Although at first glance the reefs may appear barren of other animal life, take a closer look and you might be surprised. Caves and crevices can conceal a secretive red rock crab or a conger eel lurking in the dim light. A torch may illuminate a colourful array of animals encrusting rocky overhangs and vertical faces. Large crayfish abound and look out for the more common inshore fish: wrasses, triple-fins, blue cod, tarakihi, moki or perhaps an elusive snapper.

Swim beyond the outer reef edge and you enter the realm of fine sand and mud interspersed with broken shell. Although various burrowing worms, shellfish and shrimp-like animals dominate these offshore sediments, more conspicuous are the surface dwellers, such as hermit crabs, urchins and brittle stars.



New Zealand fur seals breed at Tonga and Pinnacle Islands, their inquisitive pups a delight for boaties and divers alike. Photo: Eric Simmons.

sight, especially at the breeding colonies on Tonga and Pinnacle Islands. There they can be seen resting on the rocks after hunting at sea for their favoured prey of squid, pilchard, anchovy and jack mackerel.

Little blue penguins breed along much of the coast; these are best observed at sea during the day when they are feeding. Many other birds are seen too: shags, gannets, gulls and perhaps a reef heron or fluttering shearwater—all dependent on the sea for food.

### On foot

The small estuary behind Onetahuti beach is a good place to see wading birds, such as herons and oystercatchers, stalking fish or digging for shellfish.

Jack mackerel—one of the favoured prey species of fur seals and dolphins along the Abel Tasman coast. Photo: Kim Westerskov.



Wade into the water to see crabs scuttling across the sandy bottom and, in season, whitebait heading upstream to the extensive wetland behind.

At the southern end of the beach, the track climbs around a small headland to Tonga Quarry where, early last century, granite was quarried.

Continue down the coast to the beautiful arches at Arch Point. Here, rock pools and a good variety of seaweeds are revealed at low water.

## Monitoring and research

A major benefit of marine reserves is the opportunity they offer to study marine environments in their natural state.

The Department of Conservation has been monitoring changes to the marine reserve since fishing ceased in 1993. Crayfish and blue cod are now noticeably larger and more abundant in the reserve than outside its boundaries.

Please be careful around any scientific equipment on the sea floor. If you catch a tagged fish outside the reserve, please return the tag and catch information (fish length, location) to the Department or the Ministry of Fisheries.



Blue cod have increased in abundance and size since the marine reserve was established in 1993. Photo: Eric Simmons.

## Looking after the reserve and park

Both the national park and marine reserve are managed by the Department of Conservation. However, their continuing protection also depends on caring and vigilant visitors.

It is important that the rules in the following section are complied with. If you see people fishing in the marine reserve or harming the reserve or park in any way, please report the activity to the Department as soon as possible. Call the conservation emergency helpline 0800 DOC HOTline (0800 362 468).



Divers have witnessed a remarkable recovery of crayfish, especially larger lobsters, within the marine reserve. Photo: Anne Neumann.

### On the water

Boat passengers and sea kayakers gain a perspective on the reserve not available to foot travellers; Mosquito Bay and Shag Harbour are particularly intimate coves that the track does not reach.

Wildlife is best viewed from the water too. Dolphins are occasional visitors, carving through the waters in front of you or riding easily in your wake. Fur seals are a common

## How do the reserve and park affect you?

Enjoy your visit to the marine reserve and national park. You are welcome to boat, anchor, dive, swim, land, picnic and walk here. Please remember **all animals and plants, and the sea bed, are totally protected.**

### In the marine reserve:

- **no fishing, netting, spearing, taking or killing of marine life** (All methods of fishing, including shellfish gathering, from the shore or at sea are prohibited.)
- **no disturbance or damage** of marine life or the sea bed
- **no polluting**
- **no removal of any natural material** from the marine reserve

(Note: This is not a complete summary of offences within the marine reserve. Offence penalties carry up to three months imprisonment or a \$250,000 fine. Boats, vehicles and equipment may be seized. Full offence provisions under the Marine Reserves Act may be viewed at [www.legislation.govt.nz](http://www.legislation.govt.nz).)

### In the national park:

- **no removal of, or damage to, plants or animals**
- **no dogs or other domestic animals;** these may disturb other visitors and wildlife
- **no littering** (Rubbish facilities are provided only at Tataranui; all other rubbish should be carried out of the park.)
- **camping** is permitted, but only with a booking and in designated camping areas along the track
- **open fires** should only be lit in the fireplaces provided and should not be lit when strong onshore winds are blowing. Please extinguish your fire after use.

A crayfish shelters amongst a colourful array of encrusting invertebrates and algae. Photo: Eric Simmons.



## Wildlife

Please do not disturb wildlife. Approach marine mammals and birds slowly and carefully, avoiding sudden boat movements or loud noises. No more than three boats or groups of kayakers should be around any marine mammal. Keep at least 20 metres away from seals on shore and avoid disturbing birds and their nesting sites.

## For further information

We hope you enjoy your visit to Tonga Island Marine Reserve and Abel Tasman National Park. To find out more, consult the Abel Tasman Coast Track brochure, visit the DOC website: [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz), or contact:

### Department of Conservation Regional Visitor Centre

Millers Acre Centre/Taha o te Awa  
79 Trafalgar Street, Nelson 7010  
P O Box 375, Nelson 7042  
Ph: (03) 546 9339  
Email: [nelsonvc@doc.govt.nz](mailto:nelsonvc@doc.govt.nz)

For compliance and other information on the reserve, contact:

### Department of Conservation Motueka Area Office

Cnr King Edward and High Streets, Motueka 7120  
P O Box 97, Motueka 7143  
Ph: (03) 528 1810, Fax: (03) 528 1811  
Email: [motuekaao@doc.govt.nz](mailto:motuekaao@doc.govt.nz)

or

### Department of Conservation Golden Bay Area Office

62 Commercial Street, Takaka 7110  
P O Box 166, Takaka 7142  
Ph: (03) 525 8026, Fax: (03) 525 8444  
Email: [goldenbayao@doc.govt.nz](mailto:goldenbayao@doc.govt.nz)

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**0800 362 468**  
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conservation emergencies  
For fire and search and rescue call 111



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Cover: Mosquito Bay at the southern end of the marine reserve. Photo: Tony Lilleby