

VISITING WHANGAREI HARBOUR MARINE RESERVE

NOTES FOR SCHOOLS AND EDUCATORS



Photo: Samara Nicolas


Key information



Whangarei Harbour Marine Reserve comprises two sites on the east coast of Northland, established in 2006.

There are two main habitats in this marine reserve: the mangroves and mudflats at Waikaraka (about 8 km from Whangarei), and the sandy beach, rocky reef and deeper channel of Motukaroro/Passage Island at the mouth of Whangarei Harbour (about 30 km from Whangarei).

These two areas combined protect an area of 253.7 hectares of shore and sea.

For more information and a map of this reserve, see:  www.doc.govt.nz/whangarei-harbour.

Visitor facilities and parking

Motukaroro and Reotahi


Access to the marine reserve at Motukaroro is from Reotahi Bay at the end of Beach Road in the Whangarei Heads. Rest rooms are available at the car park.

No drinking water is available, so please bring your own refreshments.

Signs explaining what you may see at this reserve are at both sites.

Waikaraka

Access to Waikaraka is from Whangarei Heads Road. There is a large grass area here, suitable for picnics and a car park near 350 Whangarei Heads Road. No drinking water is available here, so please bring your own refreshments.

See the Whangarei Harbour marine reserve brochure for a map of parking locations (pages 3-4):  www.doc.govt.nz/whangarei-mr-brochure.



Suggested self-guided activities for school groups

Biodiversity survey

The Marine Metre Squared Project (Mm2) is an easy quadrat survey for investigating what is living in your marine reserve. See www.mm2.net.nz for resources. Rocky shore surveys or sandy shore surveys can be carried out approximately 2 hours either side of low tide. For more information, see [Activity 8: Visiting Marine Reserves](#).

Note: when conducting a Mm2 survey, it is important to keep disturbance of sand and animals to a minimum and put them back where you found them.

Litter survey

Try a litter survey on the beach. See page 9 of the DOC *Habitat Heroes: Explore your local marine environment* resource for instructions: www.doc.govt.nz/habitat-heroes-marine-resource.

Survey sheets and guidance for beach clean-ups and litter audits is available at: www.loveyourcoast.org.nz/learn (Love Your Coast/Sustainable Coastlines).

Health and Safety considerations

- Be aware that the waters around Motukaroro/Passage Island have strong tidal currents and back eddies. Experience and local knowledge is recommended for a safe and enjoyable swim or snorkel.
- The oyster-covered rocks can cause injury if students are not wearing suitable footwear.
- Seals are present in the cooler months – keep at least 20 metres away.

Teachers should also consider general risk management around water. See also general health and safety considerations for schools in marine environments: [Activity 8: Visiting Marine Reserves](#).

Please note: These notes are not a substitute for school safety planning.

Staff, students and the Board of Trustees of a school will need to consider other factors before conducting a visit outside the school and follow school procedures. Identifying and managing risks before the trip is essential, therefore a prior site visit is highly recommended.

Habitats and species in the reserve

The Waikaraka site of the marine reserve is almost entirely mangrove forest with intertidal mud flats and a subtidal channel edge. The mangroves provide important habitat for juvenile fish, shellfish, crabs and a wide variety of birdlife. Snapper, trevally, kahawai and mackerel can be seen during different parts of their life cycle near the mangroves. For more information, see: www.doc.govt.nz/waikaraka-poster.



The shallow reefs between Reotahi and Little Munroe Bay host many species, including triplefin fish and nudibranchs.

On the southern side of Motukaroro Island, the water is deeper (up to 30 metres) in the channel of the Whangarei Harbour. Here you can see a variety of fish (such as trevally and kingfish), sponges and anemones. For more information about the types of fish and other animals you may see in this reserve, see: www.doc.govt.nz/motukaroro-mr-poster.

See also: www.doc.govt.nz/whangarei-harbour.



Snorkelling providers in the area

Experiencing Marine Reserves is an organisation that specialises in safe snorkelling experiences for school groups in marine reserves and at other sites. They provide all the gear and expertise. For more information see:  www.emr.org.nz, email: info@emr.org.nz and view  www.facebook.com/emr.mtsct.

PROTECT OUR MARINE RESERVES

They are special places that protect the species and habitats within them.

- No fishing of any kind
- Don't take or kill marine life
- Don't remove or disturb any marine life or materials
- Don't feed fish – it disturbs their natural behaviour
- Take care when anchoring to avoid damaging the sea floor
- Call **0800 DOC HOT** (0800 362 468) to report any illegal activity.

