

Kapiti Marine Reserve



Fascinating marine environment

Kapiti Marine Reserve is a nationally significant recreation, education, ecological and scientific resource containing some of the finest underwater scenery in the greater Wellington region.

Kapiti is the meeting place for two major sea currents. It is here that the cold and clear Southland current meets the warm, turbid and saltier d'Urville current. The zone where these two meet swells north and south as one current dominates the other resulting in fascinating overlaps of marine plants and animals.

The Kapiti Marine Reserve also provides an important link between Kapiti Island Nature Reserve and the Waikanae Estuary Scientific Reserve on the adjacent mainland shore. Together they form a very rare continuum of protected land, sea and estuary habitats. Kapiti Island is home to kiwi, kaka, takahe and saddleback and the estuary is a feeding ground for waterfowl and seabirds and a nursery for a variety of fish. The link between the three reserves provides special protection for animals that move between sea, shore and river habitats. Shags, terns, gulls and penguins roost and breed on land, but rely on the sea for food. Native freshwater fish, such as whitebait, lay their eggs in estuarine waters and the young fish are swept out to sea before returning to swim up streams where they mature.



Finger sponge.
Photo:
Malcolm Francis,
NIWA.



Above: Sea perch. Photo: Malcolm Francis, NIWA.

What to see and do

In the water

The underwater scenery within the marine reserve is generally regarded as some of the finest in the greater Wellington region and one of the best ways to get close to the fishlife is to get into the water. Those with a mask and snorkel could explore the rocks close to the shore of Kapiti Island. Scuba diving is the most rewarding on the western side and northern end of the island.



A diver surveys the reserve.
Photo: Malcolm Francis, NIWA.

There are some remarkable natural features, such as the rock archway on the western side of the island known as the Hole in the Wall. It is also unusual to find the three common marine habitats of the Marlborough Sounds and Wellington region in such a confined area. The boulder bottom, sheltered reef, and sand bottom habitats support a rich variety of marine life. Orange and yellow sponges, some very rare, colour the reefs and luxuriant seaweed beds feed kina and paua. Starfish, corals, anemones, octopus and reef fish such as butterfish, blue cod and red mullet are also residents of these waters.

Visitors to Kapiti's exceptionally clear waters include ocean fish such as blue moki and kingfish and on occasions rare and subtropical fish such as the spotted black groper, drumfish and magpie perch.



On the water

Some wildlife is best viewed from the water. Fur seals use Arapawaiti at the northern end of the Island as a winter hauling ground. Offshore, in deep water, they feed on squid and schooling fish, such as lantern fish and jack mackerel, until they migrate south again to breed. Whales and dolphins are also regular visitors to these waters and can be spotted from a boat, launch or sea-kayak. Many birds can be seen too, such as gulls, gannets, penguins and perhaps a fairy prion or arctic skua and flocks of terns feeding on sprats.

On foot

Waikanae Estuary and Paraparaumu Beach are good places to see wading birds such as variable oystercatchers, and banded dotterels, digging for worms and shellfish in the tidal zone. Caspian terns are often encountered. They are the largest of the terns and have a stout red bill. In spring, look closely to see whitebait swimming up the mouth of the Waikanae River.



Shoveler ducks, black swans, pied stilts, a royal spoonbill and pukeko in the tidal lagoon at Waikanae Estuary.
Photo: Jeremy Rolfe.

On the shores of Kapiti Island Nature Reserve, which are only accessible by permit, you may see black shags, spotted shags and little shags, or black-backed gulls nesting on rock stacks during spring and early summer. Little blue penguins cross the beach at night, to reach their nesting burrows from the sea, and their tracks and droppings can often be seen along the beaches. Eagle rays sometimes bask in shallows close to shore.



Blue penguin.
Photo: Rod Morris,
© Department of
Conservation.

Marine life protected

Two areas of sea either side of Kapiti Island make up Kapiti Marine Reserve where all marine life, habitats, objects and structures are protected. Fishing of any type is not permitted.

Over half of the waters around Kapiti Island remain open to fishing. This includes the most popular recreation waters, Paraparaumu Beach and areas sheltered from the prevailing winds. The Waikanae River mouth remains open for whitebaiting only, although recreational fishing is now permitted within the Waikanae Estuary.



Common octopus.
Photo: Warren Farrelly, Hedgehog House.

Within the marine reserve, plants and animals may not be removed or damaged. The stocks of exploited species such as rock lobster, paua, kina, blue cod and snapper are allowed to regenerate. In time the reserve should return to a more natural state. The ecological recovery process is measured against a baseline survey of Kapiti's marine life which was completed in 1992.

The major trends are increases in numbers and sizes of paua, lobsters and resident reef fish, and they are generally bigger too.



Find out first

Stay on established tracks and use existing facilities

Take care of your gear

Remove rubbish

Dispose of toilet waste properly

Be careful with chemicals

Respect our cultural heritage

Catch only the food you need

Consider plants and animals

Consider other people

*Toitu te marae a tane
Toitu te marae a tangaroa*

Looking after the reserve

The Department of Conservation carries out surveillance and enforcement of the reserve. Warranted officers undertake regular patrols and are assisted by interested local residents and members of the public. The department is also combining resources with the Ministry of Fisheries and the Police to prevent poaching.

The Kapiti Marine Reserve Committee, representing tangata whenua, community and recreation groups, ensures maximum local participation and is an avenue for local views to be incorporated into the reserve management.

Emphasis is placed on educating people about the value of marine reserves and the need to protect them. Information signs are located at public boat launching sites, from Waikanae to Raumati Beach, and information sheets and maps are freely available. However, illegal actions such as taking or damaging marine life, habitats or objects in the reserve will be met by firm enforcement.

History

Ko te Waewae Kapiti o Tara Raua ko Rangitane: the full name given by Maori to Kapiti Island describes the island as the meeting place of the boundaries of Tara and Rangitane. Tara and Rangitane were the son and grandson of Whatonga who, in 1150 AD, divided the country by making a boundary from the southern tip of Kapiti Island straight across to the east coast of the North Island. The land to the south he gave to Tara and the land to the north he gave to Tautoki, another son whose heir was Rangitane.

Today this history is echoed in a dynamic way by a characteristic of Kapiti's waters. Kapiti is the meeting place for two major sea currents, where the cold and clear Southland current meets the warm, turbid and saltier d'Urville current.

The waters between Kapiti Island and the mainland were once plied by the mighty waka of Rangitane people, the Muaupoko and later those of Te Rauparaha of Ngati Toa who warred to gain dominance over Kapiti by 1823. This stretch of sea is called Rauoterangi Channel to commemorate the swimming feat of Kahe Te Rauoterangi, daughter of a Ngati Toa chief. Persuaded by a dream she set out from Kapiti, with her daughter strapped to her back, to warn allies on the mainland of a threatened attack. The current carried Te Rauoterangi to Te Uruhi, south of the Waikanae River and about 11 kilometres from the starting point. The child survived the crossing but died not long afterwards.

European sealers and whalers travelled to trade on Kapiti and were soon followed by shore whalers who operated from the island and the mainland.

Later, farmers took cattle across the channel to Kapiti. However, the "moat" between the island and the mainland has always helped protect Kapiti Island's natural treasures from the more devastating effects of introduced mammals.

How to get there

By land

Kapiti Marine Reserve is 30 kilometres from Wellington city and is located between Paraparaumu and Waikanae beaches and Kapiti Island.

The marine reserve's only point of contact with the mainland is one kilometre of beach at the Waikanae River mouth. The only foot access to the reserve is from Waikanae Beach or Paraparaumu Beach on either side of the Waikanae Estuary and river mouth. There are walking tracks through Waikanae Estuary.

By sea

The nearest boat launching sites are at the Waikanae and Kapiti boating clubs.

When boating, please advise a responsible person of your intentions, including your destination and intended time of return. VHF radio users should note that on the western side of Kapiti Island transmission is often difficult.

Kapiti Island and its surrounding waters are noted for changeable weather—sea conditions can quickly become treacherous. Obtain an up-to-date marine forecast before boating in the reserve.

Transport services

Two DOC-licensed operators run launch trips from Paraparaumu. (Private boats are not permitted to land on Kapiti Nature Reserve).

Permits/Reservations

Permits are required from DOC to visit Kapiti Island Nature Reserve and land at the northern end of the island. During weekends and summer months the demand is heavy, so apply well in advance. Winter is a good time to secure a booking. Bookings can be made on-line at www.doc.govt.nz.

Further information is available from the DOC Wellington Visitor Centre.

Information

DOC Wellington Visitor Centre

Conservation House, 18–32 Manners St,
P.O. Box 10-420, Wellington 6143
Telephone: (04) 384 7770 Fax: (04) 384 7773
E-mail: wellingtonvc@doc.govt.nz

Department of Conservation

PO Box 141, WAIKANAE
Tel 04-296 1112

After hours conservation emergencies:

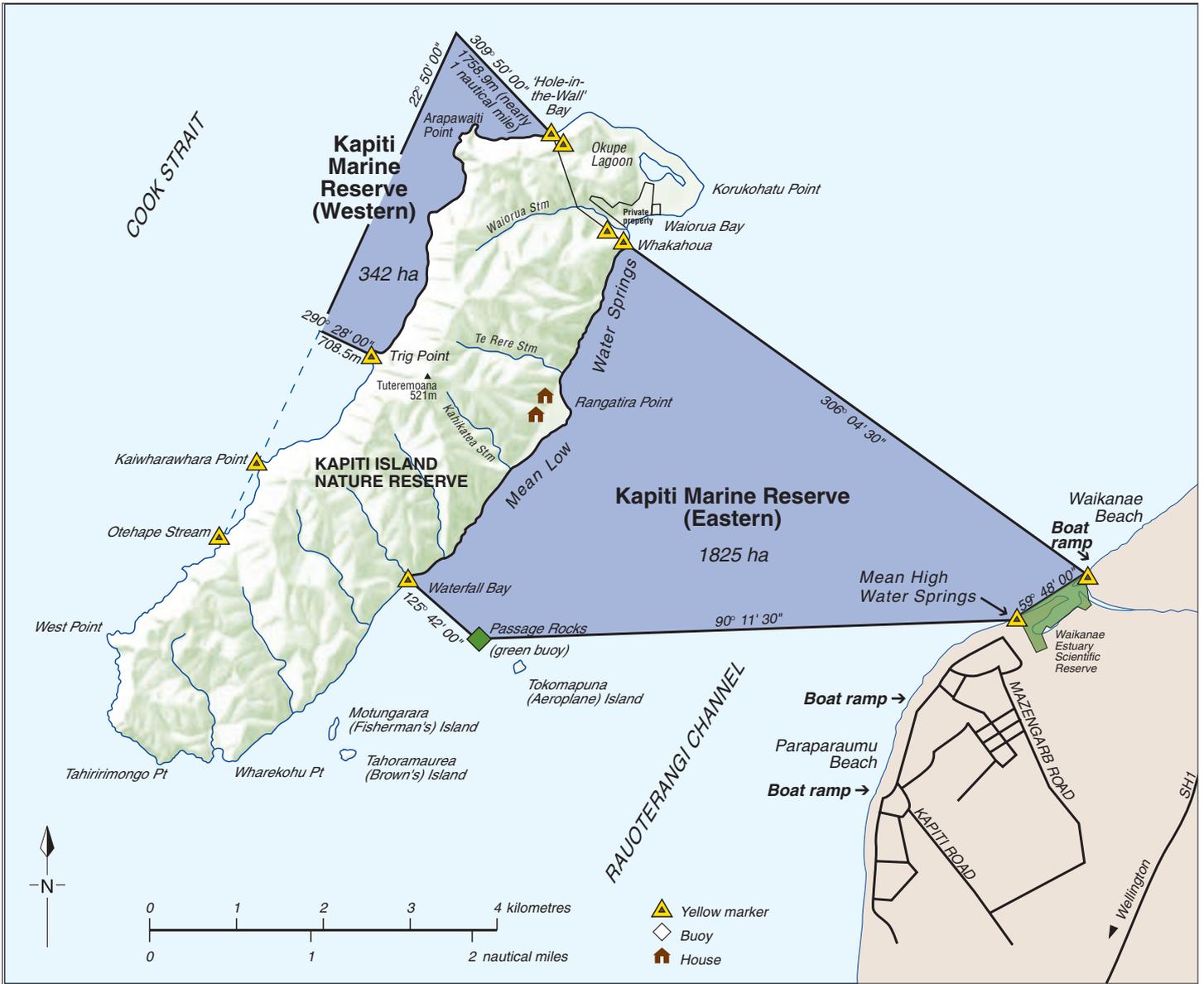
DOC HOTLINE, Tel 0800 362 468

Kapiti Marine Reserve Committee,

Nga Tai o Kapiti Komiti Rahui,

PO Box 5086
WELLINGTON
Tel 04-472 5821

For further information about recreation activities and conservation visit: www.doc.govt.nz



All marine life, habitat, objects and structures are protected

You can look and enjoy but please do not take

The Marine Reserves Act 1971 will be enforced

Marine reserve boundaries

Beach boundaries are Mean Low Water Spring on Kapiti Island and a straight line between Mean High Water Spring points each side of Waikanae Estuary.

The diagram below shows the boundaries of the reserve on the north-western side of Kapiti Island.

