

## A Marine Revolution

People are inclined to view the sea as uniform, despite the coral reefs, seagrass beds, fields of sea ice and outer boundaries of mangroves and estuaries that reveal its diversity. The terrestrial world, on the other hand, is divided into many realms, provinces, regions and districts.

To an extent humans can be forgiven for creating that distinction in understanding between land and sea. We do not, after all, live in the sea. Furthermore pelagic marine ecosystems carried by warm or cool currents have very mobile boundaries, a feature which has encouraged us to regard the sea as a unified whole.

But, like many other parts of our environment which, until recently have been ignored because they are little understood, the sea is today seen as vitally important to the continuation of life on land. It is our planet's dominant climatic force, not merely because of its great bulk, but also because of its intricate physical, chemical and biological organisation.

Most New Zealanders live near the coast. Even if they live inland, their region's geology and biology has been shaped by the sea. Despite this close relationship with the marine world, we are not instinctive marine conversationists, most of us still adopting a hunter-gatherer approach to the ocean's resources. A "Marine Revolution" is needed.

A good place to start is to adopt and support the proposal put forward by marine scientist Dr Bill Ballantine in this issue — set aside immediately 10 percent of New Zealand's coastline as representative protected marine areas. The idea of a representative reserve has worked at Leigh, near Auckland, where fishermen — both commercial and recreational — notice large populations of crayfish and other harvested species *inside* the reserve, and very few *outside*. Experience is a powerful teacher.

If exceptions to the "no exploitation" rule are allowed, the system is bound to fail. Just as the sustained yield concept was proven not to work in our native podocarp forests, so too will it not work in our marine reserves. We have learnt to protect stocks, breeding and nursery areas for a wide range of species on land. Why do we not do the same for marine life?

Of course, there are many unique and outstanding coastal areas which are not "representative". These must be protected, but can be dealt with separately as with our special purpose terrestrial reserves. The important point is that there are no impediments — financial or policy — standing in the way of the representative concept. People's attitudes are the main barrier, a hurdle of unknown proportions but one which can be overcome given sufficient goodwill and firm advocacy. This is another important responsibility of the Conservation Department. Its advocacy is provided for in the Conservation Act and there is a special coastal directorate.

But a mental adjustment will have to take place, not easy when life under the sea has long been "out of sight" and to human attitudes therefore "out of mind". A "Marine Revolution" is a fitting label for that adjustment, implying on the one hand a return to our beginnings, and on the other an overthrowing of the outmoded ideas of the past. I call on Society members to promote and lead that revolution.

**Dr Alan Mark President**



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