



It is not only habitats that must be protected; management of resources is also important. Sandy and gravelly beaches are important recreational areas but usually are relatively barren habitats. Overfishing of bottom-feeding fishes, such as snapper, has helped a population explosion of paddle crabs, making many beaches less attractive for bathers.

Photo: Ken Grange



Prevention Better Than Cure

But specific sense is not necessarily general sense. It is clearly absurd to wait until clear damage is apparent before we move to save any part. "Prevention is better than cure" may not be universally true, but it is obviously worth retaining one straight ruler, one undamaged piece, one natural bit. But so far we have no system for doing this in the sea.

A practical system for selecting and protecting a network of typical marine habitats would have to include socially and politically effective arguments for each. These could be generated at three levels:

- The principles noted above — at least one representative example of everything in each area, accessible to the general public and with the total reaching 10 percent by area, all of full protection.
- A range of local and/or pragmatic points, decided as far as possible by local people, such as ease of boundary recognition, policing and control, degree of current exploitation, adjacent land use and effects and size, viability and distance from other reserves. This would be done so as to maximise the benefits. For example, one site might be handy to schools, preferred by local fishermen as a nursery ground and well away from

shipping lanes, while being no better as an example of sheltered harbour habitats than several others.

- A range of cultural, aesthetic and emotional points which again would be decided locally if possible.

These "subjective" reasons are in fact vitally important. In some cases objective supporting evidence is possible and desirable, but the points are still in the area of opinion.

The "subjective" reasons for creating a marine protected area could include: the tourist and recreational value of non-exploited areas; protection of historic wrecks, scenic features and areas of traditional significance; use for pollution monitoring, management tests, and control of general exploitation levels; moral and aesthetic

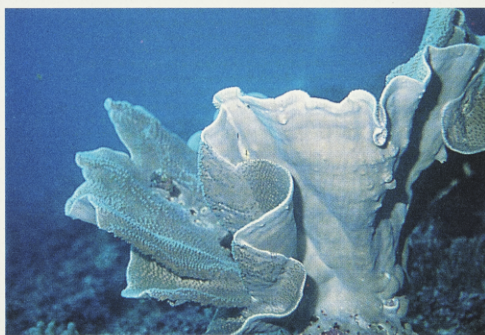
may be required in some places but this is a matter for fisheries management and is separate from and in addition to marine protected areas. There is no point in confusing these issues.

If full protection from exploitation and



Ordinary pieces of coast contain species and habitats that are worthy of protection. Octopus and sea slugs are common in Wellington Harbour, but habitats close to large cities are under constant threat from environmental degradation and there is no reason to be complacent about their long-term survival.

Photo: Ken Grange



Unique or special areas are easy to argue for protection. The Kermadec Islands, for instance, contain a curious mixture of tropical and temperate species, including the only reef-building corals in New Zealand. Photo: Ken Grange

preservation values (from genetic diversity to showing children what it was all like once.)

Finally, it should be recalled that exploitation will still be the norm in the sea. At present it is total in New Zealand (minus some tiny fragments). If the above programme went ahead, the present range and level of exploitation would still continue over 90 percent of all sea areas in all regions. The "compromise" is in favour of exploitation and overwhelmingly so. There is no need or value in any further compromise or reduction.

Areas "reserved" for recreational fishing

the full benefits of naturalness are the watchwords for marine protected areas, then the idea can be sold to all intelligent and responsible fishermen as a being a direct benefit to them, even more so than for other citizens. If any kind of killing or disturbance is permitted then most of the real benefits disappear along with the principles, so that while there may be less opposition, there is virtually no support either.

Marine protected areas with "nil extraction" offer real benefits to all citizens. The creation of a network of such areas covering 10 percent of the coastal and offshore waters requires only the political and social will to do so. This programme does not require large amounts of public or private money, merely the support of large numbers of people. This issue is of real social importance but does not have any predetermined position by party, class, sex, race or religion. There is no enemy except our own indifference. ✎

Dr Bill Ballantine is director of the Leigh Marine Laboratory.



Conflict among potential users of marine resources may force the establishment of new marine protected areas. In Paterson Inlet, Stewart Is, salmon farming is seriously affecting the natural habitats which support populations of edible scallops and scientifically important brachiopods, which do not occur in such abundance elsewhere in the world.

Photo: Ken Grange