

## Kaikoura Marine Reserve – “Much in little”

“I’VE BEEN DIVING in the area for 25 years; it’s a pretty magic place.” The praise comes from diver Brian Betts and is reserved for the reefs around the Kaikoura Peninsula which are soon to be nominated for marine reserve status.

Forest and Bird section chairperson Barry Dunnett has so far successfully steered the proposal through to the stage where it is hoped to be formally proposed to the Department of Conservation by autumn next year. In other areas charting the course towards creating a marine reserve has often proved to be difficult; as many reefs of potential disaster can lie onshore as are found in the reserve itself. However Barry’s navigational skills have not deserted him – yet.

“We’ve got support from fishermen, divers, Maori groups and strong support from the Marlborough Business Development Board, tourist operators and many locals,” says Barry.

He describes the proposed area as “a natural choice, one of the best locations in New Zealand, and one marine reserve expert Bill Ballantine was very impressed with.”

The proposed area runs for more than 5 kms around the point of the Kaikoura Peninsula. It is close to Kaikoura township, and especially to the popular youth hostel.

Two factors contribute to make the Kaikoura coast unique: the deep Hikurangi Trough close offshore with its associated nutrient-rich upwellings, and the sub-tropical convergence, caused by the meeting of the cold Southland current and the warm East Cape current. As a result of the latter, Kaikoura marks the distribution limits of both typically southern and northern marine species. The coastal waters attract schooling dusky and Hector’s dolphins, while the reef platform supports a breeding seal colony, as well as nesting populations of red-billed gulls and white-fronted terns.

As Professor John Morton remarks in *Margins of the Sea*: “Kaikoura Peninsula, then, offers ‘much in little’; it has examples of every type of rocky habitat: level platforms, pools and deep channels, stacks and bluffs, and folds and overhangs as the limestone or sil-

tstone has been carved and eroded. Add to this geological foundation the differences between sheltered and wave-exposed faces, and the wealth of living communities can be understood.”

If numbers of species is anything to go by, then the peninsula is indeed well endowed. There are 123 species of macroinvertebrates and fishes, 45 species of algae and 64 species of molluscs.

Scientist Ida Marsden, who has surveyed the peninsula’s marine life, describes the intertidal area as “of enormous recreational and educational value.” Work being carried out by scientists at the nearby University of Canterbury’s Edward Percival Marine Biological Station is providing the first baseline study for rocky intertidal areas in New Zealand. The proposed reserve is of exceptional importance for marine science.

However, despite the richness of the marine life around the peninsula, all is not well, as tourist operator Rod Rae readily attest. He recently invested in a glass bottom boat, calling it Kaikoura Seafaris and offering clients “a window on the undersea world” for a charge of \$20 for one hour, families at concession rates. Unfortunately some of the undersea world is disappearing fast, and that is not good for business.

Not that the business is uppermost in their minds: “The reason we came up here 25 years ago (from Christchurch) was for the diving. The water is so clean because it is constantly moving,” says Rod.

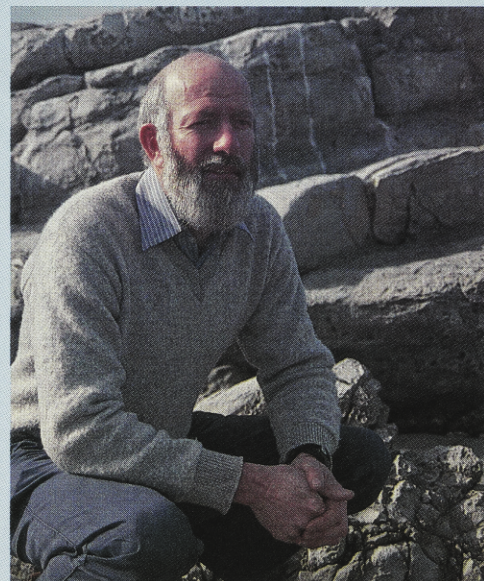
The truth of this statement becomes apparent in a trip on the the glass bottomed boat. Flanked by two friendly Hector’s dolphins, we slowly motor between reefs, observing the

underwater world. The clarity of the water is obvious; but so too is the paucity of fish life compared to years gone by, according to Rod. Spotting a paua brings the comment “that’s a rare sight here these days.”

The fish are now afraid and have to be stalked, in contrast to the past, says Rod. Ten years ago you could get a feed of crayfish, but not today.

Forest and Bird circulated Kaikoura interest groups with a questionnaire last Christmas, providing options for a reserve and asking people for their response. As a result, in April a firmer proposal was put forward, and negotiations are continuing.

Locals such as public relations officer Sue McInnes can see the value of a reserve.



Barry Dunnett, chairperson of Forest and Bird’s Kaikoura section and prime mover behind the marine reserve proposal.

Photo: Gerard Hutching

Opposite: The Kaikoura Peninsula from the air: “a natural area for a marine reserve.”

Photo: Craig Potton



Rod Rae (left) launching his new business with part time skipper Brian Betts. Both are convinced of the need for a marine reserve around the Kaikoura Peninsula. Photo: Gerard Hutching



Most spectacular and abundant of the dolphins around the Kaikoura coast is the dusky.

Photo: Craig Potton