



SIMON HAYES/DOC

Looking towards The Neck across Paterson Inlet. Ulva Island, possible focus for a marine reserve and current site of a major rat eradication campaign (see Conservation Update), is in the foreground.

the Director-General of Conservation on proposals for protection of the natural marine values of the inlet.

The committee has met several times, but Margaret Hopkins, who chairs it says little progress has been made.

The problem seems to be that DoC and MAF see themselves having different and competing statutory roles and different consultation processes. DoC is an advocate for marine protection and MAF for fisheries management, although DoC also has statutory responsibility for marine reserves and MAF for taiapure areas. In places like Paterson Inlet all these functions may be relevant. The committee needs the help and support of both departments who should be giving it information and advice.

Current legislation does not easily provide for a range of protective mecha-

nisms such as no-take and restricted-take areas, although the Mayor Island model shows that it can be done. In that case DoC was asked to investigate a specific reserve proposal by the Maori owners of the island. A working party, similar to that on Stewart Island, but with wider regional and national representation was set up, and recommended not only a marine reserve but also the establishment of a restricted fishing area to be implemented through regulations promulgated by MAF.

Despite the conflict between officials, the Paterson Inlet committee generally supports a marine reserve, as well as wider protection, possibly through a package of fishing restrictions, for the inlet's fisheries.

Merv Whipp, a marine farmer says there is general support for restrictions such as no netting, no trawling, no com-

mercial shellfish harvest and no dragging for scallops. There is also substantial support for taiapure areas. Opinions vary on the siting of a marine reserve with some wanting to start small, and others wanting to ensure that all the marine habitats are represented.

Phil Clarke, who represents the commercial fishers says that "it's not likely that the group will recommend a reserve of an ideal size from the conservation perspective, but that a reserve combined with a set of fishing restrictions will afford a pretty high degree of protection for the inlet".

Stewart Islanders don't seem to suffer from the nimby (not-in-my-back-yard) syndrome that afflicts many mainland communities. Nevertheless there is a danger in setting up a predominantly local group with conflicting interests to advise DoC on how and what they want to protect. For, although conservation by local community consensus is an ideal goal, it may not result in protection for easily accessible areas, which have a rich diversity of marine life, or areas large enough to represent a wide range of habitats. The process also risks disenfranchising the wider regional and national community by giving locals a disproportionate influence in shaping marine reserves.

We may also be in danger of establishing reserves only in areas where there is least conflict – a bit like our national park system, which has proved so inadequate in protecting habitat and species diversity.

Our generation has missed out on knowing what the oceans once looked like without exploitation. Marine reserves are an opportunity to make sure the next generations are better off. To succeed in establishing a comprehensive network of marine reserves, DoC and conservationists may need to be stronger and more professional advocates.

For Paterson Inlet, the process has begun thanks to DoC's initiative. It will be a challenge for the local community to prove that conservation by local consensus is possible and to come up with proposals which will not only meet the islanders' approval, but also those of the wider national community.

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