

## Marine reserve under pressure

New Zealand's first marine reserve is under pressure. Commonly known as 'Goat Island', the Cape Rodney to Okakari Point Marine Reserve, is suffering from its own success.

Over summer a huge number of visitors come to enjoy this reserve on the Rodney coast, near Leigh in lower Northland. As a result carparks overflow and traffic is parked up to two kilometres away. The toilets struggle to cope, and rubbish is dropped on the beach, in the sea and around the carparks.

Visitors feed the fish with lunches, frozen peas, dog rolls and other scraps. There is nothing to explain that they should not feed the fish and why. It seems a natural thing to do, and the fish splash on the surface as they fight for a handout. In the evenings the sea floor is strewn with empty plastic containers and the water surface is lined with scum from the food residue.

At low tide, the feeding extends to kina, broken open for fish food by snorkellers. They would not dream of hurting the fish but seem unaware that kina are living animals too and are also protected. Scuba divers are also guilty of this offence; which is unnecessary as fish approach without encouragement. The ample signs clearly state that

everything in the reserve is protected: but who reads them?

Crayfish too have been taken, and a recent case brought by the Department of Conservation saw several divers found guilty. The excuse was they didn't know this was a marine reserve.

This excuse is carried further by boat fishermen who fish here in broad daylight. We have approached several when kayaking, but their fishing lines are rapidly wound in at our approach. The excuse is always, 'We didn't know we were in a marine reserve.'

Every boat ramp in the area is signposted clearly showing the location of the Cape Rodney to Okakari Point Marine Reserve, and the Tawharanui Marine Park, another protected area.

At night, rock fishermen also blatantly abuse the reserve. Few are caught and twice recently we have seen the heads of snapper and blue cod dumped in the channel near the beach.

Prosecutions, confiscation of gear and resulting publicity may be the only answer. DoC does a great job on the budget it has, but as we see more marine reserves created the rules regarding them must be enforced.

Perhaps the next step is increased education to ensure that the visitors who enjoy the benefits of marine reserves will continue to do so in the future.



Blue maomao shoal in large numbers among the bathers at Goat Island Marine Reserve. People feeding the fish create a pollution problem.

David Wright, DoC's Conservation Officer, Warkworth, is very aware of the problems at Goat Island. He agrees that the majority of visitors are there to enjoy the rich marine life; however, a small handful risk destroying this.

This summer, an educational sign will inform people of the issues associated with fish feeding. There will also be increased surveillance of the reserve, and

a warden will be employed for three months from December to February. David Wright says that marine reserves management is presently underfunded.

A start to the education programme by the department was the sending out of letters to all diver-training organisations using the reserve, warning that it is an offence to kill kina and interfere with any marine life in the reserve.

— Jenny and Tony Enderby



Summer crowds on the tiny beach beside the Goat Island Marine Reserve near Leigh, lower Northland. The reserve is so popular that roads become clogged with traffic and people park up to two kilometres from the beach. Sanitation and rubbish are problems which threaten the reserve.

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