

## Hauraki Gulf Marine Park

Initially, some people dubbed it the Clayton's park — the park you have when you're not having a park — recalling the advertising campaign for an unsuccessful, non-alcoholic drink substitute. Yet, there is now a strong belief that the beefed up Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act should bring something more satisfying in the way of protection for a million hectares of water and land off Auckland and the Coromandel.

The concept is bold: all land which drains into the Hauraki Gulf and the western Bay of Plenty is to be managed to protect the surrounding waters. So people up to 80 kilometres inland — dairy farmers round Tirau in the southern Waikato, for example — have to accept responsibility for what they do with their slops.

In a first for conservation management, the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park is to be managed by a forum of territorial local authorities, along with representatives of Crown ministers, and Maori. They will use provisions of the Resource Management Act to give effect to their decisions. There'll be no dedicated staff; in fact the park doesn't even have an operational budget. Each contributing authority will provide its own resources and pay a share of any costs.

Early criticism of the park bill centred on the degree to which it was to encourage the active

protection of the gulf: while conservation groups argued for stronger environmental clauses, some local authorities opposed the idea.

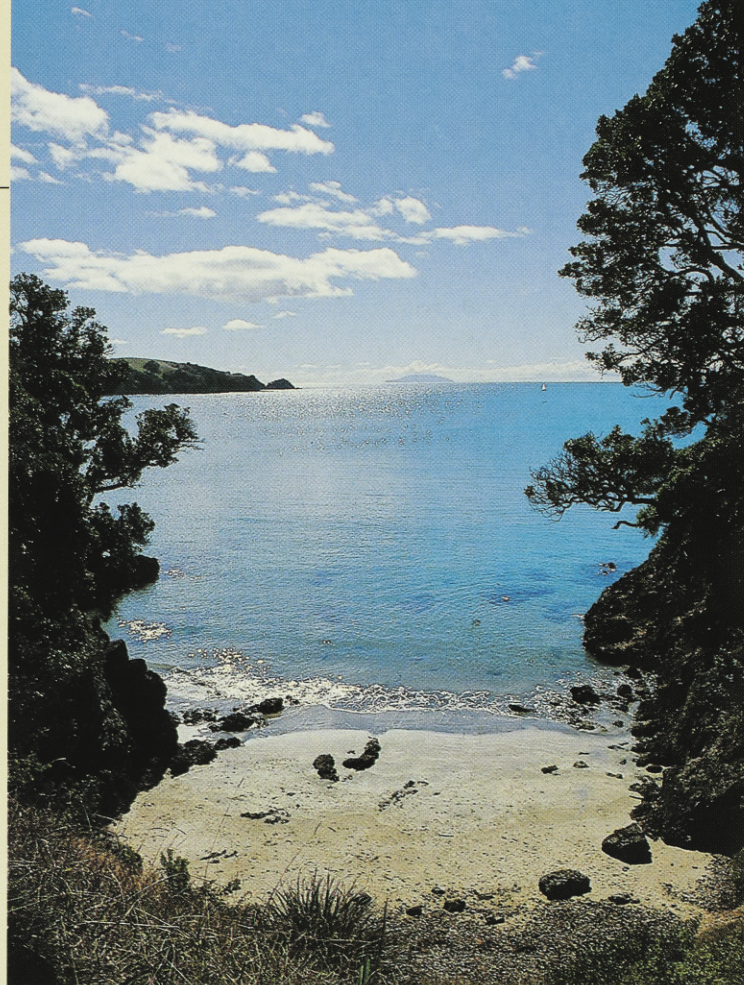
The purposes of the Act now draw on other conservation laws — 'to recognise and protect in perpetuity, the international and national significance of the land and the natural, historical and physical resources within the park.' Also to protect in perpetuity 'scenery, ecological systems, or natural features that are so beautiful, unique or scientifically important to be of national significance, for their intrinsic worth.' The park should also 'sustain the life-supporting capacity of the soil, air, water and ecosystems' of the park.

The park forum is charged by statute to prepare a strategic list for actions in the park and keep it under review. It should also encourage co-ordinated financial planning by local authorities. Every three years it is bound to report to the Minister of Conservation on the state of the environment, and progress toward 'integrated management' of the Gulf.

**T**he new park has been 10 years in gestation; more if you count an earlier proposal to form a regional park around the inner islands, under the Auckland Regional Authority. Over time its form has suffered a 'sea change'.

As Minister of Conservation, Denis Marshall in 1991 instigated a technical working party to look for options. These included possible boundaries, and special recognition for both the islands and the waters of the gulf. The working party, led by Jim Holdaway, a former chair of the Hauraki Gulf Maritime Park, recommended a marine park covering the whole gulf. Maori opposition (born of unresolved claims) led to protracted negotiations with iwi.

The proposal for a park was energetically pursued by Dr



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*The sparkling waters of the Hauraki Gulf, looking from Waiheke toward Little Barrier Island on the far horizon. A new Act of Parliament creating the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park, protects its waters and other values, and also the islands and coastal waters of the eastern Coromandel Peninsula.*

Nick Smith who, as a new Minister of Conservation, saw the potential for involving territorial local authorities using the Resource Management Act to clean up onshore effects on the Gulf. His proposal was to give statutory powers to the Hauraki Gulf Forum, which had been set up by the local authorities in the meantime. It is from this initiative that the present shape of the park emerges.

The initial stages of the Bill were shaky: much of the confusion arose from the use of the word 'Park'. What was proposed was more a bill to recognise the cooperating local authorities for the good of the Gulf, rather than a park in the traditional sense. The Department of Conservation would put in its conservation islands (including the sanctuary of Little Barrier, and public islands including the landmark Rangitoto just off Auckland) but it still retained management. When legislation was refined to allow coastal land to be added, the Department of Conservation also put in some landward reserves, but the Auckland Regional Council,

which owns hundreds of hectares of coastal reserves, did not.

The big advances were made at the late stages of the bill when Parliamentarians acknowledged that the marine park had to include the waters of the Gulf if it were to have any substance.

The interests of the Crown are to be represented by nominees of the Ministers of Conservation, Fisheries and Maori Affairs. Maori interests (there are several powerful tribes claiming this as their territory) have been further recognised with six representatives. The users and residents of the gulf — boaties, fisherfolk, conservationists — are not directly represented.

Yet getting local bodies to plan together is a major step forward. For the first time, local government is expected to be proactive towards preserving the values of the gulf, rather than continuing the frustrating and damagingly reactive way in which the gulf has previously been treated.

— Gordon Ell

