

New Marine Reserve at Stewart Island

After 13 years of advocacy by conservationists and community interests a new marine reserve is to be created in Paterson Inlet, Stewart Island. The reserve will be centred on Ulva Island and stretches over 1075 hectares along 12 kilometres of coastline in the heart of Paterson Inlet.

Much of the new marine reserve is bordered by national park land.

The remaining 9000 hectares of the inlet (which is close to the island's settlement of Oban) is to form part of a new mataitai reserve under the Fisheries Act. The mataitai is a provision for a Maori-managed fishing reserve, established with community consultation, to ensure sustainable fishing around the marine reserve.

'This marine reserve is

deserved recognition for a special area of significant marine habitats,' says Margaret Hopkins of Stewart Island, a sometime Forest and Bird councillor and member of the Southland Conservation Board when the idea was first mooted.

'It is really appropriate that this marine reserve lies adjacent to Ulva Island, an amazingly special, pest-free sanctuary. Both the marine and terrestrial habitats encompassed within these areas are a reminder to us all of what the world was once like. It is disappointing, however, that the marine reserve shrank with each round of consultation.

'To this day there are accusations about lack of consultation and a failure to take into consideration the objections that people have had,



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Paterson Inlet on Stewart Island lies close to the settlement of Oban. After 13 years of discussion, 1057 hectares centred on Ulva Island have been made into a marine reserve. Another 9000 hectares are now controlled by a mataitai reserve under Maori fisheries regulations.

but I think we have gone too far in that respect and ended up with a much diminished reserve that may struggle to be viable.

However, it is an achievement that we have reached this stage and the marine reserve in conjunction with the mataitai will ensure a high degree of marine protection for a very accessible area,' she says.

The Minister of Conservation, Hon. Chris Carter, sees the new marine reserve as 'a very exciting development in marine conservation'.

'Paterson Inlet's crystal-clear waters are a treasure chest of marine life,' he says. 'More than 270 seaweed species have been found there. Five species of marine mammals visit the inlet, including rare leopard seals and southern right whales. There are 57 species of fish, and 50 species of bird found in the reserve area.

'Most importantly, Paterson Inlet is one of only a few sites in the world where four species of primitive shellfish, called brachiopods or lamp shells, live

on the seabed at depths which visitors to the area can dive to,' Mr Carter says.

'Lamp shells are quite literally living fossils. They date back 600 million years and have hardly changed in that time. That such a substantial population of these shellfish remains in our waters is just one example of the remarkable marine bounty New Zealand is fortunate enough to have.

'Unfortunately, our efforts in marine conservation have lagged well behind our efforts to permanently protect land-based species. If we added together all the marine reserves we have around mainland New Zealand, they cover an area smaller than the smallest of our 14 national parks, even though our marine area is 15 times larger than our land area.

'New Zealand has a lot of work to do in marine conservation, and the Paterson Inlet initiative is an important step forward,' Mr Carter says. 'I congratulate the local Stewart Island community for their role in achieving it.'

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