



Forest & Bird

TE REO O TE TAIAO | Giving Nature a Voice

The Hauraki Gulf is an incredible place, globally recognised for its diversity of wildlife including whales, dolphins, and sea birds. This ocean world, right on our doorstep, supports the people of Auckland, the Coromandel and beyond, providing wellbeing, recreation, and livelihoods. Its kaimoana has fed generations of kiwi families.



But our precious Hauraki Gulf is in trouble.

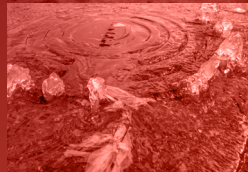
Over two lifetimes, the health of these waters has been severely degraded.



Overfishing is causing fish stocks to decline. Crayfish are functionally extinct and snapper stocks have reduced by over 80%.



Bottom trawling and other destructive fishing methods are destroying the seabed, crushing habitats such as mussel reefs and sponge gardens.



The Hauraki Gulf is being polluted with sewage, heavy metals and mud from the land. After rainfall, beaches are often unsafe for swimming.



Instead of seaweed forests thriving with life, we see kina barrens, sediment-clouded water, and bare rock.



Hauraki Gulf Marine Park

As our population grows, so does our reliance on the Gulf, including for fishing, aquaculture, transport, infrastructure, and tourism. Over a million people use the Gulf for recreation, with more than 220,000 fishers, making it the most popular recreational fishing location in the country.

Forecasts indicate that by 2030 more than 2.8 million people will be living within 80km of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park. With such a rapidly growing population, we urgently need better ways of managing our impact on the marine environment.

The Gulf simply cannot withstand the increasing pressures placed upon it.



Mussel reefs were once widespread throughout the Firth of Thames and inner Hauraki Gulf. Now, due to commercial dredging of mussel beds, and other destructive fishing methods, few reefs remain. These original reefs were of vital importance, filtering and flushing the whole Firth of Thames in a day. It takes the remaining reefs two years to achieve the same feat. Without the filtering power of mussel reefs the waters of the Hauraki Gulf have become murkier and more vulnerable to the effects of runoff from land. However, there is an initiative underway to reinstate and restore mussel reefs – a great example of how people can actively restore the health of the Gulf.



Marine protected areas (MPAs) mean more fish in the sea – this is good for marine life and good for us. Currently only 0.28% of the Hauraki Gulf is fully protected – this means that ocean species and the habitats they rely on simply can't find sanctuary from human impacts, and that's why we need a network of MPAs.

Appropriately designed MPAs are proven to increase the quantity of catch in adjacent areas, as well as the size of fish. For example, fishermen and women in Auckland are enjoying greater numbers of snapper thanks to the Goat Island MPA. A recent study proved that the MPA acts as a fish nursery – 11 percent of young snapper in a 40km radius of the reserve were offspring of adults that lived in the reserve.

The Sea Change plan proposes a representative MPA network that protects the diverse sea life and habitats within the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park. This MPA network is one element of a broad range of vital recommendations in the Sea Change plan. It's crucial that the plan be put into action as a package – because it proposes integrated long-term solutions to improve the health, well-being and sustainable economic capacity of the Gulf.

But there's a plan to reverse this damage and save the Gulf. It is called Sea Change – Tai Timu Tai Pari, an integrated plan that, when put into action, will rebuild the health and mauri of the Hauraki Gulf, sustaining these waters and the communities that rely on them.

Who wrote the plan?

A 14 member Stakeholder Working Group (SWG) developed the plan through engagement with mana whenua, local communities, stakeholders and technical experts, and contributions from local and central government agencies.

The SWG was selected to represent those sectors that have an impact on or an interest in the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park including mana whenua, recreational and commercial fishing, farming, aquaculture, infrastructure, community, and environmentalists. Forest and Bird's marine conservation advocate Katrina Goddard was a key member of the working group. The SWG was supported by the Waikato Regional Council, Auckland Council, Department of Conservation, the Hauraki Gulf Forum and the Ministry for Primary Industries, working with mana whenua.

The Sea Change plan is the first of its kind in New Zealand – it addresses the range of issues facing the Hauraki Gulf, including the need to improve water quality, better manage our fishing and protect our marine environment. The plan includes recommendations to remove bottom trawling and other destructive fishing methods from the Gulf, and to create a network of marine reserves to protect sea life and help replenish our fish stocks.

A plan sitting on a shelf won't help the Hauraki Gulf.

Together, we must call on the New Zealand Government to implement Sea Change as an integrated package, without delay. This will include stakeholder collaboration and public consultation on how best to put the plan into action.

Business as usual and a piecemeal approach will not achieve the vision we share for a thriving, abundant Gulf for all.



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