

Hokianga Accord Update #15

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Solid support for Kerikeri mataitai applicants

Localised fisheries management in the northern Bay of Islands is a step closer to reality after a positive meeting to discuss mataitai plans.

Around 35 people assembled at Whitiara Marae, Kerikeri in the first week of October to learn about the application by local Maori to establish a mataitai reserve.

Local kaitiaki/guardians want to have more meaningful input into strategies that aim to:

- Increase fish abundance;
- Provide a healthier marine environment; and
- Give effect to their customary right to manage areas of traditional importance.

Judah Heihei is both the co-chairman of the Hokianga Accord and the leader of Te Roopu Kaitiaki Whakature I Nga Taonga o Tangaroa. This group represents fourteen hapu/marae with an interest in the area from the Purerua Peninsula (inside Mangonui Inlet) out to the Black Rocks and north past the Ninepin to Takou Bay.

“Before the hui we were a little concerned about what sort of reception we were going to get. So it was pleasing for our kaitiaki to receive such an encouraging response,” said Judah.

“Often when people hear the word reserve they get ‘up in arms’. Once they learn this is not a marine reserve but an opportunity for locals to determine future fisheries management in a particular area, they are far more accepting of the plans.”

These kaitiaki had tried in vain to implement marine protection and fisheries enhancement measures over the past twelve years. They were pleased the Ministry of Fisheries was finally giving their mataitai application serious consideration.

Local kaitiaki assured the gathering that amateur fishers would still have access to fish in the area. Any new fisheries bylaws would be fully consulted on in the future. The most noticeable, immediate impact would be the prohibition of commercial fishing from within the mataitai boundaries.

Another kaitiaki, Hiwi Rihari, said it was disappointing only one of the ten objectors to the mataitai proposal attended the meeting.

“While the local commercial fisherman has genuine concerns it was now up to the Ministry of Fisheries to work with our kaitiaki to try and address those matters.”

A further meeting with MFish, the commercial fisher and kaitiaki is expected in early November.

The next step in the MFish mataitai establishment process is to ask for written submissions from people who either have a fishing interest in any of the stocks within the proposed mataitai boundary and whose ability to harvest maybe affected by the establishment of a mataitai.

After such a long process Judah and his kaitiaki are keen for an efficient submission process and timely Ministry advice to the Minister so a final decision can be made on the mataitai application.

Given that there is:

- Limited (so far) opposition to the mataitai from commercial fishers;
- No immediate impact on amateur fishers; and
- The Crown's ongoing obligation to recognise and provide for Maori customary food gathering and practices;

the Hokianga Accord is supportive and will be watching this process with interest.