

Hokianga Accord Update #28

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Support for Deep Water Cover Rahui

Tangata whenua in the southern Bay of Islands have applied for a temporary, two-year closure to fishing in Maunganui Bay, otherwise known as Deep Water Cove. The Ministry of Fisheries advertised the temporary closure request in November 2009 and submissions were due by 24 December. The objective is to achieve "more fish in the water/kia maha atu nga ika ki roto i te wai".

Ngati Kuta and Patukeha ki Te Rawhiti placed a customary rahui over the Maunganui Bay area in March 2009. This recent closure request, made under section 186A of the Fisheries Act 1996, is to provide statutory support for the rahui already in place.

Previous consultation carried out by Ngati Kuta and Patukeha ki Te Rawhiti indicates community support for the temporary closure and the earlier scuttling of the Navy frigate, the Canterbury, within the area. Tangata whenua are excited by the increasing marine life in and around the sunken ship and a number of research programmes are underway to monitor the changes in abundance.

Northern Bay Matakaitai application progress

There is still no satisfactory outcome for tangata whenua in the northern Bay of Islands who have been waiting patiently for the Minister of Fisheries to approve their application for a matakaitai around the Black Rocks and out to the coast. The kaitiaki of Marangai Taiaimai have struggled for years to achieve meaningful recognition of their willingness to deliver kaitiakitanga [guardianship] in their rohe.

The Te Puna matakaitai application has received widespread support from the community, the Hokianga Accord and various representative organisations. It seems the only impediment is the objection of one commercial crayfisher. Local attempts to address the objection have failed and so the Minister has been asked to make a decision.

At the last Hokianga Accord hui the Minister, Phil Heatley, indicated he was reluctant to make such decisions and would prefer a system where Maori decide amongst themselves what their priorities are and how they want to achieve their objectives.

Proposed MFish restructure to deliver services for Maori

In late November MFish initiated discussions on how the Ministry would deliver its services to Maori fishing interests through to 2014. MFish were due to have hui with various groups before submissions closed in early December 2009.

Essentially, MFish are seeking to integrate the commercial, customary, amateur and kaitiakitanga interests of Maori through developing Iwi Fisheries Plans, regional forums and a national iwi fisheries forums.

There is little doubt that the process to develop existing plans has been helpful to building relationships amongst various iwi, hapu and whanau. The missing ingredients to achieving success have been getting both access to sufficient resources and meaningful acknowledgement of the plans.

The proposed restructure of MFish will need to deliver greater recognition of Maori's wide-ranging environmental and commercial, customary and amateur fishing interests. It is notable that Ben Dalton (Nga Puhi, Ngati Porou) has been appointed as the Deputy Chief Executive of Treaty Partnership. This appointment is a good sign that MFish is taking its relationship with tangata whenua more seriously.

Whatever the outcome from this development, Maori must avoid being isolated into a 'Maori-only' space when there are common concerns about sustainability, fish availability and abundance amongst a range of interest groups, not just Maori.

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