

Hokianga Accord Update #6

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Environment and reserves hot topics

Environmental issues are hot topics as we lead into an election year and marine protection concerns, including reserves, will no doubt surface during those debates.

In the early 1990's local communities lost the legal right to manage local coastal resources through the fisheries legislation. Now our only options are marine reserves or customary area management tools. Each of these choices have their place, however, no area management tool is going to work without the support of the local community.

So often it is the local people who see the effects of human activity on the waterways, land and coastal areas yet it is not locals that are given the tools to manage those activities. Most often it is central government and territorial agencies making the decisions that have localised impacts.

Sooner or later the government, and more specifically the Ministry of Fisheries, will have to realise that academics do not have the necessary knowledge or understanding of local issues to make broad-based decisions regarding our coastline and kaimoana.

It also is very frustrating when a Wellington bureaucrat's advice takes priority over the locals' considered opinion. The collective knowledge of kaitiaki (guardians) who have been born and bred by the sea is beyond measure when compared to that of Wellington-based policy analysts.

A more collective approach to managing our fisheries and environment is required if we are to leave our mokopuna a legacy we can all be proud of.

Throughout the Hokianga Accord's ten hui we have sought answers to the dilemma facing coastal communities and their desire to have a more hands-on role in managing local resources. It is pleasing to note the mid north iwi fisheries forum is making progress. The report from the latest hui held at Waipapa is now online at http://option4.co.nz/Fish_Forums/documents/har1107.pdf.

A major impediment has been the lack of public awareness of the potential of customary area management tools and the benefits their implementation can have for the wider community.

This is an unfortunate outcome of MFish' failure to educate the public on alternatives to highly controversial marine reserves. Reserves legalise confiscation of areas from the public, forever.

Mataitai, taiapure and rahui have become tools of contention rather than productive, local area management tools.

An exception seems to be in the South Island where Ngai Tahu have sufficient resources to adequately consult with locals and achieve agreeable outcomes. In the north it is not so straightforward. Aside from education, major issues such as population pressure, competition for resources and access all affect people's response to any local management initiative.

Marine protection will be a major talking point at the next Hokianga Accord hui. If you have a contribution to make or simply want to hear more about customary area management tools please feel welcome to attend and participate. Dates of the next hui are April 3rd and 4th, venue to be confirmed. Keep an eye on www.HokiangaAccord.co.nz for marae details.

Alternatively contact Shelley Naera at shelley.naera@ngapuhi.iwi.nz or call her on 09 4010084 for more information.