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An update on Fish Forever campaign progress and a story by John Booth and Vicky Froude, "Invasion Alert!"

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Fish Forever Matters #2 March 2015



Fish Forever Discusses Next Moves for Marine Reserves with Conservation Minister Maggie Barry

By Vince Kerr
Fish Forever Marine Reserve Campaign Co-ordinator

There are still no marine reserves in the Bay of Islands. What are our next steps?

Before Christmas, Fish Forever got stuck into considering the various scenarios and potential actions that could get us to that elusive goal line. Can we apply for the marine reserves without hapu support? Should we? What about the Government's signalled intention to reform marine legislation?

Amidst this sea of curly questions we decided to go direct to the Minister. We gave the Minister an update of all that we had learned to date, we emphasised the strong support we had from the community in the Bay of Islands, and we highlighted the benefits of our proposal. We spoke frankly of our disappointment in not getting the Rawhiti hapu alongside in support of the proposal and our concern that Treaty politics had overwhelmed a process we had invested several years in.

We asked these questions of the Minister

- How would an application under the Marine Reserves Act 1971 be received by the Government?
- What is the status of the new Marine Protection Bill, when is it planned to come into effect, and what changes would this proposed legislation bring to how we proceed?
- Under the proposed Marine Protection Bill and the Government's Marine Protected Areas (MPA) Policy, can you give an indication of when a marine protection forum process would be initiated and resourced for Northland?

The Minister's response

The Minister advised us that while technically it is still possible to apply for the marine reserve areas under the Marine Reserves Act 1971, it could be problematic. The Government is focused on a new approach involving a more 'collaborative process' in the form of regional MPA forums. It was suggested that processing a one-off marine reserve application now under the old Act could actually delay or even distract from the new and broader scale approach.

Regarding legislative reform, the Minister told us a whole new Act is being prepared for introduction into Parliament. They are saying that there will be a discussion document coming out in the next few months to kick off this process. Very little detail on the new legislation was offered to us.

We were told that the new Act would "address a number of the deficiencies with the current Marine Reserves Act, such as the decision-making process, which in my view, lacks transparency, and can be complex and drawn-out". The Minister then suggested that we may choose to wait to see how this new legislative process may change the way our vision for marine protection in the Bay of Islands can be achieved.

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Regarding the Minister's commitment to establishing and resourcing a Northland Regional Marine Protected Area Forum, we were told that the Government could not make a commitment to a timeline or the geographical boundaries for a Northland MPA forum. The Minister stated that Northland's case to be a priority area was strong based on the large amount of supporting information, the demonstrated community support for marine protection, and the current gaps in marine protection in the region.

[Read the ministers response in full on our website here](#)

Going forward

Fish Forever is pleased that marine protection in Northland and the Bay of Islands has made it to the Minister's attention and our hard work and the community's voice has been acknowledged. However we are gravely concerned that time is passing and no marine reserve is in sight. Worse we are left very uncertain what the next action for Fish Forever and the community should be! After decades of concern over decline in biodiversity values in our beloved Bay, we are effectively asked to wait for these uncertain changes to reach Northland with no actual commitment or timeline stated. Is this situation good enough?

Fish Forever is clear on the position that just waiting is not good enough. We are evaluating a range of actions currently. We are exploring all avenues to learn more about what is happening in Wellington. We will continue dialogue with those involved and collecting background monitoring information. As always we encourage and depend on your support and ideas. All are welcome to attend our meetings (last Thursday of each month, 4-6 pm at Paihia) or suggest ideas on the way forward.

Watch this space.

Look forward to a little update like this every second month from now on. Each Fish Forever Matters will be accompanied by an interest-story from the waters of the Bay of Islands. If you've got something to contribute, please send it to Richard of the [Fish Forever team](#).

Communications Team
Fish Forever

Invasion alert!

John Booth & Vicky Froude

Growing and breeding in Northland marine waters are at least 128 alien (or non-indigenous species), many of them present in the Bay of Islands. It's likely that the first to arrive in the Bay—on the early sailing ships—was the Northern Hemisphere blue mussel, which has now hybridised with the native *Mytilus galloprovincialis*. The Bay of Islands remains at critical risk of further invaders as it a key port-of-call for many visiting recreational vessels from elsewhere in New Zealand and overseas. The movement of other types of vessel, marine farming equipment and so on into the Bay can also pose significant threats.

Fortunately, many alien species are of little concern. They may exist at low densities, and so far have caused little damage—although, as invasions on land have shown, this can change. On the other hand, the alien Pacific oyster *Crassostrea gigas*, while now the mainstay of oyster farming in the Bay of Islands, has changed forever the local ecology by forming large biogenic reefs that trap fine sediment. A number of other alien species not yet in the Bay could cause significant damage if they did arrive (see Northland Regional Council [NRC] website). These species have the potential to out-compete and displace native ones. In this alert we concentrate on just one species, the Asian kelp *Undaria*.

Asian kelp *Undaria pinnatifida*

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This kelp has already become established in many ports and harbours to the south, including Auckland. But—and very concerning—it has recently also been found in Houhora Harbour and near the Rangaunu Harbour entrance.

Undaria is a highly invasive and opportunistic seaweed which spreads mainly as fouling on boat hulls and other submerged equipment. It can form dense stands which lead to the exclusion or displacement of native plant and animal species, and can change the structure of ecosystems, especially in areas where native seaweeds are absent. One concern is that it may be Undaria—rather than native seaweeds - that will end up colonising the kina barrens of the Bay of Islands.

Undaria grows from the low intertidal to about 15 metres depth on both sheltered and exposed shores, and may reach a metre or more in height. Its key characteristics are the midrib of the lamina and, when mature, the frilly sporophyll at the base. Keep a keen watch for it: early detection and immediate eradication is the only way we'll keep this nasty out of the Bay.



If you suspect you have found Undaria in the Bay of Islands or elsewhere in Northland, put a sample into a plastic bag, place in fridge, and get hold of one of the authors, or Vince Kerr (09 435 1518) or NRC (0800 504 639).

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