

## A case study: facing unexpected opposition in a very public forum

When your campaign comes into the public eye, you may find that people come out from the woodwork after remaining quiet throughout the bulk of your consultation work. You need to be ready to respond positively, and fast.

The following articles have been reproduced with kind permission of the Northern Advocate and are an example of this kind of situation, encountered during the Whangarei Harbour marine reserve campaign.

These objections were easily responded to and were in fact irrelevant to the purpose of the proposed marine reserve and criteria of the Marine Reserves Act. They were also highly exaggerated.

# Island too risky for reserve — veteran diver

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Whangarei Harbour

By Katy Horne

One of Northland's most experienced divers says lives will be at risk if a proposal for a marine reserve at Motukaroro (Passage) Island in the Whangarei Harbour goes ahead.

Kevin Butler makes his living leading diving tours to Northland's most famous marine reserve at the Poor Knights Islands but is vehemently opposed to plans to establish a reserve at Passage Island off Reotahi.

"The island is at the narrowest part of the harbour opposite Marsden Pt and the currents there are immensely strong. The tides rip through.

"I have dived there with some of the best divers in the country and they can't handle it," said Mr Butler, who has been a master diving instructor for 28 years and dived more than 10,000 times at the Poor Knights.

The Kamo High School students who are proposing the Passage Island reserve have said that the recreational activities for the area would be diving, snorkelling, boating,

**It is ludicrous to even consider having it (Passage Island) as a reserve. It's not a place for novices. There will be drownings.**

— Kevin Butler  
Master diver instructor

scientific study and scenic viewing.

However, Mr Butler said the Passage Island area was very different to the safe waters at the Goat Island marine reserve at Leigh, which draws thousands of visitors a day during summer.

"People will think it's like Leigh.

"But if experienced divers can't handle it then mum, dad and the kids will drown. People will get swept away."

Mr Butler said signs warning people of the danger would

not be a sufficient way of keeping people safe.

"There are signs at Piha (a West Auckland beach) and look how many people have drowned there."

Mr Butler said harbour marine reserves needed to be safe for families.

"It's ludicrous to even consider having it as a reserve.

"It's not a place for novices. There will be drownings."

The Passage Island reserve is one of three being proposed by Kamo High School students.

Successive groups of geography students have been working for 10 years to have parts of Whangarei Harbour preserved for future generations.

Mr Butler said he supported the two reserves the students were proposing at Limestone Island and Waikaraka.

The students are holding their final round of consultation with key stakeholders before their proposal is forwarded to the Director General of Conservation early this year.

The Northern Advocate was unable to contact Kamo High School geography students for comment.

## Future stock

Saturday's story: "Island Too Risky For Reserve — Veteran Diver," expresses the opinion of Kevin Butler, a commercial operator who objects to the proposal that Motukaroro (Passage) Island should become a marine reserve. He "makes his living leading diving tours to Northland's most famous marine reserve at the Poor Knights".

His concerns may well be valid except for one small thing. What the students of Kamo High School are attempting to preserve is the ecology of our country. In the long term they are not making a new tourist attraction, just preservation of

what little we still have left of our maritime heritage.

I suspect that there may well be maritime parks, such as at Leigh, that are no-go areas for commercial diving operators. I suggest to Mr Butler that he should support the Kamo High School efforts of over 10 years, rather than knocking them.

It is interesting to note that Mr Butler supports the Kamo students proposal for maritime reserves at Limestone Island and Waikaraka, in both instances not an area for divers.

Is it not the basic idea of marine reserves to protect our maritime ecology? To once again have breeding grounds for not only fish, but also all other marine life in order to ensure the essential balance?

Do we stop preserving this balance just because some twit decides to dive when a strong current is flowing rather than at a slack tide? He can do it right now if he is inclined, maritime reserve or otherwise. No laws will protect the individual against stupidity. The sea is a harsh taskmaster.

My suggestion to Mr Butler is to think about what these students are attempting to do, and talk to them. Give them the benefit of your vast knowledge. Each may learn from the other.

— TIM CLARK,  
Whangarei.

# Concerns over marine reserve 'miss the point', say students

Whangarei

by Katy Horne

ty concerns raised over a marine reserve proposal for Motukaroro (Poor Knights) Island in the Whangarei Harbour miss the point, according to a student group behind the proposal.

Northland diver Kevin Sutherland told the Northern Advocate that strong currents surrounding the island make it unsuitable for a marine reserve.

Even the most experienced divers have problems when diving there and that the general public could be at risk should it become a marine reserve.

**'The colour and brilliance of the marine life at Motukaroro is stunning — there are few sites anywhere in New Zealand that can match it.'**

— Kamo High School student spokesperson Samara Sutherland

However, Kamo High School student spokesperson Samara Sutherland said the area was chosen for its high biological diversity, not for its safety as a diving spot.

"It is the effects of outgoing tide that gives the proposed reserve a lot of its character. The colour and brilliance of the marine life at Motukaroro is stunning — there are few sites anywhere in New Zealand that can match it."

She said the purpose of marine reserves was to protect diverse areas of marine life and that was why the students had chosen three distinct areas in their marine reserve proposal.

The students are also seeking to have areas at Waikaraka and Motumatakohē (Limestone) Island protected.

"The water around Motukaroro,

close to the entrance of the harbour, is a very important breeding ground for many species of fish. The actual area of the marine reserve around the island is small and the areas immediately outside the proposed reserve would, in theory, benefit directly from the spill-over of replenished fish stocks inside the 'no-take' zone."

Miss Sutherland said it was not necessary to dive at the island to experience the diversity of the life

there. "You can just stand in the shallows on the island or put your head under the water with a mask."

She said Kamo High School students and Auckland University students had been snorkelling and diving there for the past ten years and never had any problems.

"People are free to dive there now — turning it into a marine reserve isn't going to change that."

She said any piece of water was potentially dangerous.

"For instance, the southern harbour of the Poor Knights can be dangerous and a biologist drowned at Leigh Marine Reserve. If every marine reserve had to be safe it would be very limiting."