

## New group dives deep to save Gulf



Members of the Waiheke Collective's marine subgroup like Mark Russell are looking for ways to regenerate the marine environment. Photo Sophie Boladeras

An ambitious community consultation and planning process to protect and regenerate Waiheke's marine environment is gaining traction. Three months ago the marine subgroup of the Waiheke Collective formed to develop wide-ranging community support for marine protection around the island.

"We are now starting our community consultation and planning process, aimed at creating an island-wide plan to protect and regenerate the marine environment that surrounds us," says group member Mark Russell.

"A hui on 15 August at Morra Hall is our next step. To succeed we need people with all viewpoints on this important subject - opposed, indifferent, cautiously optimistic, enthusiastic - to come along

and tell us what you think."

Marine protection efforts on the island are ongoing. This June, a meeting organised by National's Nikki Kaye saw around 40 people gather at Morra Hall to discuss ways to regenerate the Hauraki Gulf.

Those at the meeting heard results from a 2015 Auckland Council Colmar Brunton survey of 2000 people which found that the majority of Waiheke registered voters (67 percent) and off-island ratepayers (54 percent) supported the establishment of a network of marine protected areas linking the islands in the Waiheke Local Board area.

Another report, after eCoast conducted an underwater survey from Matiatia to Enclosure Bay in 2016, showed a depleted

ocean environment in need of marine reserves according to head ecologist Tim Haggitt. Despite all of the data, including multiple "State of the Gulf" reports, those at the meeting agreed little had been done to mitigate marine decline.

Also in June, marine conservation around the Noises Island chain northwest of Waiheke was discussed at a meeting hosted by the Outboard Boating Club in Orakei.

"[As a society] we are still conflicted about marine reserves, seeing them as a loss of access rights, while what we need is to view our ability to catch fish as a privilege and not necessarily a right," Dr Tom Trnski, head of natural sciences at Auckland Museum said at the meeting.

National environmental organisation Forest and Bird is also currently calling for enhanced marine protection particularly the creation of more marine reserves around Auckland's coasts.

Auckland regional manager Nick Beveridge says the Hauraki Gulf is in a dire state after decades of over-fishing and degradation.

"More than half the marine life in the Hauraki Gulf has disappeared since 1925 - we can't afford to keep fishing in this unsustainable way," says Mr Beveridge.

"We need to make sure we're not pushing some fish species to the point of local extinction, along with the seabirds, dolphins and whales that feed on them."

To get involved in the conversation come along to the marine protection hui on 15 August at 6pm at Morra Hall. Contact Mark Russell on 021456891 for further information. • *Sophie Boladeras*

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