

Setting Course for a Sustainable Future

The Management of New Zealand's Marine Environment

**OFFICE OF THE
PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT
Te Kaitiaki Taiao a Te Whare Pāremata**

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Bibliographic reference

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KARAKIA

Waerea, waerea nga tai moana
Waerea nga tai o Kiwa
Waerea, waerea nga tai nā Hinemoana
Waerea, waerea nga tai nā Tangaroa
Waerea, waerea nga tai nā Tāne Mahuta
Waerea, waerea nga tai nau e Tāwhirimatea

Takoto te ihi moana, takoto te ihi matawai
Takoto te ihi pūkohurangi, takoto te ihi wairangi
Ki au-ripo, ki au-tohorā, ki au-marino
Takoto atu te au-māuru, te au-whakarua, te au-marangai
Te au-moana ki te pū, ki Hawaiki
Ki te pū, ki te Toi-whenua

Tenei au ka whakatakoto i te ihu o taku waka
Ki te rua o Tama-nui-te-Ra kia mau kita
Kita ki uta ki te Toi-whenua e

Whakahoro, whakahoro e Tāwhirimatea
Ki te pū, ki te māuru, ko Pou-tū, ko Pou-takoto atu
Ki te Toi-whenua, ki Hawaiki

Kapi kapi o mata tonga
Waiho taua i te Ihonui o tai e Maui
O tai o Kupe, o tai o Te Rango-pātahi
Koi keukeu, koi rangaranga e ī

Mitimiti tai maranga o Aotea
Mitimiti tai o te moana a Kiwa
Mitimiti tai a Hinemoana
Takaahoaho Tangaroa i tai-whenua
i tai-timu, i tai wawā, i tai wīwī e ī

Ka rere Tānekaha te waka-rei o Kahukoka
Ki te whanga, ki Hawaiki-nui, e oi ki uta e ī

This karakia is a dedication for a waka, an ocean-going canoe, to remove any obstacles or difficulties that might be in the way of an important long voyage. It asks the various atua or gods associated with the sea to prepare the way, and for a clear path to be made across the waters, so that the waka might arrive safely at its destination

Preface

New Zealand's marine environment is enormous, of great economic, ecological and spiritual value. However, our knowledge of its treasures and functions is akin to that of our terrestrial forests at the turn of the 20th century. We are woefully ignorant of what could well be New Zealand's number one ecological and economic asset.

This investigation sets out to take a very broad view of how New Zealanders see the sea - from rich coastal waters to deep oceans. It explores the threats to ecological health as the exploitation opportunities are pursued. We are, and always have been, a nation that draws wealth from the ocean and depends upon it to trade with the world. Over the last two centuries we have exploited the biological wealth; first the whales and seals, and more recently our major fish stocks. In the last three decades we have begun extracting gas and oil from below the seabed, while mineral extraction and bio-prospecting are likely growth areas in the 21st century. In-shore waters continue to be a major recreation and tourism resource with activities as diverse as whale watching and America's Cup yacht racing.

By ratifying international conventions, such as UNCLOS, we have clearly acknowledged the value and values of our seas. New Zealand has been a leader in trying to develop a legislative framework to ensure the sustainability of fish stocks - the Quota Management System (QMS) introduced in 1986 and the Fisheries Act. At the community level there are very good "care" initiatives. While the total area in "no take" reserves in New Zealand seas is minuscule, other models for managing local areas (mataitai, taiapure) are being established.

Despite this progress, the sustainable future of our marine world remains in great peril. Why? Firstly we have convinced ourselves that the QMS and associated measures equate with sustainable management of the entire marine ecosystem. While assignment of rights to take a set tonnage - the total allowable catch (TAC) is an advance on previous management systems, there is no way such a right to a component of a very complex marine commons will on its own ensure the sustainability of the whole system. Other measures to ensure sustainable management are needed.

Secondly, we simply do not know enough about the marine ecosystem, and our impacts on it, to manage it sustainably. It can be argued we will never know enough. That is not the central issue. We do know enough now to be aware that we should proceed with caution, like a ship sailing in poorly charted waters. Instead we are charging ahead as though the precision of our ecological knowledge matched the precision with which we can position a trawl net in the ocean or an oil well in the earth's mantle beneath our seas. Sustainable management of the marine environment will, in practical terms, be a process of continual research and improvement. However, current investment in research on marine ecosystems, and use of available information, are simply not sufficient to guarantee that our understanding will keep pace with our exploitative capabilities.

Thirdly, there does not appear to be wide recognition of the crucial role of tangata whenua in the "sustainable future" of New Zealand's marine world. Iwi and hapu throughout New Zealand have close relationships with the coastal seas and unique rights and responsibilities for its future stewardship. Fisheries quota ownership by Maori continues to increase, bringing with it unique opportunities to blend cultural values for the health of marine ecosystems with the realities of maintaining viable fishing enterprises.

Fourthly, we have an extraordinary plethora of legislation and agencies with marine responsibilities. There are 18 main statutes, 14 agencies and six government strategies for marine management. We have also signed up to at least 13 international conventions with marine implications. Inevitably there are gaps, overlaps and inefficiencies. A much more cohesive government approach to marine management is urgently required. This appears to be acknowledged by diverse groups with marine interests. Environmental NGOs have proposed the establishment of a Ministry of Marine Environmental Management to address needs as they perceive them, while the 1999 Defence Select Committee report recommended that "the Navy's primary area of responsibility should be the waters in the immediate vicinity of New Zealand". The importance of both the Navy and Airforce in fisheries surveillance and marine environmental emergencies was also noted.

As always there is a way forward. I am recommending immediate action on some specific issues, but more importantly that a taskforce be created to chart a new course for the sustainable stewardship of our marine world. Its most daunting task will be building consensus and promoting widespread public understanding of the many values, interests and rights at risk. A major recrafting of our thinking, policies and legislation is needed to reflect this. The values and fisheries management systems that permitted the desecration of Spirits Bay in Northland, and the ongoing demise of orange roughy stock and ecosystems such as sea mounts, are simply not good enough to meet New Zealand's needs in the first years of the 21st century.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'J Morgan Williams'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'J'.

Dr J Morgan Williams

Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment