



CTA-070-Protect Marine Biodiversity

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Protect marine biodiversity

1. Opinion

"Doing the right thing for our oceans" is more than just a slogan, writes Storm Stanley.

Locking 30% of Otago's coastline away in no-take marine reserves forever is not the answer to marine conservation issues. That might make Auckland and Wellington environmentalists feel good and give them bragging rights on the world stage, but what it will mean is that you and yours will never be able to catch a fish for the table from those places you used to, ever again.

Forest and Bird's recent call for Otago's South-East Marine Protection Forum to extend its marine protected area (MPA) target is a call to displace existing fishing effort and catches into much smaller fishing areas, a recipe to wreck the health of wider fisheries and trigger the damage to biodiversity the forum was supposedly set up to remedy.

Where does Forest and Bird's 30% slogan come from? From itself. In Hawaii in September 2016, members of the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) World Conservation Congress, of which Forest and Bird is a member, voted on a motion that 30% of each marine habitat should be set aside in "highly protected marine protected areas and other effective area-based conservation

measures" by 2030. The motion refers to effective area-based conservation measures, not to marine reserves. The IUCN motion has no relevance to the southeast of the South Island of New Zealand. The New Zealand Government is not bound by IUCN motions. The Department of Conservation is an IUCN member, but didn't vote in favor of the motion — it abstained. The South-East MPA Forum was not tasked with implementing the non-binding aspirations of an international organization; it was set up to find workable marine protection solutions for our region.

Why environmental lobbyists are so focused on numerical targets — how many marine reserves, what proportion of the coastline, and so on — rather than on achieving real biodiversity protection benefits? Establishing a marine reserve is not the same thing as protecting marine biodiversity. A marine reserve won't stop many of the most critical threats to marine biodiversity: it won't stop ocean acidification or rising sea temperatures and it won't stop sedimentation from land use changes. Recently, a Niwa expert team found that of the 20 most important threats to New Zealand's marine habitats, only seven were directly related to



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human activities within the marine environment. Those of us who are serious about protecting marine biodiversity should be asking ourselves how we can best manage the full range of threats, rather than arguing about how much ocean is in no-take marine reserves.

For every scientist rolled out by environmental groups who says the world needs to shut away 10% or 20% or 30% of its oceans, another will point out it's better to manage potential threats to biodiversity effectively wherever they may arise — for example, by establishing and enforcing effective fisheries management regimes.

The clash between effective fisheries management and large marine reserves is a critical consideration for recreational, customary and commercial fishers in Otago. Let's take the paua fishery as an illustration. Paua are harvested on inshore reefs which support naturally high levels of biodiversity and are therefore popular candidate sites for marine reserves. We know from scientific research that paua fisheries receive no benefit from the establishment of marine reserves — spillover of adult paua from marine reserves is negligible and larval dispersal is primarily local in scale. In fact, marine reserves jeopardise the sustainability of paua fisheries by displacing fishing effort to areas beyond the reserve boundary and causing localised stock depletion. If large marine

reserves are established — and to reach a 30% target, reserves would have to be very large — paua fisheries outside the reserves would rapidly become barren and unsustainable.

Paua fisheries require a **healthy marine environment and are particularly vulnerable to environmental threats such as sedimentation that are not controlled using marine reserves**. The paua industry has therefore always been a strong proponent of **marine biodiversity protection**, but — based on decades of experience and the best available science — we reject the unquestioning belief in no-take MPAs that drives slogans such as "30% of the ocean must be protected in marine reserves".

I urge everyone who has an interest in the marine environment to turn their minds to achieving effective marine biodiversity protection rather than buying into a global race to establish ever-larger no-take marine reserves. It is not the number or size of a region's marine reserves that matters, but the integrity and effectiveness of all its management regimes (marine and terrestrial) and the ability of these regimes collectively to protect biodiversity and our natural resource base while enabling local communities to thrive and prosper.

- Storm Stanley is chairman of PauaMAC5, the incorporated society representing professional paua divers in Otago-Southland.