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Regional Council
TE RAUHTANGA TAIAO

Whangateau Catchment and Harbour Study

Review of Iwi and Stakeholder Information

July

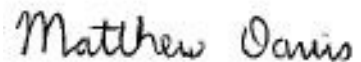
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Whangateau Catchment and Harbour Study

Review of Iwi and Stakeholder Information

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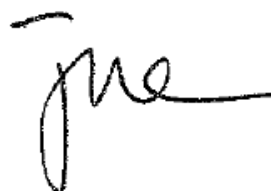
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Preface

Funding was allocated to scope the development of a Whangateau Action Plan during 2008/09. Three technical reports were commissioned to inform the development of the action plan. These reports document catchment and harbour state, record issues and values, and identify existing and potential threats. The three background studies (1) collate and summarise existing environmental information on the harbour, (2) describe the environmental and social characteristics of the catchment, and its management and planning framework, and (3) document initial consultation to identify iwi and community's views on the values, threats and pressures on the Whangateau harbour and catchment. The principal findings from the three reports are synthesized in a summary document.

The studies indicate that the current state of the harbour is relatively healthy and that there is no single, overall dominant physical threat to the harbour; rather there is a range of small threats that cumulatively have potential to affect the harbour health. All three background studies, furthermore, identified the opportunity to improve integrated planning and co-ordination between stakeholders. Additional work is required to clearly determine the threats and most effective manner to intervene in the catchment and harbour to make short term improvements that contribute to the overall long term protection and enhancement of the catchment and harbour.

Technical background reports

Technical Report TR2009/003

Whangateau Catchment and Harbour Study. Review of Marine Environment Information.

Technical Report TR2009/004

Whangateau Catchment and Harbour Study. Review of Environmental and Socio-economic Information.

Technical Report TR2009/005

Whangateau Catchment and Harbour Study. Review of Iwi and Stakeholder Information.

Technical Report TR2009/006

Whangateau Catchment and Harbour Study. Summary and Discussion.

1 Executive Summary

The Whangateau Harbour and catchment area is marked by the number and diverse range of peoples and groups with an active interest in the area's future. Five iwi and hapu authorities have manawhenua interests in the area. Their engagement in any planning or programme design for the area is best seen as "decision-maker to decision-maker".

For local residents the area is regarded as being very community focused with a strong sense of belonging and volunteerism described. Four residential areas are often distinguished: Ti Point, Whangateau, Point Wells and Omaha Beach. Each of these settlements has a distinctive character and usually separate groupings or organisations that serve the interests of that community. In this sense there is no single "community" of Whangateau or one organisation that alone can represent the people of this area.

Whangateau is valued by iwi, local residents and stakeholders as a peaceful and beautiful place, rich in history, with plentiful cockles and other kai moana, and a safe place for children to swim and learn to sail. The natural bush-clad character of much of the hilly land to the west and south of the harbour is valued. The harbour itself is central to family and community activities. Despite development and resultant changes to the hydrology of the harbour during the past 35 years, the harbour is still seen as "pristine". People emphasise its recreational opportunities, the rich kai moana resources, the naturalness of the harbour and the bird life. Iwi and local residents also highly value the historic and heritage components of the harbour.

For iwi there is a keen sense of loss of manawhenua presence in the harbour and the catchment. That is expressed through a desire for more publicly available information on iwi heritage, more planning and policy consideration of both heritage issues but also current manawhenua aspirations, and greater manawhenua involvement in designing and administering heritage and kai moana conservation measures.

For residents and other stakeholders the most frequently mentioned concern about the harbour is development. People feel that the harbour and its catchment are most at risk from further subdivision or poor planning considerations that allow environmental degradation, combined with a lack of regulation or policy that recognise the exceptional qualities of the harbour and have safeguards in place to protect these qualities.

A much discussed issue as a potential threat is sedimentation and the linked issue of mangroves advancing. The potential threat of sedimentation from logging pine forest was one example frequently cited. Other water quality issues raised include pollution from sewerage and disused landfill leachate. Depredation of the highly valued cockle resource was mentioned frequently as a source of concern. While it is unanimously held that the cockles are currently in good numbers and of a good size, concern is more for the future and the potential for over-harvesting by the increasing number of visitors to the harbour.

There is unease and concern about what is not known about the harbour. There are two parts to this. The first encompasses what is not known or understood about the ecology and hydrology of the harbour and how these things may be changing. There is a desire by iwi, residents and stakeholders for monitoring systems to be put in place quickly to build a picture of what is happening and better understand what remedial actions need to be taken to maintain the special qualities of the area. Linked to this is the understanding that much is already known about the harbour but that information (environment, Maori history and use, boat-building history and other subjects) is not readily available to local residents, visitors or government authorities. Informants felt that information should be pooled and made available.

The second point of concern regarding what is not known can be expressed by the strong sense locally that residents are in the dark about what might be planned by local government for the harbour and its catchment. This has resulted in many residents feeling worried about what might be planned for the harbour that they don't know about and subsequently feeling defensive and indignant about its lack of protection. Local residents want to be engaged, consulted and informed in all decision-making about the harbour, leading to local ownership of problems and solutions to environmental problems.

There is a belief from iwi, residents and stakeholders that the harbour and its catchment need to be managed and planned for holistically rather than piecemeal. Any project should be focused on the entire catchment and the whole harbour rather than any one part of it or any single cause of environmental decline. This reflects the understanding that potential problems facing the harbour are interlinked with multiple causes, that effective solutions cannot be developed without a holistic approach to the local environment, and that no one settlement or group around the harbour should be exclusively linked to a specific project.

A number of stakeholders and residents described the importance of establishing a body (a "forum") that could facilitate collaboration, co-ordination, consultation, information exchange and priority setting for iwi as appropriate, all government agencies, NGOs, local residents, and stakeholders with an interest in the harbour. Through regular meetings the forum could be the basis for community partnership with local government and collaborative planning with all agencies. It could be structured to have the capacity to select priorities for projects, for research or for monitoring. Eventually, as the body of knowledge about the state of the harbour grows, longer term projects can be designed with strong community ownership. Some funds should be directed by the forum towards "instant projects" – work with an immediate return in terms of visibility and action that build on what is already known about the area.

2 Introduction

Whangateau Harbour is regarded as one of the highest quality estuaries in the Auckland region. It is the Auckland region's northern-most east-coast mainland estuary and differs from other (mainland) estuaries in that it is connected to a relatively exposed coastal system, and is tidally flushed by the clean, coastal waters from the outer Hauraki Gulf. It contains a regionally-rare mix of habitats, and is well-known for its abundant shellfish beds. As a result, the harbour is an important food gathering area for local iwi, and it also used by a large number of recreational shellfish harvesters.

The potential impacts of land use intensification and the increasing pressure on harbour resources has led to concern about the long-term sustainability of the harbour ecosystem. Intensification and associated land use activities generate sediment, stormwater and wastewater contaminants, which can negatively affect coastal waterways such as Whangateau Harbour. Intensification also leads to coastal and foreshore modifications, which negatively affect the ecology and natural character of an area. Land use in the Whangateau catchment has gradually intensified since the 1960s. Today a significant proportion of the foreshore is urbanised, and the wider catchment contains a mix of agricultural, horticultural, residential and commercial development. At the same time local population growth and changing demographics (local and regional), together with roading improvements that have significantly eased access to the area, are likely to be increasing pressure on the natural resources and conservation values of the harbour.

In response to community concerns about the potential for significant degradation of Whangateau Harbour, the Auckland Regional Council (ARC) is considering the development of a plan which would identify and implement actions required to maintain or enhance its values. Background studies were undertaken to (1) collate and summarise existing environmental information on the harbour (Kelly 2009), (2) describe the environmental and social characteristics of the catchment, and its management and planning framework (Boffa Miskell 2009), and (3) conduct initial consultation to identify the iwi and community's view on the values, threats and pressures on the Whangateau catchment and harbour.

This report corresponds to item (3). It addresses who the stakeholders are in the catchment; what they value about the Whangateau Harbour; what their issues of concern are with regard to the harbour and catchment; what activities they currently undertake; and what might be their existing interest and capacity in participating in the care of the harbour and catchment.

Over 50 individual stakeholders were interviewed for this work representing: iwi; conservation, environment and heritage groups; government bodies; resident and ratepayer groups; farmers, foresters and other land users; research organisations; neighbouring organisations; and interested and knowledgeable individuals. Interviews were semi-structured and covered a number of questions set in advance. An additional 30 people attended a meeting hosted by the Whangateau Harbour Care Group. A

number of people interviewed made reference to specific publications and websites, which were reviewed and analysed as part of their input.

3 Iwi Report

3.1 Manawhenua

As the founding document of New Zealand/Aotearoa, the Treaty of Waitangi/Te Tiriti o Waitangi established a framework for a partnership approach to resource management. Although the Crown is the Treaty partner, and the ARC and Rodney District Council (RDC) are not party to the Treaty, they are local authorities constituted under the Local Government Act (LGA) (New Zealand Government 2002), with specific obligations to manawhenua under the LGA and other legislation. These obligations are different to the general requirement of councils to consult and engage with local interested parties and the community, including the Maori community.

For this study, there are five iwi and hapu authorities who may have an interest in the Whangateau Catchment and Harbour:

- Manuhiri Omaha Kaitiakitanga Ora (MOKO) Charitable Trust
- Te Kawerau a Maki
- Ngati Whatua Nga Rima o Kaipara
- Ngati Paoa Trust Board
- Ngati Paoa Whanau Trust.

It is also possible that other Marutuahu tribes (of which Ngati Paoa are one), such as Ngati Maru, Ngati Tamatera, and Ngati Whanaunga, may indicate their desire to be involved in work in the Whangateau Catchment and Harbour at some point.

The following documents were reviewed in relation to this consultation:

- Memorandum of Understanding between Manuhiri Omaha Kaitiakitanga Ora (MOKO) Charitable Trust Board and Rodney District Council 2007.
- Memorandum of Understanding between Ngati Whatua Nga Rima O Kaipara and Rodney District Council 2003.
- Whaia te Mahere Taiao a Hauraki – Hauraki Iwi Environmental Plan 2004.
- Ngati Paoa Resource Management Plan (1996).
- Ngati Paoa Trust Long-Term Plan 2006.
- Ngatiwai Aquaculture Plan 2005.
- Ngatiwai Environmental Policy 2007.
- Kawerau a Maki Trust Resource Management Statement 1995.

- Iwi consent requests and submissions for Rodney District.

Te Kawerau a Maki indicated a commitment to engage on the future of the Whangateau Catchment and Harbour but was unable to meet within the project timelines. Ngati Paoa Trust Board and Ngati Paoa Whanau Trust were not available for comment. The opportunity remains open to Te Kawerau a Maki, the Ngati Paoa Trust Board and Ngati Paoa Whanau Trust to engage with the ARC regarding their interest in the Whangateau Catchment and Harbour. Ngati Whatua Nga Rima o Kaipara indicated support for Manuhiri Omaha Kaitiakitanga Ora views on matters regarding the Whangateau Catchment and Harbour.

3.2 MOKO Charitable Trust Board

The MOKO Charitable Trust is the mandated hapu authority for Ngati Manuhiri. Ngati Manuhiri is a hapu of the Ngatiwai iwi. The traditional boundaries of Ngati Manuhiri include the Whangateau Harbour and catchment. The RDC Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with MOKO (which is supported by the Ngatiwai iwi) states:

“MOKO Charitable Trust represents the hapu that holds, maintains and exercises its own autonomy and the highest possible independent chiefly authority over all the ancestral treasures (taonga tuku iho) within the traditional lands, coastal boundaries and islands of the hapu...

The council and the MOKO Charitable Trust have a common goal. It is the sustainable management of the environment for the benefit and the well-being of the community, both now and in the future.” (Manuhiri Omaha Kaitiakitanga Ora and Rodney District Council 2007)

3.3 Iwi concerns

There is a strong sense of loss of the everyday signs of Maori heritage and presence today in and around Whangateau Harbour.

“Where’s our presence? Our footprint?”

“Names – there are no Maori names on signs! Where did people live? For example, we had a store selling goods and veggies on the shore.”

“Look at Omaha Spit – the Maori name is Taumutu. How many people know that?”

There is seen to be an urgent need to identify, protect, and raise the profile and interpretation/celebration of heritage sites with potential for planning regulation to become an empowering vehicle to acknowledge and protect manawhenua heritage (for example by putting incentives in place such as rates relief and assistance with fencing and planting to protect key sites such as pas).

“Where’s the policy? We can covenant native bush – why not historic sites?”

One specific site discussed was the Ti Point Walkway, where great quantities of shell from the hillside are spilling out over the walking path. This site was a key seasonal kainga for Ngati Manuhiri and visiting hapu and iwi where they caught, ate and preserved kai moana. Despite the value and interest of the site there are no signs describing it and electric fencing for the neighbouring private development has been installed directly adjacent to the walkway.

Development at Omaha Spit had necessitated engagement with the developer to relocate the koiwi (bodies) discovered there through the development process. There is now a series of po along the spit acknowledging those who have gone before, with an urupa created at the base of the spit. There are opportunities for these to have a higher profile. There was also seen to be potential for an iwi-led programme of guided walks to share stories and names, which could in turn contribute to economic sustainability.

There is a desire for more and better quality information on activities that may impact on the environment. This includes information on the numbers of boats using the area and the total take of shellfish. With better quality information, specific management mechanisms may be designed. This may include, for example, a mataitai reserve for the shellfish resources with an agreed total allowable take, specific to different areas.

“How many shellfish are being taken? We’re only keeping an eye on the number per person, do we know how many in total are being taken and if it’s increasing? How many mussels are being taken from particular spots?”

Monitoring the impacts of forest harvesting was also mentioned. Forestry...

“...may need monitoring day-by-day. The council’s not resourced to monitor enough.”

The impacts of policy and planning were mentioned as a further area of concern. For example the RDC focus on contained growth around existing urban centres was seen as potentially limiting its ability to sustainably manage rural areas when large numbers of holiday makers in the summer turn rural areas into places with urban issues.

“Are we keeping track of the cumulative impacts of development?”

There was also discussion of an issue concerning iwi land in Maori ownership and Maori title at Pakiri, which is designated coastal protection and therefore cannot be developed, leaving the iwi to find accommodation away from its home. This was seen to create a domino effect, where in turn this has meant not having a focused base for developing economic sustainability.

“We’re the largest freehold private owner in Rodney, and the owners want to come back (to live), but we can’t because of the rules.”

Although this land is located outside the catchment, it is seen to have a bearing on this study because of its crucial importance to the Ngati Manuhiri hapu and its ability to engage with the councils in this and other projects.

Water quality – including the risk of sedimentation and pollution – is described as a crucial area of focus. Specifically mentioned was the desirability of having forestry harvesting plans that are specific to individual sites to address different erosion potentials.

3.4 Issues of engagement with potential projects and with ARC

Ngati Manuhiri regards it as important that discussions concerning the Whangateau Harbour and catchment are at the decision-maker to decision-maker level, rather than through community forums or meetings; although where relevant, the minutes from these sessions should be forwarded to manawhenua for information purposes. Ngati Manuhiri described that processes are in place for council communication with hapu/iwi authorities, and these are seen as appropriate and functioning well on the whole.

The capacity of Ngati Manuhiri to engage in any future issues related to the harbour is described by them as limited by resources available to them. Currently there are significant demands on them relating to individual resource consents. However, working at a strategic, “whole-of-harbour” level was seen as important.

3.5 Perceived scale, priority and urgency of issues

Summarising issues of scale, priority and urgency, three main points emerge from our discussions with Ngati Manuhiri:

They would like to be involved in catchment and harbour issues at a decision-maker to decision-maker level.

There is a keen sense of loss of manawhenua presence in the harbour and the catchment. That is expressed through a desire for more publicly available information on iwi heritage, more planning and policy consideration of both heritage issues but also current manawhenua aspirations, and greater manawhenua involvement in designing and administering heritage and kai moana conservation measures.

The hapu prioritised the need for a holistic approach to planning for the Whangateau Harbour and catchment that would involve more and better monitoring, including monitoring the cumulative effects of development and other activities.

4 Local Communities and Stakeholders

4.1 Description of the people and communities of Whangateau Harbour

The residents and stakeholders of the Whangateau Harbour represent a diverse range of individuals with varying interests and engagement with the area. The area is regarded by local residents as being very community focused (at the local settlement level) with a strong sense of belonging and volunteerism described.

“People here are strongly community focused because it’s rural. We care for each other and we care for the environment.”

“There’s a wonderful collection of people here – very community-minded, getting slightly older and looking for a cause!”

Some residents commented that the communities of Whangateau are changing with a lot of development coming in and properties turning over more quickly. The area is getting busier with more holiday homes and more visitors.

“People don’t know their neighbours like they used to.”

Four residential areas are often distinguished: Ti Point, Whangateau, Point Wells and Omaha Beach. Each of these settlements has a distinctive character and usually separate groupings or organisations that serve the interests of that community.

Ti Point is the smallest of the communities, at the head of the harbour, and mostly known for the Ti Point Reptile Park and Ti Point Vineyard. It is a mix of holiday homes and permanent residents, with an honorary Harbourmaster responsible for Ti Point’s moorings and water safety management. The Ti Point Wharf is a busy site over summer, and the stepping off point for a walk to the cliffs and a scenic reserve. Water quality monitoring is conducted at Ti Point by the ARC.

The settlement of Whangateau has around 140 properties with about two-thirds of these permanent residents. There are a number of active community organisations and events including sports clubs, a hall and reserve committee and a residents and ratepayer’s organisation.

The village population of Point Wells is put at 357 by the Point Wells/Omaha Flats Sustainable Development Plan (Rodney District Council, 2006). It describes Pt Wells as a “garden seaside village” and coined the term “horticultural lifestyles” to describe Omaha Flats. These terms well capture the community’s makeup, which developed into a village from the Wells Farm subdivision in 1945. The majority are full-time residents and represent a mix of traditional and market farming, lifestyle blocks, retirees, families, holiday home owners, and a small business community. A local reserve was owned and operated by a community trust, which built a hall and library on the site but

has recently passed responsibility for the assets over to RDC. A concrete ramp provides access to the harbour for two hours either side of low tide.

The Omaha Peninsula or Mangatawhiri Spit is the site of the fourth community. The spit extends between Whangateau Harbour and Little Omaha Bay. Omaha Beach as it is locally known is accessible via a causeway across the harbour from Point Wells. The Omaha Beach Community Inc. has its own website, which states: "While Omaha Beach started as a beach resort, as many as 200 families now call Omaha Beach their permanent home." Some six groups and clubs are listed and there is an Omaha Beach Community Centre. Other interest groups include the Omaha Protection Society, which was formed 10 years ago. Residents describe the area as being 90 per cent empty during the week. This means the major focus of community activity and identity takes place at weekends.

In the hills behind the harbour outside these coastal settlements are a number of farmed blocks of land including lifestyle blocks, a dairy farm, a permaculture block and two vineyards. The regional subdivision trend is evident, toward smaller blocks and from large animal agriculture to more intensive market farming, or to less intensive lifestyle blocks.

There are a number of organisations and initiatives that attract membership from around the harbour and these are discussed in more detail in the section below. A very active core group of people are involved in more than one of these organisations. We were given several examples of local groups springing up "overnight" to counter specific infringement of the harbour's environment, landscape or heritage. Generally there are no events or organisations that can claim ownership by all or most residents and property owners in the harbour's catchment. Each settled area is regarded locally as having a distinctive character, individual interests and different representatives. In this sense there is no single "community" of Whangateau, or one organisation that alone can represent the people of this area.

In terms of local communication, many people suggested the *Local Matters* publication as a way to get the word out widely. However it is seen as important to target communication through each organisation, business or community group in order to achieve engagement with all the Whangateau Harbour communities.

4.2 Interest and stakeholder groups

4.2.1 Conservation, environment and research interests

Whangateau Harbour Care Group

The Whangateau Harbour Care Group (WHCG) has its roots in the 1970s when a local resident advocated against sand dredging in the harbour. Building on this history, in the 1990s the Whangateau Protection Society was developed informally to address a number of issues with RDC, especially proposals related to sewerage disposal from the

Omaha Beach residential development. The WHCG grew from this initiative in 2001 when it was formally incorporated under the auspices of the Landcare Trust, with support and assistance from ARC and RDC.

WHCG has around 50 active members and a committee that meets monthly and organises frequent outings around the harbour to identify environmental problems. Its projects include public education about the values of the harbour, revegetation, weed control, shellfish monitoring, advocacy for better protection for parts of the harbour, and walkway development. WHCG is most strongly associated with the Whangateau settlement but its public meetings and field days can attract large numbers of people from around the harbour, especially the annual cockle count (supported by the ARC Environmental Initiatives Fund).

Leigh Marine Laboratory

The Leigh Marine Teaching and Research Department of the University of Auckland is based near the Goat Island Marine Reserve. While it is situated outside the Whangateau Catchment, the Leigh Marine Laboratory has strong stakeholder interest in the harbour, as the Whangateau has been the study site of over 30 students' theses. As a result of this scientific research, Whangateau is one of relatively well studied harbours in New Zealand. Students working in the harbour are encouraged by their supervisors to interact with residents of the harbour during their studies, providing talks, socialising and joining local sports teams. Some teaching staff at the lab have been resident within the catchment or have taken an interest or position on proposed developments that may affect the ecology of the harbour.

Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society

The mid-North branch of Forest and Bird covers the Whangateau Harbour catchment. While the branch does not have any specific projects in the area it does have members who are actively engaged in issues related to the harbour. This includes advocacy for extending the kaihikatea reserve in the southern harbour area and an interest in the wading birds of the harbour.

Mahurangi Technical Institute

The Mahurangi Technical Institute is Rodney's largest private training establishment. It offers a Certificate in Aquatic Studies and as part of this course annual surveys on cockle numbers in the harbour. Baseline and monitoring information is available as a result of these surveys as well as from research in the harbour conducted by a number of students from the course.

Dotterel Care Group

The Dotterel Care Group comprises a number of volunteers organised by the Warkworth office of Department of Conservation. Dotterels breed on the Omaha Sandspit, one of the few places in New Zealand where this occurs. They are vulnerable to predation and disturbance and so Care Group members are rostered to check predator traps during the breeding season, observe the dotterels and discourage people from taking their dogs to

the area. Care Group members comprise local residents from Omaha as well as people from other settlements in the area, including some from outside the catchment. They do not meet frequently but represent a group of concerned individuals actively engaged in caring for an aspect of the Whangateau Harbour.

Omaha Sand Cliffs Coast Care Group

The Omaha Sand Cliffs Coast Care Group was initiated in 1999 when erosion was noted at the foot of the dune on the harbour side. The group is focused on activity to support the protection of the dunes. This action has included attending coastcare training and a conference; working with the ARC and RDC; hosting visiting dunecare and coastcare experts; planting dunes with eco-sourced specimens (an activity that can attract up to 50 people); trialling different plants to assess success; supporting the open nursery trials (in association with Friends of the Mahurangi); identifying and protecting middens; counting cockles with the Whangateau Harbour Care group; dune education, and applying for funds to underwrite this activity. Their main communication method is email plus word of mouth.

Environmental Defence Society

The Environmental Defence Society is a not-for-profit environmental advocacy organisation comprised of resource management professionals who are committed to improving environmental outcomes within New Zealand. It has offices in Auckland.

EDS provides legal advice, support and capacity building for individuals and community organisations on issues including protecting landscape values from development and subdivision, and in coast and harbour protection. It is not currently engaged at Whangateau but regards the harbour and its catchment as an important environment and it may well become involved in the area if it regards the harbour values as threatened by development.

4.2.2 Organised community and resident groups

Whangateau Residents and Ratepayers Association

The Whangateau Residents and Ratepayers Association (WR&R) was formed a few years ago in response to concerns with developments at the Whangateau camp ground. The association has 40 members although it communicates by newsletter with all 140 property owners in the Whangateau settlement. WR&R works on a number of local issues including support for a harbour walkway and roadside cleanups. It is a source of information and contact for residents in this area.

Omaha Beach Community Inc.

The Omaha Beach Community Inc. describes itself as the largest residents group in New Zealand, with about 1200 paid-up members some of whom are residents from surrounding communities. It is an active, engaged and capable group. It aims to protect community interests which members define in the broadest terms. This includes

maintaining what they see as the clean and pure beach and estuary. They are very engaged with planning processes, and perceive a significant threat from a proposed development at the southern end of the Omaha Peninsular that includes 800 units and a hotel. Earlier in 2008, a meeting concerning this proposal attracted 200 people.

Point Wells Residents and Ratepayers Association

The Point Wells Residents and Ratepayers (R&R) Association is 25 years old. It has about 240 households as members and is engaged in a number of local issues including working with RDC on development issues. The association was closely involved in the dialogue and decision to connect Pt Wells' properties to the Jones Rd wastewater treatment plant. The Point Wells R&R describes itself as having a constructive relationship with RDC and believe the council is good to work with in partnership.

Big Omaha Wharf Restoration Society

The Big Omaha Wharf Restoration Society comprises a number of local enthusiasts led by a small committee. The Society was formed 10 years ago when the wharf was threatening to collapse. It now owns the wharf and has restored the concrete supports and "the shed", working with the ARC on signage. They are now assisting with the local coastal boardwalk by working with RDC to reinstate the bridge that used to take the main road to Leigh.

4.2.3 Historic family ties

The Meiklejohn family

The Meiklejohn family arrived in 1896 and established boat-building in the Whangateau and in the Omaha Valley. A history of the boat building area was published, "The Ships of Omaha NZ 1858-1921" (Ramage and Ramage 2008). The book details how the family of saw millers and boatbuilders search for new opportunities took them on a two-year journey by ship around the world. They were recommended to settle in the Whangateau because of the river and the harbour in close proximity to the kauri for milling, along with opportunities for farming and housebuilding. There were 21 ships built in the area, with the Matheson and Darroch shipbuilding families closely associated with the Meiklejohns. Lew's Bay was named after Lewis Meiklejohn, and was where the local summer baches were – they had to be within walking distance of milking. Many of the descendants still live in the Whangateau district and take an interest in local issues.

Rathe family

Ngaire Rathe, 82, lives in Pt Wells, and has lived on the Whangateau Harbour most of her life. The Rathe family (her parents Kate and Harry Evans) settled in Whangateau in 1918 after the war, on 200 acres purchased from the Saddlers in Ashton Rd. The local store was at the Big Omaha Wharf (the "Big Omaha Store"). Ngaire's husband Jack Rathe was brought up on a farm between Takatu and Jones roads, and the couple farmed land on the Omaha Flats, including 10 years of running an outlet shop. The

Rathe family still own land and business interests in the area and take an active interest in local issues.

4.2.4 Farmers and other land users

Agriculture and lifestyle blocks

Many Whangateau farmers have lived in the district since their parents moved there or their grandparents. Large animal agriculture is on the decline in the catchment and only a small number of dairy farms remain. There is an associated local trend away from commercial farming.

There has been a significant growth in the number of lifestyle blocks in the catchment. Often properties are subdivided to create land parcels for the next generation. In association with RDC's subdivision rules, many farmers are now covenanting native forest, and some are arranging covenants with Queen Elizabeth II or the Department of Conservation (DOC). One covenant had been in place for 28 years. Some of the owners of lifestyle blocks are engaged in small-holder farming activities including permaculture approaches.

A range of information and advice is available to farmers and some are members of Federated Farmers, Fonterra, Farm Forestry Association, Trees for Survival or other industry groups. Some stakeholders referred us to Millbrook Station in the neighbouring catchment as a potential source of farming technique and information for local farmers. Millbrook Station is a "monitoring farm" and is also the site of an ARC Farm Plan. Some local farmers also participate in community groups such as the Whangateau Harbour Care Group.

Communicating with farmers for the purposes of passing on information specifically to this community group was seen as a challenge, with the suggestion being to target particular geographical areas or choose a particular issue at one time, although *Local Matters* was regarded as being well-read.

Horticulture

The consensus of those interviewed is that market gardening is on its way out in the Omaha Flats area, with the land leased for horticulture now slowly going into horses and other lifestyle uses. Other reasons pointed to included decreasing returns on investment, and rigorous food safety and other regulation, although this was seen as necessary.

Some 10 years ago the Omaha Protection Society was formed to oppose further subdivision on the Omaha Flats, with membership comprising all owners in the rural area, but local residents are unsure whether this group is still active. Lack of activity may be because there appears to be positive support (from the Omaha Flats area at least) for RDC's zoning the Pt Wells/Omaha Flats Structure Plan as "countryside living" to recognise a transition zone between smaller blocks in Pt Wells and larger rural properties.

Whangateau Campground

This RDC four-star camping ground is over a century old. The camp is located adjacent to the local hall and domain. The domain was traditionally a place for community picnics and gatherings, and was used as a United States army camp during WWII. The campground is a very popular local holiday destination, and is also popular for visitors from further afield and overseas. The Qualmark rating includes an environmental component, which for the camp includes recycling solid waste and trucking out their wastewater. There has been some local disagreement about RDC building further structures at the campground.

Forestry

Three blocks were identified in the catchment as “forestry”, but there are other forestry areas as part of larger farming operations. One of the larger forestry blocks was due to be felled in 2009.

Whangateau Boatyard

This is a working boatyard, located in Tramcar Bay on the Leigh Road. A trust administers and runs it, with a website that celebrates steam power. The focus is on repairing the wooden fishing boats on the harbour and restoring wooden scows and whalers. A new wooden yacht club has just been established.

4.2.5 Neighbours and groups neighbouring the catchment

Farms and other producers

Matakana Farmers’ Market. The Farmers’ Market at Matakana is one of the defining social and commercial features of the area. Over thirty local growers and food producers have stalls at the market each Saturday. Although the market itself is outside the catchment of the Whangateau Harbour a number of producers from within Whangateau catchment have stalls there including Omaha Blueberries. There is no promoted connection yet between local environmental initiatives and marketing at the Farmers’ Market. The Market is a good place for information exchange and educational initiatives because it is a gathering place for local residents and visitors to the area.

Landcare/Waicare groups

Tawharanui Open Sanctuary Society Inc. (TOSSI). TOSSI is a non-profit group formed in 2002 to support the Tawharanui Open Sanctuary through volunteer work, fund-raising and other activities. It is working in partnership with the ARC to realise the longer term vision for the Tawharanui Open Sanctuary. Tawharanui is outside the Whangateau catchment but it is an interesting close neighbour for the harbour as a source of learning for any future project: it draws on a lot of local residents for volunteers and supporters; it is an active partnership between a local non-profit group and ARC; and it is successfully engaged in a major environmental initiative (restoring

ecosystems through planting and predator control). TOSSI has over 400 financial members. The majority of its most active supporters live locally.

Matakana Land Care Group. This organisation is an informal grouping of landowners in the Matakana River catchment interested primarily in weed control in native forest on local private land. They have also been involved in predator control and revegetation. The group is not based in the Whangateau catchment and it is not currently very active but it is relevant to this study because it has experience in attempting to engage landowners in conservation initiatives on private land in a similar neighbouring catchment.

Leigh Valley Restoration Group. The Leigh Valley Restoration Group, a member of Waicare, is also outside the Whangateau catchment. It is relevant because of its experience in engaging private landowners in a stream restoration project in a neighbouring catchment.

5 Government Stakeholders

5.1 Auckland Regional Council

Management of activities within the Whangateau Harbour sits within a wider whole-of-New Zealand regulatory context, which includes the Ministry for the Environment, Department of Conservation, Ministry of Fisheries and other central government responsibilities.

In the Auckland region, the regulatory context is framed by the main planning regulation of the Local Government Act (New Zealand Government 2002) and the Resource Management Act (New Zealand Government 1991), along with the Land Transport Management Act (New Zealand Government 2003), the Historic Places Act (New Zealand Government 1993), and the Local Government (Auckland) Amendment Act 2004 LGAAA (New Zealand Government 2004). These in turn have been interpreted and applied through other statements and strategies, of particular relevance being:

- Auckland Regional Growth Strategy (Regional Growth Forum 1999),
- Auckland Sustainability Framework (Auckland Regional Council and Territorial Authorities 2007),
- One Plan (Auckland Regional Council and Territorial Authorities 2007),
- Auckland Regional Policy Statement (RPS) (Auckland Regional Council 1999),
- Auckland Regional Pest Management Strategy along with other strategic and annual planning documents,
- Proposed Auckland Regional Air, Land and Water Plan (2005)'
- Auckland Regional Plans: Coastal (1999); Sediment (2001); and Dairy Discharges(1999)

The RPS recognises the coastal edge of the Omaha Peninsula Spit, as well as the tip and the south western edge, for their significant "Landscape Quality". The peninsula is listed as a "Natural Heritage Area" with multiple values (Auckland Regional Council 1999)

The Auckland Regional Plan: Coastal specifically identifies the Whangateau Harbour, the northern tip of Omaha Spit, the kahikatea forest/wetland reserve the stretch of open coast south of Broadlands Drive as worthy of protection (Auckland Regional Council xxx).

There are also resource consent processes, monitoring, research and investigation, and education and advocacy programmes.

Both ARC and RDC have on-the-ground work programmes and interests here. For ARC the focus has been on being an “environmental guardian”, including coastal and marine management, park management, pest and weed control initiatives, stormwater discharges, educational initiatives including Waicare and Environmental Initiative Fund support, along with strategy, regulatory and policy activities as outlined above. Its role now encompasses the four well beings (social, cultural, economic and environmental) addressed under the Local Government Act (New Zealand Government 2002).

5.2 Rodney District Council

The Rodney District Council is focused on the local “economy, environment and society”, including its District Plan processes, infrastructure creation and maintenance, catchment management planning, civil defence, libraries and other community facility provision, community development and advocacy.

Specific documents that relate to the Whangateau Catchment and Harbour include:

- Vision Rodney (2008)
- Planning Rodney (2008)
- The Long-Term Council Community Plan 2009-2019 (2009)
- Proposed District Plan (2000)
- The Northern and Western Sector Agreements (2001)
- The Omaha Coastal Compartment Management Plan (OCCMP) 2003– which names Omaha Cliffs Coast Care Group as one of the stakeholders with responsibilities for implementation (Rodney District Council 2003), and
- The Omaha Flats/Pt Wells Sustainable Development Plan (Rodney District Council 2006).

It is understood there are also older management plans for the Whangateau Campground and associated reserve and sportsground, and individual other reserves.

The OCCMP stated: “The intention is to prepare a separate CCMP for the Whangateau Harbour in the future” (Rodney District Council 2006)

As described in this report, there are numerous locally-led voluntary public initiatives, many of which are carried out alongside RDC.

The four areas most mentioned by the public in relation to RDC processes concerned:

1. The introduction of the ski lane.
2. The introduction of the Pt Wells sewerage scheme.

3. The proposed development at the southern end of Omaha Beach.
4. The protection or otherwise of historic structures around the harbour.

5.3 Department of Conservation

The Department of Conservation has interests in the Whangateau Catchment and Harbour. Aside from its advocacy role for species conservation, DOC has responsibility for the kahikatea wetland on the southern side of the Omaha Beach Peninsula and the Tamahunga Reserve. The Warkworth Area Office is actively engaged in the local community. It also manages the Dotterel Care Group and interacts with neighbours and farmers in the hills behind the harbour as part of possum and pig control.

5.4 Fisheries compliance

The Ministry of Fisheries manages a system of honorary fisheries officers who work voluntarily for 20 hours a week patrolling popular fishing and shellfish harvesting sites. The Whangateau Harbour is part of a larger patrol area that covers marine areas from Hatfields Beach to Pakiri and includes a portion of the Kaipara Harbour. There are 40 patrol points within this area that are regularly visited, including the Whangateau Harbour. There are currently four honorary fisheries officers who cover this area. This number is rising to six in recognition of the increased harvesting pressure expected on the Whangateau cockle beds now that two popular cockle beds further south have been closed (due to overharvesting and illegal harvesting).

5.5 Harbourmasters

ARC has transferred its Harbourmaster responsibilities for the Whangateau to RDC which has a staff Harbourmaster with responsible for navigational safety. This encompasses how people use watercraft and includes identifying hazards, providing navigational aids such as channel markers, and managing mooring areas. There are also two honorary (volunteer) Harbourmasters – one for Omaha and Pt Wells and one for Ti Point. This is a historic role, with a focus on administering individual mooring areas, and as first point of contact for locals and visiting boaties. There are 50 moorings at Omaha, 45 at Ti Point, and eight at Pt Wells.

5.6 Schools

There are three local primary schools, and Mahurangi College, as well as the local home school network. Leigh Primary has an Enviroschools group and this year studied

“Experiencing Marine Reserves” with the students. The schools’ newsletters go home to all families and are understood to be well-read.

6 Key Issues Related to the Harbour

6.1 What is valued by residents and stakeholders

Whangateau is valued by local residents and stakeholders as a peaceful and beautiful place, rich in history, with plentiful cockles, and a safe place for children to swim and learn to sail. The natural bush-clad character of much of the hilly land to the west and south of the harbour is valued. The harbour itself is central to family and community activities.

“We see this as a tranquil place. It was like a mirror this morning. Life is great.”

Despite development and resultant changes to the hydrology of the harbour during the past 35 years, the harbour is still seen as “pristine”, the “best estuary in the Auckland region and we want to keep it that way”.

“This harbour is unique, from Kawakawa to Tutukawa. We think we’re lucky and we want to preserve it.”

“The harbour is all sand so it is clean and easy to walk around.”

“At times, visibility in the harbour is 15 metres. That is a good sign. The fish life is fantastic.”

The healthy and prolific cockle beds are a local source of pride.

“Our international visitors are amazed the way we can collect cockles here.”

“It’s not so well known, but along Omaha Beach the tuatua are very good quality!”

Residents and stakeholders describe the harbour with passion, emphasising the recreational opportunities (sailing, swimming, canoeing, walking) and the quality of the water. They value the remaining naturalness of the harbour and the “immensity” of the bird life. The presence of breeding dotterels along with the large foraging area for other wading birds in the upper harbour give the harbour status “international significance” for birds. It is an important harbour for bird watching and is on the circuit for international bird watching. Godwits, fairy terns, banded dotterels, wrybills, spotless crane and banded rail can all be seen here. Many particularly value the kahikatea wetland reserve on the southern side of the Omaha Sandspit for its unique natural edge to this part of the harbour.

“I’ve got a list of 60 birds I’ve seen at Omaha.”

The Tamahunga Ecological Area – a native forest reserve in the southern catchment is described by several stakeholders as one of the most significant forest areas in the area. It has been fenced off from cattle and this area, along with covenanted forests on

private land in the catchment, are managed for possums and pigs. The Te Araroa Walkway also goes through this area.

Scientists and researchers, along with some local residents describe and value the particular ecological values and diversity of the Whangateau Harbour including that it supports “some of the biggest seagrass beds in the Auckland area”. It is regarded as “great for scientific study as it acts as a control for some of the more degraded harbours in the area”. They describe the harbour as an important recruitment area for parore and as providing a nursery for “huge schools of yellow-eyed mullet and kahawai.”

Local residents and other stakeholders highly value the historic and heritage components of the harbour. There is a high degree of awareness locally of the boat-building history of the harbour and remnants of these times are treasured and guarded. With a core of long-term residents and close local communities, recent history is also frequently retold with celebrated stories of locals “fighting” to protect special features or environments of the harbour.

6.2 Perceived environmental problems

The most frequently mentioned concern about the harbour is development. People feel that the harbour and its catchment are most at risk from further subdivision or poor planning considerations that allow environmental degradation.

“My priority? No more development!”

“There should be zero tolerance [to environmental impacts of development)].”

Longer term local residents describe significant changes to the harbour since the 1970s including the heavily modified Omaha Beach Sandspit with its groynes, sand mining, and bulldozed dunes, along with the causeway connecting the sandspit to the Omaha Flats. Local residents describe how these developments changed the whole dynamics of hydrology and sedimentation in the harbour. They see the harbour as vulnerable to further degradation if any more changes are made. The proposed marina was mentioned by many people as being in this category.

“The marina would be a terrible thing for the shellfish. The potential for doing damage would be huge.”

In this sense, local residents and stakeholders frequently stated the greatest threat to the harbour and its catchment is a lack of integrated planning combined with a lack of regulation or policy that recognise the exceptional qualities of the harbour and has safeguards in place to protect these qualities. Linked to this is the sense that there is a lack of co-ordination between ARC and RDC and a lack of real consultation between government and local residents. People feel this leaves the harbour and themselves vulnerable to poor decision-making and therefore a threat to the environment.

“The whole harbour needs to be preserved, both the historic and natural environment.”

“It needs a complete solution that takes in the whole harbour. A holistic solution.”

“We’ve just been zoned ‘mixed activities’ so anything could happen here now. They’ve taken away all the coastal protection we had.”

“We desperately need help now. We need a structural plan. In fact, any sort of planning would be good.”

As an example of local concern about the lack of formal protection for the harbour a number of groups have been advocating for an extension of the kahikatea reserve to include the harbour edge and tidal flats, in part to protect the feeding grounds of the wading birds and the general ecology of this portion of the harbour.

Local residents and other stakeholders are concerned about the loss of natural character if the harbour is further developed. Some expressed concern about small but cumulative changes in the natural shoreline through illegal building of boat ramps and jetties as well as salt marsh edges being replaced by lawn, infill and “inappropriate (non-native) plantings”. Rocks and concrete rubble were mentioned as examples of loss of natural shoreline character. Several people mentioned how they would like to see the coastal edge to the harbour restored. They believed this natural buffer would have a major impact on the health of the water (slowing down the loss of fine sediments from the land) as well as restore the natural character of the harbour.

People also expressed concern about any additional developments increasing stormwater flows and bringing sediment and pollutants into the harbour.

“It’s only a tiny harbour. There’s only so much that it can stand.”

“Development that interferes with the water table would have dire consequences for the kahikatea reserve – don’t take too much water.”

“Even with best practice, 30 per cent of suspended particles are being carried into the streams and harbours – that’s still very significant with a large development.”

“It could become like Auckland harbours – I wouldn’t swim there!”

A second point of concern is sedimentation. There is debate about whether this is already a problem for Whangateau Harbour. Some residents note that the harbour seems shallower now than in the past, that sand islands are forming in the harbour and that some of the catchment streams are filled with sediment after heavy rain. Others believe that the sand islands have always come and gone, that the drainage of the harbour is such that any sediment is well cleaned out and that the catchment is in good health with a high level of forest cover. These people point to the healthy state of the cockle beds as an indication of the lack of a sediment problem in the harbour.

“I’ve been around long enough to tell you islands in the harbour come and go. They shift around. Massive tidal rip at harbour mouth sucks all that sediment out to sea.”

“The silt comes down from the quarry and in heavy rain it’s very thick.”

There is a linked debate about the advance of mangroves in the harbour. Views vary from concern about the loss of inner harbour beaches to mangroves, concern that mangroves interfere with harbour access and with views, and worries that mangroves

are “taking over the harbour”, to an understanding that mangroves are an important and natural part of the local ecology, and belief that the mangroves are not in fact advancing.

“It used to be a shelly beach there. It’s where I learned to sail. Now it’s full of mangroves that are continuing to advance.”

The view that most people have in common is that whether or not sedimentation is currently a problem for Whangateau, they are concerned that it should not become any worse.

“Any sedimentation is going to affect the fish and the cockles.”

“No [Auckland region] harbours will be able to get to the semi-pristine state of the Whangateau. There’s an opportunity to keep Whangateau in its current state, but it needs dedicated work.”

There is strong local concern about the potential for pine harvesting in the catchment to result in a major sediment dump in the harbour although some within the industry have different views.

“There’s no way they can harvest these trees in any way and not have an effect.”

“There’s a definite feeling amongst forestry people that ARC are anti-forestry, yet the impacts are for only a small period of the trees’ 30-year lifespan, and the rest of the time the trees are playing a positive part in the ecosystem.”

There is also a belief that riparian planting and fencing may be a valuable land management tool to safeguard the harbour. This includes the harbour edge properties where it is seen as desirable by some stakeholders that the natural vegetated edge be maintained to act as a sediment filter.

“You’ll never fix these problems unless you fix the land.”

In terms of sedimentation, “Mahurangi is almost beyond the point of rescue while the Whangateau still has hope.”

Some landowners felt that subdivision to lifestyle blocks was good for the environment because as they are not “real farms” there is not the same level of agricultural activity, or need to maximise production. This often results in more conservation activity and planting riparian margins as part of the investment in the land value. Some feel conversion to lifestyle blocks has lessened the impacts of agricultural activity.

Harbour water pollution is a third area of concern. Local residents and stakeholders were most worried about the Point Wells’ Jones Road sewerage plant and the fact that it is expected to absorb sewerage from Leigh and Matakana as well as sewerage from the harbour settlements. Local residents and stakeholders are not confident that the system is designed for these quantities.

“Ultimately it goes in to the harbour. We’re going to get high nutrient levels and it’s especially problematic in southern part of harbour where it is landlocked. And what about storm overflows?”

This was not unanimous, however, as the previous situation was remembered as worse, with the new system aimed at eliminating the overflows.

“Previously, if you got a high tide and rain, you’re likely to find floating sewage!”

Some Point Wells’ residents pointed to the wastewater consultation process and project implementation as an example of good practice and community-council partnership. There is still concern that the cost of connecting to the new system may leave some still utilising faulty septic tanks.

Another point of concern mentioned by several stakeholders and local residents is the closed landfills at the north western end of the harbour. Three landfills were referred to as being active here during the 1970s and early 1980s taking rubbish from Leigh and Warkworth. People remember years when 10 gallon tins of printers ink from the Rodney Times were dumped here. Locally, it is not known if leachate is being monitored from these sites or what the results of any past monitoring has been and this is a source of local concern.

“Mud snails used to be prevalent in the harbour. I’d see a 100 in a square metre. Now from the whole of the Whangateau that snail has disappeared. Is it the tip?”

A few stakeholders also mentioned concern about the potential polluting impact of painting and antifouling at the boatyard.

Some, knowledgeable about past Omaha Flats horticultural practices, thought that this potential source of pollution to the harbour had greatly improved.

“We used to be a major polluter with our run-off but through Hort NZ all run-off is now controlled and it’s 100 times better now than it was 10 to 20 years ago. Pollution is now improving as we speak.”

Depredation of the highly valued cockle resource was mentioned frequently as a source of concern. Local people are unanimous that historically the cockles have been in good numbers and of a good size. This view is supported by the researchers and scientists who monitor them. Concern is more for the future and the potential for overharvesting by the increasing number of visitors to the harbour.

“The number of people going to the harbour to get shellfish has doubled in the past 14 years. We’re so close to Auckland. It’ll get worse with the motorway improvements.”

“With the closing of shellfish beds further south, the locals aren’t going to believe the numbers of visitors that will turn up.”

Those monitoring either the cockle beds or the harvesters believe that there are sufficient cockles to cope with increased numbers of visitors if the harvesting limits are adhered to. For this to succeed it is felt that there is a need for greater surveillance, more education and for more signs up to display the rules.

“Yes a lot of cockles are taken but what’s important is the standing crop. What portion of the standing crop are they taking? Actually it’s small.”

The pipi beds are regarded as more problematic. Pipi are now rare in the harbour although people are unsure if that is because of overharvesting or changes in the harbour's hydrology. There is great concern from many people about these beds and some called for the taking of pipi to be banned. There does not appear to be any monitoring of these beds.

Some stakeholders mentioned the threat of invasive weeds and introduced predators as specific threats to the biodiversity and ecology of the harbour and its catchment. Dotterel predators are a major concern, which is currently managed. It was commented that invasive weeds are common in the catchment and are not well-controlled. Stakeholders also stated that ongoing control of possums, goats and pigs in native forest is required. Individuals reported that a number of potentially problematic invasive marine species have been found in the harbour including Asian Date Mussel, Pacific Oysters, Australian Gobi, and Parchment Tube Worm. These are not yet regarded as risks but could become so.

"It's important that the birds are preserved. It will be upsetting to me if they are diminished."

A strong reaction to a recent change to harbour water zoning that appears to allow motorised boats in the upper harbour in a site that is favoured by kayakers and sail boats was voiced. Many residents were dismayed by this, stating a loss of enjoyment of the harbour, disturbance of the peace, and concern about pollution and other damage jet-propelled boats produce.

"The jetski decision is horrific. They do a lot of damage in shallow water – blow shellfish and sediment in all directions. It should be overturned."

"They should allow jetskis. You've got all those Omaha and Auckland people after all."

A second land use issue mentioned by a small number of people was erosion of the foreshore, and this was linked to a desire to improve public access around the harbour. It is felt that walkways help reconnect people with the harbour and so develop a richer relationship with it.

"There are fence posts in the harbour where it used to be farmland! It's urgent...if it keeps eroding it won't be there in 10 years."

"A good walkway network is important as it gets people out and observing. Where areas aren't visible from road that's where we get illegal boat ramps and illegal infill."

Finally, local residents have concerns about the preservation of cultural heritage sites. They noted several instances of local authorities acting to demolish these sites and worry about this happening again.

6.3 Gaps and unknowns

One of the commonest responses we encountered was unease and concern about what is not known about the harbour. There are two parts to this. The first is related to what is not known or understood about the ecology and hydrodynamics of the harbour and how these things may be changing. People want evidence to understand if sedimentation is an issue, if pollution is present.

"Where are the greatest sedimentation problems? We want an explanation for all this."

"Is the harbour getting shallower?"

"People want to do the right thing. They don't know what to plant on their foreshore."

"People go in to arrange covenants for their bush blocks and discover they're already covenanted. They don't even know their land has covenants on it."

"We're all trying to look after the harbour. We want to know we're doing the right things. We need information. We want to catch cockles and flounders in an environmentally friendly way."

"What we don't have is monitoring ... has it got worse or has it got better?"

"Are the jetskis bad for the harbour or just really annoying?"

Farmers interviewed desired to have better knowledge and monitoring of land use impacts. They wanted to know about the local microclimate – for example, maintaining rain gauges.

There is a large resource of information about the harbour through the 30 theses of students from the Leigh Marine Lab and through the monitoring that has been undertaken by the Mahurangi Technical Institute and by the Whangateau Harbour Care Group /Auckland Regional Council cockle surveys, but this information is not widely known or accessible locally.

The second part to the "unknowns" is the strong sense locally that residents are in the dark about what might be planned by local government for the harbour and its catchment. There is a forcefully articulated sense of lack of consultation, or that views stated are then ignored in decision-making. Locals told repeatedly of the examples of historic structures on the harbour being condemned without local knowledge. The zoning decision about the jetskis was given by many interviewed as another example of a decision being "sprung" on local residents. This has resulted in many residents feeling worried about what might be planned for the harbour that they do not know about and subsequently feeling defensive and indignant about its lack of protection.

"Decisions are made and then the community has to react to them."

"Locals who live on the harbour need a voice. With teeth."

A frequently mentioned “gap” in actions for the harbour is the sense of a lack of co-ordination and integration between decision-makers for the harbour.

“I wish they worked together, the ARC and RDC.”

A related issue is a desire to see the RDC and ARC demonstrating good practice through such activities as road construction and wastewater management.

Another area of unknowns that was mentioned was the cultural or archaeological history of the area. Although there is much promotion and understanding of the marine and boat-building history of the area, people are generally more vague on the Maori history of the area, unsure if the stories they have heard are accurate or not, and unsure of how to find out.

6.4 Scale, priority and urgency of issues

Summarising issues of scale, priority and urgency, two main points emerge from discussions with local residents and stakeholders: addressing development and becoming informed.

Residents and stakeholders prioritise concern about further development in the harbour affecting water quality, bird life, shellfish, heritage sites and natural character.

They equally worry about what they do not know about the harbour including unseen or unanticipated threats to it. Commonly prioritised is the need to become better informed about what is threatening or might threaten the valued qualities of the harbour and what should be done to prevent environmental degradation.

7 Factors for the implementation plan design

7.1 Summary of relevant points for the implementation plan design

A series of relevant points were identified from the interviews that can be considered when designing the implementation plan.

- **Manawhenua.** Decision-maker to decision-maker discussion at an early stage of any project design.
- **Diverse communities.** Whangateau has a number of diverse, discreet communities. No one area or any one organisation currently represents all residents and stakeholders. Some groups expressed some anxiety about coming together.
- **Highly valued.** The Whangateau Harbour is highly valued for both its environment and heritage. Several local organisations are actively involved in working to protect these qualities.
- **Healthy harbour.** There is a general belief that the harbour is currently in a healthy state and that it needs to be maintained and protected in this state.
- **Co-ordinated and holistic planning.** The harbour and its catchment need to be managed and planned for holistically rather than piecemeal. Government agencies need to co-ordinate planning, consultation and decision-making.
- **Local engagement, local ownership.** Local residents want to be engaged, consulted and informed in all decision-making about the harbour, leading to local ownership of problems and solutions to environmental problems.
- **Development is a key threat.** The special qualities of the harbour (both its heritage and environment) need to be formally recognised in planning.
- **Monitoring.** A further priority is to better understand potential threats such as sedimentation, nutrient enrichment from the Point Wells sewerage system, leachate from the closed landfills and the boatyards, the advance of mangroves, and the presence of invasive marine species. Monitoring systems need to be put in place quickly to build a picture of what is happening and what actions need to be taken. Shellfish monitoring should be continued.
- **Sharing information.** Much is already known about the harbour but that information (environment, Maori history and use, boat-building history and other subjects) is not readily available to local residents, visitors or government authorities. Information should be pooled and made available.

- **Continue or improve existing management.** Some issues of concern are already being managed and these should be continued and/or improved. These include: predator control for the dotterels, invasive weed control, pine harvesting, and control of shellfish harvesting.
- **Add new management projects.** Some issues of concern can be acted on with existing knowledge such as restoring the natural edge to the harbour by informing landowners of appropriate coastal edge planting to retain natural character and reduce sedimentation. Improving information for visitors (particularly shellfish gatherers) to help avoid breaches of the law could also be acted on.

7.2 ARC as project stakeholders

Any future environment project for the Whangateau Harbour will benefit from a co-ordinated approach with relevant ARC teams, drawing on their experience, knowledge and mandates to build an effective and robust approach to environmental protection for the harbour. A co-ordinated approach within the ARC to designing a programme for Whangateau will help the programme reach its potential both in terms of outcomes for the Whangateau and as a potential model for other catchments.

To further these objectives ARC staff were interviewed as stakeholders. Noted from these discussions are the following points:

A well-designed Whangateau implementation plan can include the opportunity to model catchment planning, including farm plans. The project should build this potential into its design in a way that makes learning and experience available to other catchments in the region.

An effective project can result in understanding and articulating the environmental and cultural heritage values of the catchment and harbour in a way that can be used to guide conditions, planning instruments, and decision-making for resource consent applications in the area.

The project can include a forum for improving public understanding of the cultural values of the area. Awareness of such values builds respect.

Baseline data and well-designed ongoing monitoring (for environmental and cultural heritage outcomes) is critical for understanding project impact. They need to be built into project design at the start.

An effective project acts as a point of engagement with local residents building that can lead to full consultation and ownership by whole harbour community

Objectives and desired outcomes must be clear from the start. Prioritise issues.

Adaptive management allows the project to grow and changes as knowledge and information grow.

Help us to define the term “natural character”.

Achieve action on the ground, including small successes up front.

Align ARC resources and teams from the project inception.

7.3 RDC as project stakeholders

From RDC staff perspective a significant amount of work goes into projects of this nature to ensure good communication and consultation processes, and to work through issues with diverse communities. It is felt that the quality of RDC’s processes have improved in the past five years, and these processes are subject to continuous improvement. Examples given include the Omaha Compartment work where two extensions of time were given to ensure submitters could participate in the process, the Point Wells wastewater treatment project, and the Pt Wells/Omaha Flats Sustainable Development Plan. RDC describes the effort it is making to be clear with its communities about priorities and what work is not going to be funded. For example, the focus is mainly on growth management and the effects of growth, rather than on rural areas.

RDC regards the Whangateau Harbour as ‘very important’.

RDC has also completed a coastal inundation study, which included a process of meeting with Omaha residents (Tonkin & Taylor 2005).

It is seen as critical to co-ordinate with the ARC at an early stage of any project.

8 Conclusion

Whangateau is valued by iwi, local residents and stakeholders as a peaceful and beautiful place, rich in history, with plentiful cockles and other kai moana, and a safe place for children to swim and learn to sail. The natural bush-clad character of much of the hilly land to the west and south of the harbour is valued. The harbour itself is central to family and community activities. Despite development and resultant changes to the hydrology of the harbour during the past 35 years, the harbour is still seen as “pristine”. People emphasise its recreational opportunities, the rich kai moana resources, the naturalness of the harbour and the bird life. Iwi and local residents also highly value the historic and heritage components of the harbour.

For iwi there is a keen sense of loss of manawhenua presence in the harbour and the catchment. That is expressed through a desire for more publicly available information on iwi heritage, more planning and policy consideration of both heritage issues but also current manawhenua aspirations, and greater manawhenua involvement in designing and administering heritage and kai moana conservation measures.

For residents and other stakeholders the most frequently mentioned concern about the harbour is development. People feel that the harbour and its catchment are most at risk from further subdivision or poor planning considerations that allow environmental degradation, combined with a lack of regulation or policy that recognise the exceptional qualities of the harbour and have safeguards in place to protect these qualities.

A much discussed issue as a potential threat is sedimentation and the linked issue of mangroves advancing. The potential threat of sedimentation from logging pine forest was one example frequently cited. Other water quality issues raised include pollution from sewerage and disused landfill leachate. Depredation of the highly valued cockle resource was mentioned frequently as a source of concern. While it is unanimously held that the cockles are currently in good numbers and of a good size, concern is more for the future and the potential for over-harvesting by the increasing number of visitors to the harbour.

There is unease and concern about what is not known about the harbour. There are two parts to this. The first encompasses what is not known or understood about the ecology and hydrology of the harbour and how these things may be changing. There is a desire by iwi, residents and stakeholders for monitoring systems to be put in place quickly to build a picture of what is happening and better understand what remedial actions need to be taken to maintain the special qualities of the area. Linked to this is the understanding that much is already known about the harbour but that information (environment, Maori history and use, boat-building history and other subjects) is not readily available to local residents, visitors or government authorities. Informants felt that information should be pooled and made available.

The second point of concern regarding what is not known can be expressed by the strong sense locally that residents are in the dark about what might be planned by local

government for the harbour and its catchment. This has resulted in many residents feeling worried about what might be planned for the harbour that they don't know about and subsequently feeling defensive and indignant about its lack of protection. Local residents want to be engaged, consulted and informed in all decision-making about the harbour, leading to local ownership of problems and solutions to environmental problems.

There is a belief from iwi, residents and stakeholders that the harbour and its catchment need to be managed and planned for holistically rather than piecemeal. Any project should be focused on the entire catchment and the whole harbour rather than any one part of it or any single cause of environmental decline. This reflects the understanding that potential problems facing the harbour are interlinked with multiple causes, that effective solutions cannot be developed without a holistic approach to the local environment, and that no one settlement or group around the harbour should be exclusively linked to a specific project.

A number of stakeholders and residents described the importance of establishing a body (a "forum") that could facilitate collaboration, co-ordination, consultation, information exchange and priority setting for iwi as appropriate, all government agencies, NGOs, local residents, and stakeholders with an interest in the harbour. Through regular meetings the forum could be the basis for community partnership with local government and collaborative planning with all agencies. It could be structured to have the capacity to select priorities for projects, for research or for monitoring. Eventually, as the body of knowledge about the state of the harbour grows, longer term projects can be designed with strong community ownership. Some funds should be directed by the forum towards "instant projects" – work with an immediate return in terms of visibility and action that build on what is already known about the area.

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10 Appendix 1

In alphabetical order, the people and organisations contacted during the writing of this report.

Iwi

Glen Tupuhi, Ngati Paoa Trust Board
Hariata Gordon, Ngati Paoa Whanau Trust
Jane Sherard, Ngati Whatua Nga Rima o Kaipara
Mook Hohneck, MOKO Charitable Trust, Ngati Manuhiri
Saul Roberts, Te Kawerau a Maki Trust

Stakeholder groups and individuals

Alexander Longue-Higgins, ARC monitor farm "Millbrook Station"
Amy Taylor, ARC
Carol Ramage, Meiklejohn descendant and author
David Thatcher, RDC Harbourmaster
Elise MacDonald, Whangateau Harbour Care Group
Elizabeth Foster, Whangateau Residents and Ratepayers Association
Fiona Baker, Pt Wells' resident
Graham Painter, Omaha Beach Community Inc., Chair
Hilary Chidlow, ARC Environmental Education
Hugh McKergow, Big Omaha Wharf Restoration Society
Ian Murray, RDC Parks and Coastal Mgr
Jared Walker, ARC
Jim Cooke, Farm Forestry Association Councillor
Jo Richards, Dotterel Care Group
Jocelyn Caygill, Omaha and Pt Wells' Harbourmaster
John Walsby, Mahurangi Technical Institute
Kath Heath, Matakana Land Care Group
Kathryn Davies, ARC
Kathryn Erikson, Leigh Valley Restoration Group
Ken Sholson, Omaha Flats' market gardener
Kerry Connelly, submitter and Omaha resident
Liz Maire, Department of Conservation
Maurice Puckett, ARC Tawharanui ranger
Megan Stewart, ARC
Michael Kessell, Matakana Farmers' Market
Morris Ansell, Harbourmaster Ti Point
Murray Little, Honorary Fisheries Officer
Ngaire Rathe, local
Noeleen Cranston, Pt Wells Residents and Ratepayers Association
Paul Williams, Tawharanui Open Sanctuary Supporters Inc.
Peri Buckley, ARC
Peter Reid, RDC Water Services Manager
Peter Riley, local farmer
Raewyn Peart, Environmental Defence Society
Richard Taylor, Leigh Marine Lab
Rob Hughes, ARC
Roger Bannister, ARC
Roger Grace, Whangateau Harbour Care Group

Terry Brailsford, Omaha Yacht Club and Omaha Cliffs Coast Care
Thelma Wilson, Department of Conservation
Sam Morgan, RDC coastal
Steve Bryant, ARC forestry contractor
Sue New, Whangateau Campground
Trish Allen, Rainbow Valley Farm
Tony Enderby, photographer and educator
Vanessa Vujcich, ARC
Warwick Massey, Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society

In addition to these interviews, 30 local residents attended an evening meeting in the Whangateau Hall. Many of these people wish to be kept in touch with the project and they are listed in Appendix 3.