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Media statement



EDS calls for the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act to be beefed up

In a new report released today, the Environmental Defence Society (EDS) has called for a strengthening of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act 2000 to better protect the landscapes of the Hauraki Gulf Islands.

The report is one of a series of case studies EDS is undertaking as part of a broader investigation into landscape protection in New Zealand. EDS has already released case study reports on the Mackenzie Basin, Waitākere Ranges, and tourism.

Co-authored by EDS Policy Director Raewyn Peart and EDS Solicitor Cordelia Woodhouse, *Protecting the Hauraki Gulf Islands* examines the effectiveness of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act, current planning provisions and other approaches in protecting the landscapes of Waiheke Island, Aotea/Great Barrier Island and Rākino Island. It was funded by the Auckland Council.

“The Hauraki Gulf is a place of outstanding landscapes, rich indigenous biodiversity and spiritual importance to Māori,” said Ms Woodhouse.

“It is an area used by many to live and work, for recreation and for the sustenance of human health, wellbeing and spirit.

“Our research concluded that the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act is making little useful contribution to the protection of the island environments. This is due to its broad language and competing objectives.

“Waiheke Island has been subject to intense development pressures due to its growing population and high pre-Covid visitor numbers. We found the current planning provisions not up to the task, with the cumulative impacts of case-by-case consenting threatening ‘death by a thousand cuts’. In contrast, there is much less development pressure on Aotea/Great Barrier and Rākino islands,” said Ms Woodhouse

“More than half the land on Aotea/Great Barrier Island is managed by the Department of Conservation. Our research found a woeful lack of funding allocated to the island by the Department with biodiversity suffering as a result,” said Ms Peart.

“Rākino is pest free, but mainly covered in kikuyu grass. The island would benefit from stronger incentives for landowners to undertake indigenous replanting.

“Auckland Council is currently reviewing the district plan provisions applying to these islands for incorporation into the Auckland Unitary Plan. This is a great opportunity to sharpen up the planning approach.

“On these fragile island environments, land and sea are very closely connected. We have recommended the Council adopt an integrated planning approach, where a precinct plan is developed for each island, extending over the land and into the surrounding marine environment.

“This would enable marine protection to be considered in association with land use planning.

“Strengthening the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act and the planning provisions in the Auckland Unitary Plan, alongside better tourism management and greater funding for biodiversity protection, would go a long way towards protecting these unique island environments for future generations,” concluded Ms Peart.

The EDS report sets out a number of recommendations on how landscape management should be strengthened for the Hauraki Gulf Islands including:

1. *Strengthen the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act*: to make its objectives, and the priority between them clearer. In particular, the Act needs to provide a stronger protective layer over the important biodiversity and landscape values of the Hauraki Gulf islands.
2. *Strengthen the District Plan provisions for Waiheke Island*: so that they are clearer and more directive and leave less room for discretion. Where discretion is exercised, make greater provision for public input through notification procedures.
3. *Develop a Hauraki Gulf Islands Overlay*: for incorporation within the Auckland Unitary Plan in order to retain the ethos of the provisions in the Hauraki Gulf Islands District Plan and a focus on the individual characteristics of the islands.
4. *Develop tailored island precinct plans for each island and surrounding marine area*: for incorporation within the Auckland Unitary Plan below the Hauraki Gulf Islands Overlay. Tailor rules to the sensitive island environments, incorporate design guidelines and control the impacts of fishing on marine biodiversity surrounding the islands.
5. *Develop more strategic and spatially-focused local area plans* for the islands along the model of the Auckland Plan to provide greater direction for development and conservation on the islands in the long term
6. *Consider developing co-governance arrangements and legal personhood for the Aotea Conservation Park*: through amendments to the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act to raise its status, provide a more compelling proposition for funding, and strengthen Ngāti Rehua-Ngātiwai ki Aotea’s kaitiaki role on Aotea/Great Barrier Island.

7. *Promote a move to 'slow' tourism:* on Aotea/Great Barrier and Waiheke Islands. To achieve this support the development and implementation of destination management plans, revise the concession system on Aotea/Great Barrier Island and promote sustainable tourism on Waiheke Island.

The Hauraki Gulf Islands report is available [here](#)

The Waitakere Ranges report is available [here](#)

The Mackenzie report is available [here](#)

The Tourism report is available [here](#)