

## ***Marine spatial plan needed for Hauraki Gulf***

*By Gary Taylor*

The Hauraki Gulf plays a big part in making Auckland a liveable city. Those involved in administering the area are starting to think about an exciting new initiative that could protect its outstanding values and have international significance. The idea is to develop a special kind of plan for the Gulf, a marine spatial plan, which would set out where different activities would be allowed, and where conservation imperatives would prevail.

This initiative would be of international interest because right now many countries are moving to develop marine spatial plans as a way of resolving resource use conflicts in coastal waters. The Hauraki Gulf, with its intensive range of uses and with jurisdiction split amongst different agencies, could be a very useful pilot and exemplar of how to do it.

The Hauraki Gulf has its own special Act of Parliament. This established the Hauraki Gulf Forum, an integrative body comprised of iwi representatives and statutory managers of the Gulf. The Forum's mandate extends over some 13,900 square kilometres of sea, from Te Arai in the north to south of Whiritoa on the Coromandel Peninsula. It includes the Waitemata Harbour and embraces some of the most intensively used coastal waters in New Zealand.

The Forum recently released *Spatial Planning for the Gulf*, a report which reviews marine spatial planning internationally and describes how such an approach could be applied to Gulf.

Late last year, the Waikato Regional Council indicated its intention to investigate the preparation of a spatial plan for the Gulf. It is seeking to do this in collaboration with its Forum partners and other stakeholders. Auckland Council's Chief Planning Officer, Roger Blakeley, signalled at a recent EDS seminar on the Auckland Plan that his Council was also considering ways of progressing the initiative.

So how might such a process unfold? The plan would need to be prepared by a group involving all the key stakeholders in the Gulf under the overall auspices of the Hauraki Gulf Forum.

Having the Forum take responsibility for preparing a Hauraki Gulf Spatial Plan would give it something really substantial and useful to get its teeth into. It could sponsor the process and recruit all the key parties to play a part. Key science providers including universities, Cawthron Institute and Crown Research Institutes like NIWA and Landcare Research could provide technical advice.

Importantly, the process would need to be a genuinely collaborative one. It should include user group representatives including recreational boaters, aquaculture, fishing, mining, conservation groups, and other resource users. Iwi would need to play a key role. Using a collaborative process would add an element of real innovation to the process and ensure buy-in at the end of the exercise.

Collaboration is relatively new to New Zealand. It's been used successfully in the Land and Water Forum, which brought together disparate interests in freshwater management and finally nailed a series of 53 recommendations that would transform the way freshwater is managed in this country. It's more recently been adopted in the Mackenzie Country, with the Upper Waitaki Shared Vision process bringing together previously warring interests to work through an agreed way forward for that iconic area.

Collaboration involves first understanding the scientific and policy underpinnings of the area then working via a consensus approach to identify the preferred way forward. In the spatial planning context, this would be via a plan or series of plans describing the future of the Gulf over time.

It might, for example, plot sightings of the Gulf's resident Bryde's whales, a threatened population subject to ship strikes. These areas could then be subject to vessel speed restrictions. It might identify areas where aquaculture would be acceptable as well as favoured anchorages for recreational users. It could identify popular bathing beaches and drive priorities for land-based investment in reducing runoff of contaminants.

A marine spatial plan would also identify the biodiversity storehouses of the Gulf, those areas which are critical to the ongoing health and productivity of the marine system. These would include key habitats which support juvenile snapper and valued shellfish beds. It would identify important marine mammal habitats for protection.

Once agreed, the spatial plan would be implemented through the various resource use statutes including the Resource Management Act, the Fisheries Act and conservation legislation.

The Hauraki Gulf is now subject to many conflicting pressures and we have passed the point where we can continue a laissez-faire approach to its management. To protect its outstanding values and to provide more certainty to all users, we need to intervene and think carefully about its future. If Auckland is to become the most liveable city in the world, the Hauraki Gulf has an important role to play.

Marine spatial planning is the focus of EDS's *Coastlines* conference on 1-2 June.

*Gary Taylor is chairman of the Environmental Defence Society and convenor of Coastlines: spatial planning for land and sea, SkyCity Convention Centre, 1-2 June [www.edsconference.com](http://www.edsconference.com)*