

## **New Zealander's Love Affair with the Sea**

Tony Bouzaid, Chairperson, Great Barrier Island Community Board

New Zealand has always had a love affair with the ocean.

When fund raising to send Rainbow 2 to Heligoland for the One Ton Cup a senior Yacht Squadron member was heard to comment:

"Rainbow 2 has as much chance of winning the One Ton Cup as America has of putting a man on the moon".

On July 21<sup>st</sup> 1969 both occurred on the same day and Rainbow 2 shared front-page headlines with the first steps by Neil Armstrong. This epitomised the vast public interest in the sea and sailing that had been building for generations.

As an Island nation ships and sailing were the initial lifeblood when the country was settled, firstly by Polynesians who came here by canoe,

(not known to them at this time was that in years to come they would be entered into the Guinness World Records--Longest Canoe--The Maori war canoe Nga Toki Matawhaorua, which was shaped with adzes at Kerikeri Inlet, New Zealand, in 1940, is 35.7 m (117 ft 1 in) long and 2 m (6 ft 7 in) wide. It can carry a total of 135 people – 80 paddlers and 55 passengers)

then came Europeans in sailing ships. The first major event instituted on the founding of Auckland was the inaugural Anniversary Regatta in 1840. When one looks at the history of NZ it is a given that it will have an affinity to the sea that surrounds it. Considering that approximately 60% of the residents of the US have never seen salt water it is probably a little easier to understand. Take a guess at the number of New Zealanders who have never seen salt water?

Our early settlers were glad to see the end of the sea by the time they arrived in New Zealand after up to a year on the water. A country with more coastline per square mile than any other in the world it is easy to understand why they couldn't get too far away from it. No place in New Zealand is further than 50 miles from the sea or a large body of water.

Unlike most early Australians who were forced to go there for their misdemeanours our European ancestors came here of their own free will or at least the will of their families. Those who hated the ocean and didn't want to see it ever again either got off in Australia or soon got themselves over there.

We all know that New Zealand has always been a very forward thinking and acting country. Lets face it New Zealand was the first nation in the world to give women the vote 15 years before the US. This forward thinking has extended to decisions such as the formation of marine reserves round the coast. In addition we have many groups such as the Hauraki Gulf Protection Society, Friends of the Coastline, Guardians of the Sounds and the Port FitzRoy Protection Society that are endeavouring to ensure that our heritage can be carried on for generations to come.

Conservation at sea and coastal zones can have a direct affect on biodiversity on the land. Examples of this relationship include the plight of the black petrel. Once common throughout New Zealand this species can now only be found nesting on Great Barrier and Little Barrier Islands. Regulations now require long liners to set their first baits well under

water to help prevent the by-catch of diving petrels which is having a significant impact on petrel mortality at sea. While on the coast, over indulgent gathering of shellfish from beaches around Auckland have depleted populations creating maritime deserts. Exclusion Zones for gatherers have now been set up in some locations, which the residents actively monitor.

Along with the love of the sea and the coast comes a responsibility to help protect it. The New Zealand boating public has come a long way since Mansion House Bay was referred to as 'glass bottom bay' because of all the empty bottles on the seabed. In my boyhood I was taught to break the bottle over the side with a winch handle before consigning it to the deep. The shorelines used to be littered with the refuse from recreational boating. Nowadays boaties are taking responsibility for their own waste and dumping at sea is no longer seen as acceptable in any company. In addition, progressive Councils provide rubbish barges at peak holiday periods for rubbish collection and recycling in harbours remote from shore based facilities. Regulations now require holding tanks or septic recycling systems to be built into all new boats with discharge limited to open waters at least 500m from shore. For popular anchorage sites such as Port Fitzroy, regulations such as this will ensure that boaties, residents and holiday makers can all swim together in clean harbour waters. This new attitude along with responsible regulations has created a cleaner greener image for recreational boating.

Port FitzRoy, on the outer edge of the Hauraki Gulf attracts both local and global visitors to this pristine, deep-water harbour, sheltered in all winds and surrounded by outstanding natural features. I have spent the last 8 years fighting to prevent further encroachment of mussel farms in the harbour. I don't object to mussel farms per se and even instigated the Great FitzRoy Mussel Fest, but not where they conflict with traditional anchorages. The harbour was subject to ten proposed additional mussel farm applications. There are already six mussel farms in Port FitzRoy that occupy a considerable share of a limited resource.

As a result the Port FitzRoy Protection Society was formed by a group of concerned boaties and others to fight for the preservation of this uniquely valuable recreation resource. Only one mussel farm was notified before the Moratorium was instituted by the Government, but if approved would practically eliminate the best anchorage in the harbour in winds from the westerly quarter. If we hadn't publicised the application, made the boating public aware of its repercussions and advised boaties to make submissions I have no doubt this valuable anchorage would have been lost to recreational users.

We raised money through public and yacht club donations to pay lawyers and consultants and opposed the application with 390 individual submissions at the Regional Council hearing. The consent was declined. The applicant then appealed to the Environment Court. After another battle in court the appeal failed. The applicant has since taken it to the High Court and we are still awaiting a decision.

One of the founder members of the Society was a good friend, Sir Peter Blake who before his untimely death campaigned for the cause of marine protection worldwide. Being a relatively young country New Zealand is in the position to learn from the mistakes of other countries. Encouraged by its love of the sea New Zealand has taken on the challenge by restricting its seaborne resources to ensure that our future generations are able to experience what the coastline has to offer.

What does the coastline mean to me and many other New Zealanders, why do we fight for it?

To enter Port FitzRoy through Man of War Passage after a rough Gulf crossing.  
To cruise along a coastline that exhibits its geological history in its rock formations.  
To dive in crystal clear water and experience another world.

To collect cockles at low tide and BBQ them on the beach.  
To paddle up tidal creeks into the heart of the forest.  
To watch dolphins at play on the bow wave of the yacht.  
To explore the rocks and islets of a coastline hardly touched by man.  
To fish off the rocks or the wharf at sundown.  
To build sandcastles on the beach with no one else in sight.  
And to attempt to absorb a coastline that exhibits a diversity and breathtaking beauty that is equal to that found in New Zealand's inland landscapes.

Or in the words of Greg Amos, a friend more eloquent than I:

"Anchored in a sheltered bay  
Pohutakawas tumble to the sea  
The sound of drunken tui  
From a nearby kowhai tree."

My love affair with the sea was probably both hereditary and environmental. My father dug his first boat out of the mud of the Manukau. His first sails were made from his mother's bed sheets and with 'Lone Star' he won the Manukau Harbour 14 footer Championship. My first experience with the sea was as a 14 month old in 1942, when my parents and the Corkin's sailed to Port FitzRoy for the Easter break. On board the "Corsair" was Dad's brother Lou who had worked for some time for the Post Office and was an expert at Morse code. He had a friend on the following boat who was also an expert and all the way out to the Barrier they communicated by flashing signals in Morse code. Little did they know that the Navy were trying to monitor their signals but couldn't keep up? They anchored for the night in Nagle Cove and woke up the next morning to find a Navy cutter alongside with armed sailors lining the gunwale and demanding to know what they were doing the previous night. Also why they were in the harbour when it had been declared a prohibited area? Even the locals weren't allowed to leave the island unless in a dire emergency.

My first sea borne memory was falling overboard in Whangamumu Harbour and only a fishing line hanging over the side saved me from drowning. My mother often recounted an incident on "Scout" when as a 2 or 3 year old I liked to throw the pots and pans over the side and watch them oscillate as they sank out of sight. When Dad caught me throwing the last one over he dived in after it. I was probably lucky not to be thrown in as well!  
I only got to go sailing every alternate Christmas while at boarding school in Queensland for a few years. Then it was back to New Zealand and sailing at every opportunity that boarding school allowed. Immediately after my last exam I was apprenticed into the family sailmaking business.

New Zealanders love affair with the sea became the catalyst for both sailing and boating which is now the largest manufacturing export industry in the country. At the same time this affinity was coupled with a deeply ingrained understanding of the importance of the ocean for fishing and recreation. A history of resource plundering in other parts of the world has left its mark and while they work to reverse the damage done New Zealand is taking a pro-active stance to conservation,

For New Zealand to continue its love affair with the sea we MUST continue to protect our coastline and the public access to it. There are many harbours in other parts of the world where it is impossible to access the waterfront from the land or in fact access the land from the sea. My brother cruises throughout New England and there are many harbours where to tie up your dinghy just to go ashore will cost as much as \$20 an hour.

Having been brought up on sailing holidays in the Hauraki Gulf it was only natural that I would want my children to experience the same. The majority of this holiday time was spent

sailing in and around Great Barrier Island. At the same time all their weekends were taken up sailing dinghies at Wakatere Boating Club. Thus this love and respect of the sea is passed on from one generation to another. I believe it is this association with the sea from an early age, the many excellent sailing harbours around our coastline, the sailing heritage of our forebears and the pioneer spirit of “can do” that has made New Zealand the pre-eminent sailing nation of the world it is today.

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