

SUSTAINABLE  
SEAS

Ko ngā moana  
whakauka

# A guide to developing place-based, community-led, restorative marine tourism in Aotearoa New Zealand

Developed by OD&Co with support  
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# Introduction

Restorative Marine Tourism (RMT) is a place-based and community-led practice that weaves together restoration efforts and tourism activities. It:

- provides benefits for the health and vitality of the moana
- strengthens community connectivity to the marine environment
- provides visitors with a more grounded and authentic visitor experience in place.

This guide delves into the current state of Restorative Marine Tourism (RMT) in Aotearoa, and identifies opportunities, strategies, and characteristics of successful approaches. It is a practical and insightful guide to activating RMT opportunities in communities across Aotearoa New Zealand.

This document champions the idea that a focus on blue economy tourism should lead with place-based, community-led, and restoration-focused activity, as this approach is best placed to serve our economic, environmental, social, and cultural well-being outcomes now and into the future.

By linking our tourism system and infrastructure with the growth and emphasis of the blue economy, we can shed light on a new subset that draws on the strengths of these critical sectors for the future of our economy.

Through this guide, we aim to:

- explain RMT through a definition, explanations, and pillars
- examine RMT activities and celebrate champions leading the way
- identify emerging opportunities and key domains for activation
- guide communities on what it takes to activate RMT initiatives
- provide tools for communities to increase the uptake of RMT initiatives.

Through our research, we concluded that this approach is not only already being implemented in communities across Aotearoa but that a focus on this emerging sector promises significant environmental, cultural, social, and economic benefits for Aotearoa New Zealand.

We hope that reading, learning, and engaging with these insights brings you as much joy and inspiration as we found in exploring and developing them.

*Ko te mauri he mea huna ki te moana - The mauri is hidden in the sea*

Mauri Ora

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# Methodology

This guide integrates our research, key findings from previous work by the Sustainable Seas National Science Challenge, insights from our keystone case study in Mārahau, and valuable contributions from Restorative Marine Tourism (RMT) champions we have profiled and celebrated in this work.

Our goal was to identify useful insights and outcomes to inform future progress in RMT.

## Steps taken to develop this guide:

1. **Workshops:** We conducted several workshops to develop concepts and strategies to support RMT practices. These sessions facilitated brainstorming, collaboration, and refinement of ideas to support RMT.
2. **Review of the Sustainable Seas Challenge:** We extensively reviewed the significant and relevant work done by the Sustainable Seas National Science Challenge in the blue economy space. This provided a strong foundation of knowledge and best practices related to marine restoration and sustainable marine activities.
3. **Tourism sector analysis:** We analysed research and data from the visitor sector, including the push for a Destination Management approach in Aotearoa. This analysis helped us understand the broader tourism context and how RMT can be integrated into existing frameworks.
4. **Interviews and profiles:** We interviewed, profiled, and spent time with a range of individuals successfully delivering RMT practices through their everyday work. These interactions provided first-hand insights into effective RMT strategies, and the challenges and opportunities faced by practitioners.
5. **Case study in Mārahau:** We supported the development of our case study in Mārahau, which brought together tourism operators under a collaborative initiative. This case study aimed to create a restoration season to build on existing success in fuelling restoration efforts by leveraging the tourism system.

From our research and activities, we identified a range of insights and outcomes to inform the future of RMT. Furthermore, we researched and identified key visitor segments and potential consumers of RMT and pinpointed the groups best placed to activate these opportunities.

We've translated these findings and insights into practical guidance for communities wishing to engage with RMT. Our conclusions have been organised into pillars that form protocols for RMT in Aotearoa. These pillars can be used as standalone resources for communities to activate around RMT or understood together as a wider strategic direction for RMT in Aotearoa.

# Research insights

Our insights are included throughout this guide but here we've summarised the 'raw' findings from our research that informed that guidance. They include:

1. **RMT can be and is being done successfully:** Numerous examples and our champion profiles, demonstrate successful integration of marine restoration with tourism, highlighting both progress and potential for Aotearoa New Zealand.
2. **RMT is a bottom-up practice:** Community involvement and leadership are crucial for the success of RMT. Initiatives thrive when they emerge organically from within the community and leverage local knowledge and participation.
3. **RMT produces multiple co-benefits:** RMT offers significant co-benefits, including, but not limited to, the restoration of marine ecosystems, strengthening of community connectivity, improved well-being for those participating, and enhanced added value for our visitor sector, blue economy, and regions.
4. **Doing it well sometimes involves doing it anyway:** Consistent challenges include securing funding, coordinating stakeholders, and navigating compliance issues. The most successful cases involved communities getting on with the job and finding self-sustaining ways of making it happen.
5. **The moana comes first but it's the whole picture that counts:** Effective RMT initiatives adopt a holistic and integrated approach, recognising the interconnectedness of marine and terrestrial ecosystems and fostering deep relationships between people and the moana.

## We also identified challenges

Some of the challenges we identified included:

1. **Funding Limitations:** Securing consistent and sufficient funding for marine restoration and research projects remains a significant challenge, often limiting the scope and impact of initiatives that offer greater promise and potential.
2. **Regulatory and compliance issues:** Navigating complex regulatory frameworks and achieving compliance with various environmental and tourism-related regulations can be cumbersome and restrictive for operators.

3. **Coordination among stakeholders:** Effective coordination among diverse stakeholders such as local communities, tourism operators, researchers, iwi and hapū, government agencies, and others is essential but often challenging to achieve. There was a sense of frustration among those doing it well about the barriers and complexity they face.
4. **Scalability and sustainability:** Ensuring that RMT initiatives are scalable and sustainable over the long term requires careful planning, ongoing support, and adaptability to changing environmental and economic conditions.
5. **Awareness and promotion:** Raising awareness about the benefits and opportunities of RMT, both within local communities and among potential visitors, is crucial for garnering support and participation but can be difficult due to limited media resources and the cost of conducting such outreach.

# Understanding RMT

We've coined the phrase Restorative Marine Tourism (RMT) to distil the longer form concept we started of 'Place-based, community-led restorative marine tourism'. To assist our understanding further, we've defined RMT as:

*A community-driven, place-based practice that integrates marine restoration efforts with tourism activities, enhancing the health of marine ecosystems, fostering cultural connections, and providing meaningful, immersive experiences for visitors and locals.*

Or, in more approachable terms:

*Restorative Marine Tourism (RMT) is a type of tourism that combines fun and meaningful activities with efforts to heal and protect our ocean environments.*

RMT involves local communities leading the way in creating experiences that allow visitors to enjoy the beauty of the sea while also contributing to its restoration and health.

It's a win-win for everyone involved, from the marine life to the local people to the visitors who leave with unforgettable memories and a sense of having made a positive impact.

For the purposes of our work, the criteria for RMT was articulated as activities that directly or indirectly participated in the visitor economy while supporting place-based and community-led restoration outcomes to improve the health of the moana and wider marine environment.

## RMT has several benefits

The benefits of RMT include:

**Environmental:** RMT contributes to the restoration and protection of marine ecosystems, enhancing biodiversity and ecosystem services.

**Social:** RMT strengthens community cohesion and connectivity, providing opportunities for local empowerment and capacity building.

**Economic:** RMT supports sustainable tourism, creating economic opportunities aligned with environmental and social goals.

**Cultural:** RMT preserves and promotes the cultural connections and knowledge of tangata whenua and other coastal communities.



## RMT Pillars

Five core pillars form the basis of all RMT activity in Aotearoa, from small-scale owner-operator businesses to large-scale collaborations, all the initiatives we studied clearly aligned with these pillars.

These pillars should be considered as the essential domains of RMT in Aotearoa, supporting our definition of RMT and acting as a criterion to assess activity as to whether it fits within the framework of RMT that is emerging in Aotearoa.

## Five Pillars of Restorative Marine Tourism (RMT)

### **Place-based**

RMT is localised, nurturing the unique characteristics and culture of a place.

### **Community-led**

RMT starts from within a community, not imposed from outside.

### **Restorative**

*RMT aims to enhance ocean health, actively participating in restoration.*

### **Integrated**

RMT sees the ocean, people, and all living things as interconnected.

### **Relational**

RMT emphasises the deep relationships between people and the moana.

## Place-based

*RMT is localised, nurturing the unique characteristics and culture of a place.*

RMT is an inherently localised practice that is seen and understood through a place-based lens. It acknowledges the unique characteristics of place and recognises and nurtures the distinctive culture of that place.

This pillar embraces cultural understandings and narratives that emanate from tangata whenua and tangata moana of that particular locality, as well as contemporary understandings and knowledge that has been acquired by communities living and working in that particular environment.

Place-based requires an understanding of the nuances of the location, the interconnections between the sea and the people who reside there, and the relationships that have been formed and continue to be formed through connection to the moana in that particular locality.

Fundamentally, this place-based pillar doesn't just adhere to a place-based understanding but supports the mauri and vitality of that location by expressing authentic narratives that support greater connectivity to the moana and improve the wellbeing of all living things in that place.

## Community-led

*RMT starts from within a community, not imposed from outside.*

RMT requires a community-led and community-orientated approach to be successful. Effective approaches to RMT are products of the community they seek to serve and do not come from 'the top down' or by enforcement through an external organisation or outsiders to that particular place.

In this instance, the word community is used in the most deliberate and distinct meaning of the word, representing not so much the wider community of place but the communities that enjoy an interconnection and relationship with the coastal environment. Of course, a relationship to the sea is a broadly universal idea in Aotearoa, but successful RMT initiatives are typically initiated by those with the closest bond and most frequent interaction with the sea.

Community-led also speaks to the idea that these initiatives most commonly emerge from humble beginnings and grow organically, rather than being forced to scale or 'bring everyone with them' from the start. Indeed, this appears to be one of the critical aspects of the growth of such initiatives.

RMT operates at a societal level rather than an institutional one. At its best, it engages effectively and helps activate institutions with a responsibility over the ocean environment, but it is usually not constrained or stifled by corporate, political, or bureaucratic structures that weigh the initiative down. This applies equally to funding, as all of the successful examples of RMT had a self-sustaining or autonomous model of funding to insulate from the perils of grant funding, these ideas are akin to social enterprise models.

## Restorative

*RMT aims to enhance ocean health, actively participating in restoration.*

This pillar offers perhaps the most critical definition of the practice of RMT, one that exists for the purpose restoring mana (strength) and mauri (vitality) to ocean ecosystems, that have capacity to renew and become stronger.

The definition of 'having the ability to restore health, strength, or wellbeing' is offered by the Oxford Dictionary for the word restorative. It speaks of a thing (in our instance, a practice) that restores health, strength, or well-being. Cambridge Dictionary offers a more enlightened take on the idea of 'restorative', which is something 'making you feel better or more energetic if you are feeling tired or ill', which beautifully and fittingly captures that co-benefits that are derived from restorative activities, especially in the moana.

Alongside these helpful definitions, the UN Decade on Restoration understands restoration of oceans and coasts as 'Restoring oceans and coasts means reducing the pressure on those ecosystems so they can recover, both naturally and by re-seeding or transplanting key species', which is a more nuanced brief of the 'Restorative' element in Restorative Marine Tourism.

Critically, the word restorative is prioritised here as it evolves our understanding beyond 'conserve' or 'preserve' thinking to an active practice that not only seeks to raise awareness and champion behaviours that reduce the harm we are causing to the ocean but focuses us appropriately on the essential work of rolling up our sleeves and being active participants in the restoration of health of the ocean, to add new life and enhance the mauri of this environment, which inherently feeds our own mauri and wairua creating a reciprocal exchange that is regenerative in nature. The more we speak with and interact with the moana through restoration, the more our capacity and interest in doing this will grow, creating a positive cycle of reinforcement for us and the ecosystems that sustain us.

## Integrated

*RMT sees the ocean, people, and all living things as interconnected.*

An unmistakable quality of successful examples of RMT were that they took a whole of eco-system approach. This aligns with the concept of ecosystem-based management (EBM), which is defined as 'managing the marine environment in a holistic and inclusive way' but premises the idea of an integrated understanding and approach rather than management that often sits outside of the domain of RMT that is community-led or not a product of institutions or governing bodies.

This integrated and holistic understanding is already intrinsic to Te Ao Māori, which fundamentally understands and articulates the environment through the interdependent and interconnected relationships bound together in Te Taiao, the natural world that surrounds and contains us. Critically, this understanding is centered on relationships, not ownership or control of the environment but rather a respectful and reciprocal relationship with our kin.

RMT is so fundamentally premised on an integrated and holistic approach that even some of the most prominent and successful examples of RMT don't limit their definition and narrative around their work to the moana, choosing instead to zoom out and take a whole of ecosystem understanding that doesn't detach our identity as people from the environment in which we exist. Ko au te Taiao, ko te Taiao ko au (I am nature, and nature is me).

Tangata whenua also express this approach through the idea of 'ki uta, ki tai' or from the mountains to the sea, which provides a more visual interpretation of integrated and holistic thinking but also offers another insight around the expression of wai (water). By thinking about the journey of water we can consider its whakapapa and the natural order in which it enters the moana, forcing us to consider first and foremost the activities on land that dictate the wellbeing of the water that flows into the sea, which is often a blind spot if we consider the moana in isolation from the rest of the environment.

## Relational

*RMT emphasises the deep relationships between people and the moana.*

RMT is deeply relational and requires embracing the interdependency and interconnections we enjoy with the moana — a spiritual or cultural bond that is essentially unbreakable but grows in presence and awareness in relationship to the amount of time we spend with the moana.

Academic understandings of this relationship only help us rationalise something that is better felt and nurtured, that the moana and all living things within her are living beings that we share a deep emotional relationship with. Of course, our understandings of this relationship are informed by our own cultural identity or spiritual beliefs, and they are expressed in vastly different ways depending on how intrinsic the ocean is to someone's identity and everyday life.

RMT can be considered like a gateway drug to help re-activate and re-connect these relationships, facilitated by RMT champions and practitioners for whom, regardless of how they deliver RMT, the ocean has had a profound impact on their lives and is embedded in their way of thinking and being in the world. RMT encourages this level of spiritual and cultural connection with the moana and facilitates opportunities to transform, at times fear and trepidation about such experiences, into pathways to rekindling relational understandings of the moana and the important role she plays in our lives.

Mana Moana research and knowledge expresses the ideas of whakapapa in practice (Te Ao Tūroa), guided partnerships (Waka Taurua), research methods and methodologies (Taura Here), and lines of service and responsibility (Tūhonohono). These framings, which enhance our understanding and recognition of Mana Moana, offer guidance on what an integrated approach to activating this relational pillar looks like for tangata whenua.

# RMT and the Blue Economy Principles

The Blue Economy Principles adopted by the Sustainable Seas National Science Challenge (the Challenge) are underscored by a definition of the blue economy for Aotearoa: *marine activities that generate economic value and contribute positively to ecological, cultural, and social well-being.*

This definition is further expressed and expanded upon through six principles:

1. **Accountable** — adopting decision-making and reporting frameworks that consider the natural, social, and cultural effects of all proposed and actual uses of ocean resources.
2. **Te Mana o te Moana** — prioritising the health and wellbeing of the moana informed by a Te Tiriti o Waitangi-led approach where the rights and responsibilities of tangata whenua are provided for.
3. **Regenerative** — adopting practices that actively support and restore marine ecosystem health.
4. **Inclusive** — engaging with communities to achieve multiple benefits for people and the environment.
5. **Intergenerational** — empowering holistic governance and management that support the moana to provide for long-term social, cultural, environmental, and economic wellbeing.
6. **Prosperous** — actively transitioning towards resource use that is productive, sustainable, resilient, and enhances the ocean and ocean-dependent livelihoods.

Critically, the Challenge also identifies that:

## **A thriving blue economy is an aspiration**

A blue economy does not happen by itself. We must transition towards it by investing, regulating, and consuming wisely. This means having a different mindset about how we value and generate value from marine resources. This shift will also require increased trust between businesses, communities, and government, as well as investment in institutions and organisations that drive the necessary transition.

## **Place-based**

- **Accountable:** Activities deliver restoration visibly linked to people and place, enhancing local accountability.
- **Te Mana o te Moana:** Prioritises the wellbeing of the moana and enhances ocean health, guided by tangata whenua.
- **Regenerative:** Focuses on active restoration of local marine ecosystems, contributing to overall environmental health.
- **Inclusive:** Engages local communities and visitors in planning and implementing place-based initiatives.
- **Intergenerational:** Employs long-term strategies for sustainable local marine environments and supports independent restoration activity.

- **Prosperous:** Develops place-based social enterprises and initiatives that are sustainable, create jobs, and enhance local livelihoods.

### Community-led

- **Accountable:** Community-led initiatives ensure transparent decision-making and reporting that is the closest to the source (those living there).
- **Te Mana o te Moana:** Partners with tangata whenua, expresses cultural narratives and values, creates a more relational sphere of activity.
- **Regenerative:** Encourages community-led restoration activities that regenerate marine ecosystems and fuel wider regeneration efforts.
- **Inclusive:** Community leadership ensures activities meet local needs and include diverse voices, of those most connected to the ocean.
- **Intergenerational:** Focuses on embedding and creating community capacity for long-term stewardship of marine environments.
- **Prosperous:** Develops self-sustaining community projects that create local economic opportunities while protecting the ecosystem.

### Restorative

- **Accountable:** Stimulates dialogue that seeks to better understand challenges and impacts within the environment they're occurring.
- **Te Mana o te Moana:** Placing restoration of the moana at the centre of the work to enhance understanding and commitment to wellbeing.
- **Regenerative:** Goes beyond reducing harm or negating negative impacts to actively enhancing and renewing marine health.
- **Inclusive:** Breaks down barriers to participation in restoration activity by creating gateway experiences and educational opportunities for all.
- **Intergenerational:** Focuses on long-term marine health and vitality for future generations.
- **Prosperous:** Encourages restoration that is economically viable and leverages existing tourism infrastructure to deliver more gain.

### Integrated

- **Accountable:** Supports community-led decision-making that creates awareness of the impacts of our activities throughout the ecosystem.
- **Te Mana o te Moana:** Supports an aligned view of the environment to Te Ao Māori concepts and promotes Kaitiakitanga responsibilities.
- **Regenerative:** Considers all ecosystem components in restoration activities, enhancing overall health and stimulating renewing activity.
- **Inclusive:** Creates a lower barrier to entry for stakeholders to engage in dialogue and activity about marine restoration in an informal way.
- **Intergenerational:** Stimulates interaction, awareness, and involvement in the health of the moana that is intergenerational.
- **Prosperous:** Promotes integrated projects that are economically sustainable and enhance the marine environment.

### Relational



- **Accountable:** Ensures relational practices are transparent and reports on social and cultural impacts.
- **Te Mana o te Moana:** Fosters spiritual and cultural bonds between people and the ocean.
- **Regenerative:** Encourages practices that strengthen the health of marine ecosystems through relational approaches.
- **Inclusive:** Promotes diverse community participation, enhancing relational connections with the moana.
- **Intergenerational:** Strengthens relationships with the moana to ensure future generations benefit from its resources.
- **Prosperous:** Supports localised economies and small enterprises to generate economic opportunities whilst protecting natural resources.

# RMT and Destination Management

The Destination Management (DM) Guidelines produced by MBIE (Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment) identifies three interdependent components that form the basis of an integrated DM approach.

1. **Visitor experience:** the destination's experience offering, including activities, attractions, supporting infrastructure, services and amenities.
2. **Marketing and promotion:** the destination's marketing and promotional activity, creating demand and enabling the destination to be competitive, productive and sustainable.
3. **Resource management:** the destination's strategy, policy and regulatory frameworks, Te Tiriti o Waitangi, organisational structures and the investments that support the destination.

## Visitor experience

- **Place-based:** Enhances local visitor experiences by connecting visitors with local people, local knowledge, and local environments.
- **Community-led:** Ensures visitor activities are designed and led by local communities and intended to serve and benefit local communities first.
- **Restorative:** Supports activity that protects and enhances the natural resources that form the basis of our visitor experience in Aotearoa.
- **Integrated:** Encourages visitor education, slower journeys, connections with locals, and experiences that build long-term connections to place.
- **Relational:** Fosters deep connections between visitors, locals and the place, enriching their experience and sense of long-term loyalty.

## Marketing and promotion

- **Place-based:** Promotes the unique characteristics and narratives of place, leveraging our tourism brand that promotes our natural environment as a key drawcard for visitors.
- **Community-led:** Creates enriching community connections with visitors and creates local ambassadors to carry local stories and narratives.
- **Restorative:** Increases consumer understanding and demand for restoration by showcasing the potential for positive impact of tourism on marine restoration.
- **Integrated:** Communicates the holistic nature of experiences, integrating land, sea, and people as part of a cohesive story.
- **Relational:** Promotes deeper, enriching, and culturally centered experiences that visitors can have here whilst having a positive impact on the local environment rather than taking from it.

## Resource management

- **Place-based:** Creates localised monitoring and citizen science opportunities within place, by both locals and visitors.
- **Community-led:** Empowers local communities to manage resources and initiatives themselves, not rely on external inputs.

- **Restorative:** Focuses on activities that actively restore and enhance marine ecosystems and the renewal of natural resources.
- **Integrated:** Adopts holistic management approaches that consider the entire ecosystem and the wellbeing of natural resources.
- **Relational:** Recognises and enhances the importance of cultural and spiritual relationships in resource management.

# RMT Opportunities

We've grouped the practices of RMT into five categories of activation.

1. **Investment** — raising money for restoration activity through tourism activity
2. **Data** — collecting 'citizens science' data from visitors and tourism operators
3. **Education** — creating awareness and ambassadors among visitors and locals
4. **Infrastructure** — leveraging tourism assets (marketing, staff, boat trips etc)
5. **Experiences** — delivering immersive hands-on experiences or events

## Investment

*Raising money for restoration activity through tourism activity*

Investment in restoration can be achieved by leveraging tourism activities to generate funding for marine restoration projects. This can include allocating a portion of ticket sales from boat tours, diving excursions, and other tourism activities directly to restoration efforts.

Additionally, businesses can implement 'visitor donation' programs where tourists have the option to contribute to local marine restoration funds.

By integrating investment opportunities into tourism activities, businesses not only support marine restoration but also engage visitors in the work, creating a sense of shared responsibility and connection to the local marine environment.

## Data

*Collecting 'citizen science' data and insights from visitors and tourism operators*

Tourism operators can engage visitors in citizen science projects that contribute valuable data for marine restoration and research. This involves facilitating the work required for visitors to collect data on activity and observations during visitor experiences. These could range from observations about water quality, marine species sightings, and other ecological indicators during their visits.

Activities like snorkelling, diving, and boat tours can include briefings on how to record observations and use simple data collection tools such as underwater cameras and mobile apps. Visitors can participate in species identification programs, contribute to databases tracking the health of marine ecosystems, and monitor the presence of marine threats.

By involving visitors in data collection, operators not only enhance the visitor experience and sense of contribution and connection to the environment but also gather critical information that can be used by scientists and policymakers to inform restoration strategies. This participatory approach fosters a deeper understanding and appreciation of marine environments among visitors while providing valuable insights for ongoing research.

## Education

### *Creating awareness and ambassadors among visitors and locals*

Education can be achieved indirectly by adding informative commentary and knowledge sharing to visitor experiences and interactions or more directly by creating products and initiatives for raising awareness about marine ecosystems' health and restoration needs.

Either direct or indirect educational practices help create awareness, connection, and advocacy for restorative marine practices. Initiatives can include guided tours, workshops, and interactive exhibits that educate visitors about local marine ecosystems, the challenges they face, and the efforts being made to restore them.

Tourism operators can partner with schools and community groups to extend these educational efforts to local residents and future champions. Additionally, training programs can be developed for tourism staff, equipping them with the knowledge to effectively communicate restoration messages to visitors. By integrating education into the tourism experience, operators can inspire a sense of stewardship and encourage both visitors and locals to become active participants in marine restoration efforts.

## Infrastructure

### *Leveraging tourism assets (marketing, staff, boat trips, etc.)*

Tourism infrastructure can be strategically used to support marine restoration activities. This includes using boats and other equipment for restoration activities such as ocean dive clean-ups, species transplantation, transporting volunteers/kaimahi to undertake restoration activity, and monitoring that leverages off the presence in a particular marine environment (ie monitoring and reporting on breaches to a marine reserve or poor behaviours).

Tourism operators can schedule regular restoration activities as part of their service offerings, allowing tourists to participate in hands-on restoration work. Staff can be trained to lead these activities, ensuring that they are conducted safely and effectively.

Marketing and promotional assets, such as websites, social media channels, and promotional materials, can be used to raise awareness about marine restoration efforts and highlight the operator's commitment to restoration. By integrating restoration activities into their core operations, tourism businesses can provide meaningful experiences for visitors while actively contributing to the health of the marine ecosystem and improving social licence in the process.

## Experiences

### *Delivering immersive hands-on experiences or events*

Immersive and hands-on experiences are a powerful way to engage locals and visitors in marine restoration efforts. This can include organising events such as beach clean-ups, planting sessions, and guided snorkelling tours focused on restoration.

Visitors can be invited to participate in activities like monitoring marine wildlife, assisting with scientific research, and learning about restoration practices as a visitor experience. These experiences not only provide visitors with a deeper connection to the marine environment but also contribute to tangible restoration outcomes.

Special events, such as restoration gatherings or even 'restoration seasons' that support shoulder and low-season activity and emphasise opportunities to participate and contribute to restoration work. By offering unique and engaging experiences, tourism operators can attract environmentally conscious and values-aligned visitors and foster a community of advocates for marine restoration.

# RMT Activators

## Community groups

Local conservation and restoration groups, small NGOs, and special interest groups that have experience to offer or wish to collaborate with tourism partners to enhance restoration activities. These groups often have deep connections with the local environment and community and can provide valuable insights and support for RMT initiatives.

### **Examples:**

- Local environmental clubs and societies
- Small conservation NGOs
- Special-interest groups focused on marine life

## Social Enterprises

Small, owner-operated outfits that run as commercial enterprises but primarily exist to service restoration outcomes or support restoration activity. These businesses integrate restoration goals into their core operations, often re-investing profits into environmental initiatives.

### **Examples:**

- Eco-friendly tour operators
- Businesses selling sustainable marine products
- Businesses conducting marine clean-up activities

## Science and research groups

Initiatives led by individuals or collectives that support science and research outcomes by providing visitor experiences or linking with tourism offerings to raise funds and generate data. These groups contribute to the scientific understanding and restoration of marine environments.

### **Examples:**

- University-led marine research programs
- Independent marine biologists offering educational tours
- Collaborative or multi-agency research projects

## Marine tourism operators

Existing operators within the tourism sector such as boat transport services, kayaking guides, and tour operators offering marine experiences. These businesses can integrate restoration activities into their existing operations, providing visitors with hands-on opportunities to contribute to marine health.

### **Examples:**

- Whale-watching companies
- Snorkelling, kayaking and diving tour operators
- Water taxi and boat cruise operators

## Cultural experience operators

Initiatives led by individuals or collectives of tangata whenua, either as Māori businesses or operated through hapū, marae, or iwi groups, delivering cultural experiences involving the moana. These operators provide authentic cultural insights and practices, enhancing the visitor experience while supporting marine restoration.

### **Examples:**

- Māori-led cultural tours and experiences
- Iwi-based marine restoration projects
- Hapū or whānau operated experiences

## Educational institutions

Schools and tertiary institutes that integrate marine restoration into their curriculum or extracurricular activities. These institutions can collaborate with RMT operators to provide students with practical, hands-on learning experiences that contribute to marine restoration efforts.

### **Examples:**

- School field trips focusing on marine ecology
- University courses with a practical component in marine conservation
- Extracurricular groups dedicated to environmental restoration



## RMT audiences

Aotearoa New Zealand's diverse and well-established tourism market comprises several distinct visitor segments, each with unique motivations and interests.

We've outlined the main visitor segments that align with Restorative Marine Tourism (RMT) activities, supported by relevant research and data.

### Philanthropists and high-net-worth travellers

**Profile:** Philanthropists and high-net-worth travellers are typically individuals who have significant financial resources and are motivated by a desire to give back to the communities and environments they visit. These visitors often seek exclusive and bespoke experiences that allow them to contribute to meaningful restoration projects.

**Evidence:** Research by Tourism New Zealand<sup>1</sup> highlights that high-net-worth individuals are drawn to New Zealand for its luxury offerings and unique natural environments. They are also increasingly interested in making positive impacts through their travels.

**RMT alignment:** This segment can be engaged through exclusive, high-impact restoration activities such as sponsoring large-scale marine restoration projects, participating in bespoke marine science expeditions, and supporting local conservation initiatives through financial donations and hands-on involvement.

### Educational and special-interest travellers

**Profile:** Educational and special-interest travellers visit New Zealand to engage deeply with specific subjects of personal or professional interest. These visitors often seek out learning experiences that provide in-depth knowledge and hands-on participation in areas such as marine biology, environmental science, and cultural studies. This segment includes individuals, school groups, university students, and professionals looking for educational enrichment through immersive experiences.

**Evidence:** Research by Tourism New Zealand<sup>2</sup> indicates a growing trend of visitors seeking educational and special interest experiences, driven by a desire for meaningful and enriching travel. Reports have shown that visitors

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<sup>1</sup> [Tourism New Zealand. "Luxury Travel Research."](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Tourism New Zealand. "Special Interest Travel Research."](#)

are increasingly looking for activities that combine learning with travel, such as guided tours, workshops, and field studies that provide a deeper understanding of New Zealand's unique natural and cultural environments.

**RMT alignment:** These visitors can be engaged through structured programmes that offer educational content related to marine restoration, such as workshops, field studies, and guided tours that focus on marine ecosystems, Indigenous knowledge, and restoration techniques. Programmes can be tailored to different levels of expertise, ensuring opportunities for the novice to the experts are provided and visitors can leave with a richer understanding of marine restoration efforts.

Additionally, partnerships with educational institutions can provide opportunities for visitors to participate in ongoing research and restoration projects, enhancing their learning experience and contributing to meaningful restoration outcomes.

## Environmentally conscious eco-travellers

**Profile:** Environmentally conscious eco-travellers are motivated by a strong commitment to environmental sustainability. They seek experiences that minimise their environmental footprint and allow them to contribute to the restoration of natural habitats.

**Evidence:** Tourism New Zealand's Sustainable Tourism Report <sup>3</sup>highlights a growing trend among international visitors prioritising eco-friendly travel options and sustainable practices during their visits.

**RMT alignment:** This segment can be engaged through activities such as participating in marine debris clean-ups, volunteering in habitat restoration projects, and supporting eco-friendly tourism operators committed to sustainable practices.

## Cultural travellers

**Profile:** Cultural travellers are interested in exploring and experiencing the unique cultures and traditions of the places they visit. In Aotearoa New Zealand, this interest often includes a focus on Māori culture, as well as the local customs and stories of local communities.

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<sup>3</sup> [Tourism New Zealand's Sustainable Tourism Report, 2020](#)

**Evidence:** The New Zealand Māori Tourism Annual Report <sup>4</sup> speaks of a strong interest in cultural tourism, with many visitors seeking authentic Māori cultural experiences, including workshops, and guided tours led by tangata whenua.

**RMT alignment:** These visitors can be engaged through culturally immersive experiences that integrate marine restoration activities, such as participating in rituals and cultural practices related to the sea, learning about indigenous marine management, and engaging with local Māori communities in restoration projects.

## ‘Hands-on’ backpackers and working holiday travellers

**Profile:** ‘Hands-on’ backpackers and working holiday travellers are typically younger visitors who seek immersive and participatory experiences during their travels. They are often willing to engage in physical work and are motivated by a desire to connect with local communities and contribute to restoration efforts.

**Evidence:** Statistics from Immigration New Zealand <sup>5</sup> show that thousands of young people participate in working holiday schemes each year, with many seeking opportunities to volunteer or work as part of environmental and community projects.

**RMT alignment:** This segment can be engaged through volunteer programmes that offer hands-on restoration activities, such as planting, monitoring marine life, and assisting with scientific research. These programmes not only provide valuable labour for restoration efforts but also offer meaningful and rewarding experiences for participants.

## Locals

**Profile:** Local visitors from within the region often have a strong connection to their local environment and community. They are typically motivated by a desire to improve and protect their own surroundings and can provide ongoing support and participation in restoration activities.

**Evidence:** Research by the Department of Conservation <sup>6</sup> highlights that local residents are increasingly participating in conservation efforts and local environmental projects, driven by a sense of community responsibility and pride.

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<sup>4</sup> [New Zealand Māori Tourism. "2020 Annual Report."](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Immigration New Zealand Working Holiday Visa](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Department of Conservation. "Local Conservation Participation Report."](#)

**RMT alignment:** This segment can be engaged through regular community events focused on marine restoration, such as beach clean-ups, educational workshops, and citizen science projects. Local businesses can also offer special promotions and incentives for residents to participate in restoration activities, fostering a sense of local stewardship and ownership over marine restoration efforts.

## Domestic visitors

**Profile:** Domestic visitors from other parts of Aotearoa New Zealand travel to experience the unique natural and cultural offerings of different regions within the country. They are often motivated by a desire to explore and learn about new areas and may be interested in contributing to restoration activities.

**Evidence:** Tourism New Zealand's Domestic Visitor Insights <sup>7</sup> report indicates that New Zealanders are increasingly interested in travel experiences that allow them to explore their own country, with a growing focus on sustainability and environmental impact.

**RMT alignment:** This segment can be engaged through targeted marketing campaigns that highlight restoration activities as part of the travel experience, such as guided tours that include restoration projects, volunteer opportunities, and educational experiences. Domestic visitors can also be encouraged to participate in weekend retreats or short-term programmes focused on marine restoration, combining travel with meaningful contributions to local environments.

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<sup>77</sup> [Tourism New Zealand. "Domestic Visitor Insights."](#)

## Case study – restorative tourism in Mārahau

Mārahau, though a small village, shoulders the weight of tourism for the Abel Tasman National Park, New Zealand's most frequented yet smallest national park. Post-COVID, local businesses recognised the imperative to strengthen the connection between tourism and the community. The Mārahau Pledge is a testament to this realisation, building on the success of Aotearoa New Zealand's inaugural zero-carbon itinerary in Nelson Tasman and reinforcing the region's reputation for light-footprint travel.

Mārahau is the gateway to the Abel Tasman National Park. The village's economic viability is drawn from the thousands of visitors that pass through or are serviced by its tourism operators each year. The park itself, including the Tonga Island Marine Reserve, is a testament to the power of regeneration and restoration as a vehicle for creating a visitor destination and experiences that, in turn, generate employment and economic surpluses.

In the heart of Mārahau village lies an innovation that has the potential to be transformational for restorative localised tourism in Aotearoa New Zealand. Initiated in 2022, the Mārahau Pledge is not just a commitment; it's a movement that is setting a national precedent for sustainable tourism. In what is believed to be a New Zealand first, every tourism operator in Mārahau is united under this pledge, a voluntary move to front foot the restoration agenda.

By eliminating competition in restoration, the pledge focuses on collaboration, accelerating the pace of change. Moreover, it introduces a regenerative tourism model, emphasising not just reducing harm but actively benefiting the local community. The initiative's business-led nature, stemming from the operators' intrinsic motivation to give back, further sets it apart.

By championing a regenerative vision for Mārahau, it fosters deeper community involvement and amplifies the region's light footprint narrative. The initiative strengthens ties with the local community and invites visitors to participate.

There are currently 10 businesses that have taken the pledge. Nine tourism operators (representing all tourism operators) and one accommodation provider. Interest is growing from other accommodation providers and local hospitality outlets, and the group is actively working to increase membership in the accommodation and hospitality sectors.

The Pledge recognises that true environmental sustainability can only be achieved with the active participation of the community. By fostering community involvement and collaboration, the pledge ensures that local insights and efforts are harnessed in environmental projects. The Pledge has

set its sights on the development of a Restoration Season as a way of fuelling engagement and impact in the marine restoration space.

During our case study, the Pledge developed and progressed this initiative, including seeking investment through the Tourism Innovation Fund set up by MBIE. Unfortunately, despite making it through to the shortlist of projects recommended for funding, the fund was initially reduced and then subsequently dropped completely by the Coalition Government. As a result, the cornerstone investment to match operator co-funding was lost, and the initiative had not found a suitable co-funder at the time of writing.

Notwithstanding the challenge of finding suitable funding and support for such initiatives, the Pledge remains committed to activating this innovative approach. The Restoration Season will harness the care and enthusiasm of eco-conscious visitors to support a range of restoration activities that will enhance our natural environment and biodiversity.

The Mārahau Pledge Restoration Visitor Season takes the next step by making novel, appropriate, safe and engaging restoration activities on land, in, on, and around the moana part of the Mārahau visitor offering.

Following the high season of December to February, visitor numbers and profile typically change from March to late May. Total visitor numbers drop but those that do visit stay longer, have interests in environment and cultural subjects and are looking for novel local experiences. During this shoulder season, operators maintain capacity for the Easter and school holidays peaks but typically serve fewer patrons.

The proposed Restoration Season (RS) involves developing, promoting and delivering a set of novel and innovative practical and educative restoration activities for these typically cultural and eco-conscious visitor groups. This would include, for example, moana species monitoring, pest eradication, and planting.

The Restoration Season will be a one-week participatory celebration of our restoration activities during the autumn shoulder season. The Restoration Season event will develop, promote, and deliver a set of novel and innovative, practical and educational restoration activities for cultural and eco-conscious visitor groups. It will be held annually in the first week of the autumn (April) school holidays. Tickets will be limited to 200.

Attendees will volunteer on a one-week programme of restoration projects and enjoy a range of wrap-around social and fun events that will celebrate the work of the Mārahau Pledge, grow networks and friendships, and give attendees unique experiences that will deepen their relationship with our region. Specific restoration activities will include beach clean-ups, marine monitoring, pest eradication, and planting.

The park itself, including the Tonga Island Marine Reserve, is a testament to the power of regeneration and restoration as a vehicle for creating a visitor destination and experiences that, in turn, generate employment and economic surpluses.

## Case study – citizens of the sea

In late autumn each year, hundreds of amateur sailors gather with their vessels in Aotearoa's northerly ports, waiting for a friendly weather window before embarking on an adventurous pilgrimage to the wider Pacific. Part holiday, part 'bucket-list entry', and often a test of sailing skills and stamina, the winter voyaging to the tropics nevertheless creates a tight collective of community-minded travellers.

For the first time this year, 24 of these intrepid sea-goers who departed in May as part of the Island Cruising Club's Go East and Pacific Rally, have added a scientific rationale to their offshore exploits.

The 24 boaties each took a 25cm-long torpedo-shaped water sampling device known as a TORPeDNA. They dragged this behind their vessels for about five minutes three times a day while voyaging. At the end of each sampling stint, a small cartridge covered in ocean 'goop' is removed and stored in a preserving solution in their onboard fridge or freezer. At the end of each voyage leg, the samples are posted to Cawthron Institute's laboratories in Nelson for detailed analysis.

Cawthron's DNA technicians and scientists then subject each of the hundreds of samples to an elaborate hi-tech process of sorting and amplifying the tiny DNA fragments left behind by originating ocean creatures. The identity of these organisms is revealed by comparing the analyzed results with already-known DNA data logged in reference libraries worldwide.

DNA fragments typically last no more than 21 days in the ocean, so what this volunteer science project is revealing are the ecological communities living, or which have recently occupied, each watery locale at a particular point in time.

Repeating the exercise at different times of the year and over multiple years potentially provides a deep rendering of ocean life as it confronts, for example, ocean warming and acidification, and high-seas fishing activity.

Expanding the sampling pool with larger groups of amateur and professional sailors, along with commercial vessels, potentially generates a global data bank for analyzing ocean health and species diversity. From this, governments and multinational bodies alike could, it is hoped, make more detailed and informed decisions about the conservation, protection, and restoration of their ocean estates.

Sponsored by a collective of science, technology, and media organizations, this Citizen of the Seas project is in its early startup phase. In coming years, plans are in place to enroll wider groups of sailors and the wider marine



community to test and refine other mapping and sampling technologies. (For full details, see [Citizens of the Sea.](#))

While similar projects have been done elsewhere, this volunteer-based mass ocean sampling enterprise is filling a huge knowledge gap around the state of the high seas due in part to the availability of high-speed analytical equipment, expanding reference libraries, and the simplicity and stability of sampling equipment and, most importantly, by tapping the dedication and commitment to ocean welfare shown by this community of sailing citizen-scientists.

# Restorative Marine Tourism Champions

## Tammy Jameson (Bay of Islands)

### Bay of Island Snorkeling

Tammy Jameson and family run a boutique snorkelling trip to Maunganui Bay or Deep Water Cove in the Bay of Islands. The bay is covered by a no-fishing Rāhui Tapu that allows for kina to be taken and fed to the fish. The removal of the kina is supporting seaweed restoration and replenishing fish life.

During the four-hour trip, Tammy explains to visitors that kina is not a problem because of overfishing and ocean warming, meaning we need to have more marine reservations and protected areas that allow the taking of kina to support restoration.

“Now people can go in and feed the fish and have a ball with them. And the fish just follow you around like little puppies, really. Now it is completely lush with seaweed, and it just makes a super home for so many different varieties of fish; it is just teeming, it is just very healthy.”

The Jameson family tourism business has also been a restorative activity for the family. Tammy had previously worked for more than 20 years as a skipper for a large national tourism and marine transport operator. Tammy's mother was also a skipper who worked for the same operator.

Over the years Tammy said she had become increasingly concerned at how the tourism experience offered had been shortened, condensed, and disconnected from the very real challenges and changes occurring in the local environment. When her mother passed, the family was left with a small inheritance, which Tammy and her husband used to purchase a vessel surveyed for up to 12 visitors.

In 2019, they began offering a specialist snorkeling-only trip to Deep Cove that included a rich encounter with the abundant flora and fauna of the location. The rāhui, first established in 2010 and renewed biennially, along with active work to rid the area of the sea urchins, had seen the macroalgae return and flourish in the bay. While clearly not all visitors will be able to engage in the unique underwater experiences, the Jamesons' tour nevertheless offers a distinctive restorative dimension that separates it from other operations in the locality.

Tammy also notes that some visitors' experience of feeding the reef fish in a richly restored bay has a direct impact on their future behaviour in the moana. She said in some cases, the experience helped visitors question their 'hunter-gatherer' fishing ethic that, more generally, had helped to create the conditions that the restorative activities are attempting to change.

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*"People can feed the fish and have a ball with them. The fish follow you around like little puppies. It's lush with seaweed and teeming with diverse fish species." – Tammy Jameson*

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## Glenn Edney (Tukatuka)

### **Te Whanga Hauora o Tutukaka**

Not far down the coast from the Bay of Islands is one of Aotearoa New Zealand's most famous permanent and internationally renowned marine reserves, the Poor Knights Islands. Veteran skipper, diver, and marine ecologist Glenn Edney has spent much of his working life running visitors to the Island diving paradise. Prior to that he also owned and operated a swim offering with whale tourism business in Tonga for six years.

The strictly no-take, no-disturbance reserve of the Poor Knights is located 22 kilometres off the coast and most tourists leave from the sheltered Tutukaka Harbour. While the islands reserve is pristine, the harbour itself has become degraded and denuded of sea life. In response, Glenn and a group of fellow locals established a trust that aims to restore the harbour by reducing silt running into the bay and re-establishing rich kelp beds that had previously been a feature of the harbour coastline.

In support of the latter, the trust has established a kelp hatchery from which they have begun to replant seaweeds in the bay. As Glenn notes, the aim is "to restore the mauri (life force) of the bay". As part of the work, the group is looking to offer the hatchery as an education facility and potentially as part of a tourism experience.

The Poor Knights is a magnet for visiting divers, and as Glenn points out, there is a group of enthusiasts that visit the islands multiple times a year, sometimes up to three or three times a month. This group, many of whom are well known to the local tourism operators, has developed a strong connection with the locality. As Glenn says, they come to rejuvenate and restore. While the trust has yet to create an offering targeted to this group, they have been discussing how to encourage their participation in the seaweed restoration activity during their visits to the region.

"Obviously those people that come 30 to 40 times a year have disposable income and are predisposed to ecological thinking from at least a conservation or preservationist perspective," says Glenn. "The marine reserve concept works for them, and they see the results. Also, they are developing relationships with place and even though the place is far distant from where they live, they've developed this relationship, and for me, that's actually just the key thing right there."

While participating in a regenerative activity as part of the visitor experience is unlikely to appeal to non-repeat visitors, it "would work for people who are regular visitors who have that sort of longer-range relationship with that place", says Glenn.

“So that's something that we can, you know, potentially tap into by saying, ‘OK, why don't you deepen that whole relationship a little bit by, you know, delving into what's under the surface here in the harbour?’”

While this restorative tourism offering is still in the planning stage, Glenn's long-term association with the harbour, the tourism community, and the many repeat visitors suggests that such an offer, alongside the restoration work, the educational offering, and an active harbour restoration of the kelp beds of the harbour, could be a distinctive offering for this particular group of visitors.

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*"We aim to restore the mauri of the bay. Our project not only enhances biodiversity, but also educates the community about marine conservation." – Glenn Edney*

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## Phil and Steph van Dusschoten (Whakatāne)

### Diveworks Charters

A long-term relationship with a locality emerges as a prerequisite for restorative tourism offerings, often underpinned by a deep respect and ethical relationship with the marine ecology and life of marine creatures.

This relationship is exemplified in the work of Phil and Steph van Dusschoten, who own and run Whakatane-based Diveworks Charters. Their tourism offering includes in-water dolphin and seal encounters, snorkelling experiences around (and walking tours of) Moutohorā Whale Island, just off the Bay of Plenty coast from Whakatāne.

The couple's restoration-based relationship with the island precedes and includes their tourism operations. The island was bought by the Department of Conservation (DOC) in 1984, and from then on Phil's boat, Diveworks, was the DOC service vessel for about 15 years, which gave the couple the opportunity to be involved in work on and around the island alongside DOC and local iwi, Ngāti Awa. This experience has included eradicating pests, creating walking paths, planting trees, and releasing endangered species, including kiwi, on the island. Their tourism business is one of two with concessions to run dolphin and seal encounters around Moutohorā.

Since its move into public hands, the island has, they say, been slowly restored (removal of pests, native trees and grown cover planting). This highlights how, in the van Dusschotens case, the tourism business has supported the island's restoration. In other words, rather than locating restorative tourism in the experience visitors enjoy, tourism provides the infrastructure for restoration. Particularly, the business provides the basis for the restorative activity on and around the island. Of course, the wider community is also involved. The van Dusschotens say that the wider community shows great concern for the island and the Bay of Plenty coast more generally.

At the same time, the huge 3800-hectare mussel farm off Ōpōtiki, established in 2014 and part-owned by Whakatōhea iwi, has, they say, helped relieve the recreational fishing pressure on the reefs around the island. Recreational fishers have been drawn away to more abundant fishing around the farm. In this sense, we might argue that mussel farming, in this case, and shellfish aquaculture installations more generally, can be regarded as important pieces of infrastructure that help support restoration tourism. One upshot of this is that the van Dusschotens don't see the need for further protection of the island's marine environment. As Steph explains:

“All our tour is about restoration, about the island. It is so beautiful underwater. It's always been lovely. We've been snorkelling around there for

years, and when you get that blue, blue water that comes up in the summer, it's just so beautiful."

The couple's dolphin and seal encounter business grew out of their family's encounters with the mammals, together with Phil's involvement with Whakatane Coastguard, his diving work and his long association with the community as a former local police officer. The family discovered during snorkelling trips to Whale Island that the seals, who were relative newcomers, were particularly friendly and unperturbed by their presence.

"As their numbers increased, they frequently accompanied our snorkellers in a friendly manner," says Steph, "but at that point, formally swimming with the seal at that stage wasn't something we could do under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. We then asked DOC if we could add swimming with seals to our Dolphin Permit. DOC declined, saying there was little information about the effects swimming with seals would have."

With Rosemary Tully, a local wildlife conservationist, Phil was granted a concession for a three-year Seal Study, funded by Diveworks. This involved gathering faecal samples for analysis to see what seals were feeding on, taking scientists and observers who studied seal behaviours both from the boat and concealed on the land to determine any negative effects of human interaction with the seals.

"After three years of observation, DOC determined that issuing a permit for us to swim with the seals had no detrimental effect on their behaviour; in fact, the seals seemed to enjoy the human company.

"We are so fortunate we have this nice little area for seal swimming. We don't let people go onto the rocks or into their area; we say the seals will come to you. There is an area where they mainly have their babies. Sometimes you can see the little babies with their mums. We call that area the nursery. We look after the nursery and are obviously very keen to protect it."

The eruption of Whakari White Island in December 2019 and the tragic loss of life from that, followed by the COVID pandemic, had a significant impact on their business. However, since then, tourist numbers have rebounded, and they have renewed their dolphin and seal permit to 2029. The couple are now looking forward to "some great seasons ahead".

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*"All our tour is about restoration, about the island. It is so beautiful underwater. It's always been lovely. We've been snorkelling around there for years, and when you get that blue, blue water that comes up in the summer, it's just so beautiful." – Steph van Dusschoten*

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## Ulva Goodwillie (Rakiura Stewart Island)

### Owner of Ulva's Guided Walks on Ulva Island Bird Sanctuary

While not strictly marine tourism, Ulva Goodwillie's 'Ulva's Guided Walks on Ulva Island Bird Sanctuary' exemplifies the deep relationship to place and a strongly restorative offering. Her case also highlights the importance of clearly identifying and attracting the visitor group to your conservation-focused experience.

Ulva Island is an island reserve in Paterson Inlet, a half-hour boat trip and just over the hill from Oban, the main settlement on Rakiura Stewart Island. Ulva's tours (yes, she is named after the island) have a strong focus on international visitors keen to experience the extraordinary bird life on the island.

"You know, we are so blessed down here; we have rare and endangered plants and bird and marine life. I went to the British Bird Festival for seven years, and they are our biggest target market. They have millions of birders registered that belong to the RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds). For two nights and three days, we would get more than 20,000 people coming to the New Zealand stand," says Ulva.

"We are members of the New Zealand birding network that produces a brochure with a road map of New Zealand, starting at Cape Reinga, down to us. Above our marquee stand, we had a huge banner of a wandering albatross above the five operators. These people would come and book their next trip to New Zealand - we were doing Tourism New Zealand's work for them."

How did Ulva manage to get to this and in front of so many of her potential customers willing to travel off the beaten track at the farthest end of the planet? Through "pure luck" and happy coincidence, says Ulva. The coincidence was the Department of Conservation's decision to install the famous kākāpō, Sirocco, on the island for three years.

"One night, a group of visitors said they came from Rutland Water in the UK where they had this fabulous British Bird Fair. 'You should get a stand there', they said. There was already a waiting list to have a stand, and I had been applying for the last three years. And when they said, 'Oh, do you want a stand?' there was no hesitation on my part, and I agreed immediately. They went on to say they were the people that started the Bird Fair many years before, and when they saw that a kākāpō was being shown in New Zealand, they just flew here."

What Ulva's experience highlights is how eco-tourism, particularly those adding a wildlife restoration offering to the mix, and visitors' networks and connections to success.

"Word of mouth is our best marketing tool. We know we have a fabulous product here. Stewart Island is a granite rock; we have different soils, and we are the least modified island in the Aotearoa archipelago. We have a primeval podocarp forest on Ulva Island. Ulva Island was never milled even though we had over 30 sawmills in the 1800s to early 1900s, so we have the original Gondwana forest. Birds thrive a million times better because we are predator-free."

However, Ulva does recognise the limits of eco-tourism as it moves toward restoration activities. She pointed out that her visitors were happy to donate to Paws4Nature, which provides rat detector dogs. But it seemed unlikely that visitors would actively contribute to restoration activities: "I mean, you put the face of a little dog up there and it's a winner every time."

Ulva has a set of tips for those looking to start out in ecotourism, which she said she had learned the "hard way".

"The first two years were diabolical because I hadn't taken into account the compliance costs. I didn't save for the first winter. You have to put that money aside. You don't get unemployment benefit as the winter months are spent catching up the to-do list and taking bookings for the following season and the like. Learning how to cost is another thing. I had no idea when I started.

"If I was starting again, I would market it to people who are into the environment, conservation, eco-tourism, climate and the natural world. It has made everything so much easier to contact target markets, just keep everything authentic and honest. Visitors love the fact that we show and provide everything we state on our product activities. Along with the sub-Antarctic islands, we have been called the Galapagos of the south."

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*"Use your local area, use your local contacts. We have a captive market here and the first thing that the tourists are asked is, what are they doing tomorrow?" – Ulva Goodwillie*

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## Mark Jones (Whitianga)

### **Glass Bottom Boat Whitianga**

Underwater encounters with marine reserve sea life without getting wet and a rich engagement with the dual cultural and historical record of the locality are central to Whitianga's Glass Bottom Boat tours.

Owned by Mark and Halley Jones since 2013, the three-vessel business offers a two-and-a-half-hour trip from Whitianga Wharf out and around Te Whanganui o Hei (Cathedral Cove) Marine Reserve. Translating as the 'Great Bay of Hei', the reserve, bay itself, and the local iwi take their name from Hei te Arawa, who was the spiritual advisor for Kupe aboard the waka, Matahourua when it sailed from Tahiti to Aotearoa around 950AD.

While the tour can include swimming and snorkeling in the reserve, the business' 10-12-seat glass bottom vessels begin the trip with a visit to the blow hole on the western end of Cooks Beach and then the vessel slows to pass the buoy that marks the points where James Cook's Endeavour anchored.

During the tour, the visitors get a firsthand view through the vessel's glass bottom of the reserve's rich kelp and fish life and the crew keep up an engaging and detailed commentary on the important cultural and historical background of the bay. Mark also promotes the local museum to visitors.

Cook famously spent 12 days in the bay in November 1769, where he observed the astronomical event, the Transit of Venus across the sun, and the crew careened the Endeavour's Hull at low tide after the long sea voyage. Cook and his colleagues, including the famous Tahitian navigator, Tupaia, also engaged in what is thought to have been the first formal welcome and visit by Europeans to a Māori village — Ngāti Hei's fortified pā above Wharekaho, just north of Whitianga.

Mark says the reserve was thought to be the most publicly used marine reserve in Aotearoa New Zealand when the walking track was open.

"People walk to Cathedral Cove, and if they walk down to the water, touch the water and are below the high-tide mark, they are technically in the marine reserve. When that walking track was good, when it was operational, about a quarter of a million people a year were walking that. Plus, all the tour boats and the dive boats and the recreational boats, and because it is quite close (to Whitianga). Probably Goat Island would be up there. But Cathedral Cove is just that drawcard. A lot of other reserves are offshore and hard to get to."

As for marine tourism business out of Whitianga, this has increased. Mark says when he started there were three boats; now there are seven. The latest is a

new 30-seat catamaran. The increase suggests more competition, so what might be next for marine eco-tourism in the bay? We asked Mark if there was an environment, health or therapy or food dimension that could be added and whether that would work.

“There are so many types of people, there are some people they get 20 minutes in, and they can’t wait to get off, so it’s not too therapeutic for them. Some people are scared on it, others are just so happy on it, lots of different reactions. Typically, the customers have limited boating experience and for a lot of people just being on the water is outside their comfort zone, let alone in the water. The thing with the ocean is that for most people, it is out of sight, out of mind. People say that the reserve is big, but if you look at a map, it’s a dot.

Mark’s comment suggests that the company, whose point of difference is glass bottom boat viewing of the marine reserve’s fish life, is already doing a kind of restoration by offering visitors with limited sea experience a way of developing a connection with the moana. But what might be the next phase of eco-tourism, and is there space for restorative activities?

“We have thought about doing other things on land, tree planting that sort of thing, so that the environment is better for it at the end of the tour. They have more information, but nothing has physically been done. On the food thing, we get asked a lot about that on the boat. You are looking at all the fish and trying to do the conservation message and some people just want to eat them. So there goes a red moki, those fish mate with their partners for life, and they grow to such and such a length. Any questions? ‘What do they taste like?’ we get asked. Well not too bad, you can smoke them. Can you eat those, the Cook’s turban for example, I don’t know, they just want to eat everything.”

The business has, however, confronted some significant challenges in recent times. COVID on the whole “wasn’t too bad”, but congested waters and access to wharf space and bad weather in January of 2023, which led to the closure of the Coromandel road and the failure of a section of the Cathedral Cove track, followed by Cyclone Gabrielle and hail within two weeks of each other, remain key frustrations.

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*“The thing with the ocean is that for most people, it is out of sight, out of mind. People say that the reserve is big, but if you look at a map, it’s a dot.” – Mark Jones*

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## Stew Robertson (Motueka)

### **Marine Reserve Ranger and founder of Abel Tasman Eco Tours**

While now working for the Department of Conservation (DOC) as its Marine Reserve Ranger in the Nelson-Tasman area, we have included Stew Robertson among our champions of restorative-orientated marine eco-tourism based on his extensive experience setting up and running Abel Tasman Eco-Tours.

Stew arrived in Aotearoa more than 20 years ago and worked for many years as a skipper with water taxi and kayaking businesses based at Mārahau, just south of Abel Tasman National Park. While he attempted to encourage those businesses to engage more directly in eco-tourism, he and his wife eventually went out on their own and set up Abel Tasman Eco-Tours, offering boat-based small-scale tours of the Abel Tasman National Park. After seven years, the couple sold the business as new opportunities came up.

For Stew, the essence of restorative eco-tourism is a strong social dimension, which in his case involved a philanthropic dynamic where well-off visitors volunteer to cover the price of trips for those without the financial means.

However, he first noted that not only is eco-tourism a rather exclusive niche that tends to attract the middle-aged and wealthy, but it also presents significant challenges for operators setting up restorative activities in the marine environment.

‘When you are looking at restorative tourism on the land, then planting trees is available. But, for most people, when you get into the marine space the health and safety is prohibitive. We didn’t take people snorkelling; it was too marginal for that, so we found the sweet spot where you were collecting financially and engaging them intellectually, so they went away and felt that they had contributed, but they hadn’t got their hands dirty, so to speak, we never cracked that nut.’

The trick, he said, was to find activities that appealed to the particular client group with an interest in eco-tourism and didn’t carry undue risks. In his case, such work included litter audits by visitors on one of Abel Tasman National Park’s beaches and tailoring trips to the needs of groups.

As another example, they ran trips with people in respite and those on therapeutic yoga retreats. Stew noted that in some cases “silence is golden”. “Just being in a place and being quiet and being present is important, and we did that kind of thing.”

But it was the philanthropic extension to eco-tourism that stood out for Stew.

“For us, it was very important to spark up a relationship with [customers] and keep in touch. We wouldn't bombard them with stuff, just send them an email once a year with some news. In my first season, an American couple came out. They were the only clients on the boat. At the end of the trip they said they would like to give me a tip but didn't have any cash on them ... and I was like, wow, that sounds good. So I said, well, pay it to your Airbnb and then they can just give it to me. And so they did that. And then I sent them this newsletter a year later. And they were like, oh, we'd like to book another trip. I was like, oh, cool. When are you coming over? We're not, but if we chartered the boat, can you organise people who deserve to go out and to come out?”

“My mother-in-law was working as a social worker at [a local NGO], so she organised families who really needed to get out into the bush on a trip, as it just wasn't on their radar. She co-ordinated it all, and this lady in America paid for it. She did this for about three years. There's a real business model around that. Where wealthy people pay for poor people to go out on these boat trips. This takes it to another level; it's like philanthropic tourism. We did it for three years in a row. We lost touch eventually, but it was keeping in touch and creating that long-term relationship with people that made it happen.”

This example highlights a quite different way to consider restorative extensions to eco-tourism. Here, the visitor and paying customer are anonymous and separate entities or individuals. Yet the ethic of restoring a connection to the environment is supported with the cost of such trips for those who would not normally be able to afford such excursions covered by the wealthy.

While some might suggest that charitable and philanthropic giving is not well developed in Aotearoa, Stew is able to point to examples where companies in particular underwrote the cost of eco-tourism into the national park for school groups and groups of young people.

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*“There's a real business model over there where wealthy people pay for poor people to go out on these boat trips.” – Stew Robertson*

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## Dr Krista van der Linde (Kaikōura)

### **Moana Mark**

Dr Krista van der Linde is a specialist Marine Mammal Biologist with more than 15 years' experience in marine conservation. She is the co-founder of Leopardseals.org and the founder of Moana Mark. In her capacity as a Marine Scientist, Dr Van der Linde has held various roles at NIWA, the Department of Conservation, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), and universities. As well as leading Moana Mark, she works with the University of Canterbury as a Research Associate guiding doctorate students in the School of Biological Sciences and is an Advisor to Tāngaroa Tuia te Ora, the Endangered Species Foundation.

Moana Mark is a relatively new non-profit certification initiative developed by Dr Van der Linde to specifically acknowledge and support partners committed to marine sustainability and marine conservation research initiatives. Founded in Kaikōura, it is a national initiative with the potential for marine research and conservation efforts to be carried out both throughout Aotearoa and internationally.

Dr van der Linde says while New Zealand has many organisations conducting great scientific research, there are none which have their own funding for marine mammal research. "I've worked for Government agencies, Crown Research Institutes, charities and universities, and all my funding for research has to come from outside grants. It can be a relentless pursuit," she says.

"Here in Kaikōura, the whales support a \$119 million dollar marine tourism industry, yet we don't know how many are left, and there were only 42 at the last count, even less than that when you look at the number of individuals here per season. The lack of money that is put into it, it just blows my mind. So it becomes a matter of how do we get people to jump on board?"

"Through Hapuku, I started to come into contact with luxury tourists who were genuinely interested in the local marine environment and genuinely wanted to contribute. I thought back to my days as a PhD student; I was working up in Auckland, and they had a great model where a boat went out once a day, 100 people and \$1 per passenger went into a kitty and that generated \$30,000 a year. In Kaikōura, we have up to 16 boat trips a day, so these types of ideas started to generate.

"Hapuku Lodge saw some of the work I was doing and generously built a marine lab. From there, we talked about donating \$10 from every room night to marine research in Kaikōura. I thought, 'This is it', and I began to understand this was something people would support.

“Then, after working with one of the local helicopter operators, they agreed to sign up, and I realised this could actually be a way I could fund research, specifically through the tourism industry; it's something that seems to me to be a win for everybody. You have science that needs to be done because we really need to conserve these species because if we don't, people aren't going to have anything to look at, so absolutely it is something we should be doing together.”

The first marine research project is underway, and Dr van der Linde is using that to help shape the model before she fully takes it out to market. She says Destination Kaikōura has been highly supportive, and while she has had some talks locally, she hasn't fully approached tourism operators – yet. She has been in touch with organisations such as Tourism New Zealand and Qualmark, and again, the feedback has been supportive. So Kaikōura is a trial; the next step is building projects in other regions.

The first project is on sperm whales. “The University of Otago has been researching sperm whales in Kaikōura for the last 30 years; however, this year, [there was] no funding to continue their summer and winter surveys. So, this is what the Hapuku and South Pacific partnerships are focused on at the moment. Basically, we want to ensure that the university's summer and winter surveys are continued every year, but we want to do even better than that. We want to get a year-round abundance estimate. So with all the tourism operators that are out there, we want to get all the photographs from the citizens, put that into the established catalogue of whales and find out what the abundance is year-round. Because at the moment, we understand their seasonal numbers, but this could be improved if we had year-round data.”

Dr van der Linde explains that targeted visitor restoration offerings work. “It's definitely doable as an offering.” She goes further: “This is the way forward. As a little scientist on my little one boat with my \$100 worth of fuel that I managed to get funding for, I'm not going to make a difference, you know, but we need to enable the people who are on the water every day to collect that data to make a big difference.”

She adds that South Pacific Helicopters has added ‘Research Vessel’ signage to its aircraft because it is now collecting data for the project and contributing financially. “That can also be a clever marketing tool.”

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*“This is the way forward .... We need to enable the people who are on the water every day to collect that data to make a big difference.”*

*– Dr Krista van der Linde*

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## Lee-Anne and Todd Jago (Kaiteretere)

### Waka Abel Tasman

Lee-Anne and Todd Jago are the owner-operators of Waka Abel Tasman, which runs double-hulled waka tours in Kaiteretere and Abel Tasman National Park. Both have decades of experience guiding, instructing and managing adventure tourism enterprises in the rohe and have competed in waka ama at national and international levels. As well as managing their business, they are founding members of Te Tai o Awatea, a charitable trust that creates culturally safe spaces for local people and Māori within Te Tai-o-Aorere to reconnect with taonga tuku iho. Todd is also a technical expert in the adventure tourism industry and sits on the national Te Hau Kōmaru National Waka Hourua Charitable Trust.

Lee-Anne (Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Māhuta, Ngāti Pou) and Todd (Ngāti Raukawa ki te Tonga) say Waka Abel Tasman, which was established in 2016, is not a tourism business at its core.

“We have an experience that is held in tikanga Māori, so it's really a cultural education space first and foremost,” says Lee-Anne. “Our community is at the heart of what we do, and our business is really focused on them. We didn't set up for tourism; we set up for community and schools, but at the same time, we can also cater to those manuhiri who come to the rohe as tourists and are here anyway.”

The Jagos don't consider their business as 'eco' anything. “I think we are naturally eco; it just comes with it; it is just part of what we do,” says Todd, “and so we don't feel the need to label ourselves as that. Even if we did, I don't see how we could be placed in the same bracket as, for example, a ferry operator who offsets. There is a difference, but that probably needs to be defined further.”

Lee-Anne adds: “A big part of our business is how we create change within our local environment and with our local kids. We want our kids to love this place so much that they want to stand up and be kaitiaki. And so that's what it is for us as well if you are talking about being sustainable, having a light footprint. I am not sure current definitions of eco-tourism consider all that sort of thing.”

Talking about opportunities for marine tourism, Todd says the main opportunity lies in supporting current operators to bring more information into their trips - if operators wanted to.

“For us, it would be good to know what the issues are. We don't fully know what is happening under the water from a scientific perspective. I see all the sand dollars at low tide here and wonder what is happening, for example.

“We haven't gone out to look specifically for that sort of deeper information, but if that sort of information came to us, that would be great. It would be

good for us to know what the issues are in the area we work in. These sand dollars, are they supposed to be there, or are they invasive? What do we need to look out for?"

Lee-Anne agrees: "If work being done could come in closer, if we can have more connections with one another, then we could feed one another, like Tasman Bay Environmental Trust and snorkelling in marine reserves, they are kind of in that middle space because they are bringing kids into the environment, whether it's on the water with snorkelling in marine reserves or on the waterways with the Tasman Bay Guardians, they are connecting with science, and they're connecting the kids with monitoring what they're seeing as well, and that is really key.

Todd draws that out further. "Not everyone's a scientist or understands marine restoration, so to get given a whole lot of stuff to read, that's not effective. But if they come out on a trip with us and tell us 'this, this and this,' then that will sink in with us and our staff.

"At the recent waka festival hosted here in Kaitereterē, there was an outfit called Coastal People, Southern Skies, and they were teaching people on the waka how to monitor the water and test the water out there. That's the kind of opportunity I think exists."

The recent Te Hau Kōmaru Waka Hourua Festival hosted in Kaitereterē in April is an example of the potential for the entire community to benefit from cultural activities in the coastal and marine space.

The couple say the week-long event involving mana whenua, Te Tai o Awatea Trust and Te Hau Kōmaru was life-changing for their community. Thousands of people attended.

"To be able to witness these waka coming in together ... for mana whenua and for those wāhine calling and those tāne blowing pūmoana and the haka pōwhiri and the kaiwero and those coming in on the waka, that is just something else and it is actually hard to put words around," says Lee-Anne.

"For our whole community, that week really changed this place. For a whole week it was a village, and central to that village were our Māori whānau, owning it. It was a beautiful environment.

"We had beautiful feedback. I didn't hear anything to the contrary by the local people."

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*"A big part of our business is how we create change within our local environment and with our local kids. We want our kids to love this place so much that they want to stand up and be kaitiaki." – Lee-Anne Jago*

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## Kiley Nepia (Wairau)

### Hawaiki Kura

Kiley Nepia (Ngāti Apa ki te Rā Tō, Ngāti Kuia, Rangitāne o Wairau, Ngāi Tahu) is the owner-operator of Hawaiki Kura, a whānau business which specialises in Māori development, cultural awareness training, and Māori tourism. Kiley has held leadership roles within his community, iwi, and marae and, as cultural advisor to Te Taihū iwi Ngāti Apa ki te Rā Tō, from 2017 to 2021, he led the revitalisation of waka traditions within his tribe. Based in Wairau, Hawaiki Kura work all over Te Taihū and Aotearoa.

While not explicitly involved in marine or eco-tourism, Kiley has more than 25 years hosting visitors. His was not the usual path into the industry.

“It started organically on the marae, just providing things like manaakitanga, kaitiakitanga, and cultural experiences, and started through things like the sister-city relationships held locally, local school groups and then after a while, I figured out that there was a space in the market for authentic Māori tourism. We started with small groups and tailor-made packages offering cultural experiences at the marae, and then that grew into packages for the cruise ship market.”

The years leading up to the pandemic were busy. “It got to the point where they (inbound tour operators) wanted to do more with us, but we just didn’t have the capacity, and we wanted it to be an enjoyable process for everybody. We thought that any more than that, and it just became a little bit too staged for us.”

Kiley says it’s easy to pinpoint why their offering was so popular. “What we offered was a really authentic way for overseas people to get an insight into what Māori culture looks like, and not be bystanders but really connect.”

Thinking about marine tourism and eco-tourism, he believes cultural tourism is the hook and provides the story with which to connect,

“I would suggest waka generally provide a great model; waka are floating classrooms, and it’s another experience for people to have that connects them to culture, connects them to the environment, the moana. The moana is the thing that connects us all; it connects us with our international tourists, so its power in that respect is often overlooked.

“Thinking about waka from an eco or sustainability point of view as an offering, that’s not just part of it or an add-on; it is inherent. But to me, the greater appeal is the ability of waka and cultural experiences to create that connection and emotion.”

Kiley says that direct restoration work or restoration-centred tourism starts with creating a connection.

“I think a good tourism offering, whether that is eco-based or restorative, it all comes back to authenticity, and I think whatever the offering is, it comes down to the location and your values as well ... What I have seen is once there is that certain connection there, people will keep going back. It will be a special place for them, too, if they get the right experience and the right connection.

“If you take that and apply it to the idea of marine restorative tourism and owning that sense of kaitiakitanga, then I am not sure if you can do it without that deeper connection to the moana that te ao Māori provides.”

In terms of protocols, what would he do in terms of offering guidelines for correct conduct and procedures to be followed to establish, develop, promote, and extend restorative tourism locations, activities, and experiences?

“Perhaps, just better connectedness in the first place, so people know the significance of the area, what the issues are, what the quality of the moana is and what’s happening under the water, that sort of thing.

“Whatever is done to extend restoration tourism activities needs to tell the whole story: why those areas are special and what significance they have. It’s got to be visible, it’s got to be resourced, it needs to have time to be nurtured, and I think it would have to dovetail with an educational/cultural programme. It’s also really important to work with existing operators and place them at the centre.

“In saying that, I think that there is a huge opportunity to develop the next generation of, let’s call them guides or storytellers or kaitiaki. If you have two people and they’ve got the same type of skillset in terms of tourism and guiding, but one can play a pūtātara, or one can roll out of their canoe with a taiaha, then you know hands down which tourists or guests will prefer.

“And that is all about authenticity and connection and kaitiakitanga, and passion and all the tanga that we talk about because we are born storytellers, whether that’s in the classroom, whether that’s up at the lake, or on the moana.”

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*“What I have seen is once there is that certain connection there, people will keep going back. It will be a special place for them, too, if they get the right experience and the right connection.” – Kiley Nepia*

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## Brendan Alborn (Mārahau)

### Abel Tasman AquaTaxi and Mārahau Sea Kayaks

Brendan Alborn is the Commercial Director of family-owned Alborn Enterprises, the largest commercial tourism operator in the Abel Tasman National Park. The Alborns' operations include the Abel Tasman Centre and AbelTasman.com, Abel Tasman AquaTaxi, Mārahau Water Taxis, Mārahau Beach Camp, Hooked on Mārahau and Mārahau Sea Kayaks.

The business started in 1997 when Brendan's parents took the lease on the Mārahau Holiday Park. As it grew over the years to encompass water taxis, a shop and café, and guided kayak trips, Brendan says there was always a natural focus on sustainability and an interest in protecting both the coastal and marine environment.

"They were already all about fuel efficiency and that type of thing and doing the right thing. The thinking had always been that if the environment is not in a good state, then what have we got left to sell? Nothing, so why would we jeopardise that? Where would that leave our small community? In that respect, the biggest risk to us as a business is the ecology in that park."

Brendan, a sustainability engineer who has worked globally, became more involved in the family business in 2012; his first focus was formalising their sustainability programme. By 2019, they had achieved zero carbon certification across all their enterprises, the first tourism operator in New Zealand to do so. "And it was great, but you can celebrate that for a day, but then you go, right, what about everybody else?"

So other Mārahau operators went out and got themselves zero-carbon certified, too, and Brendan did everything he could to help them.

Eco-tourism or restoration tourism is not something one commercial operator can do on their own, he says. "It's all operators, all of those community groups like the Abel Tasman Birdsong Trust and Project Janszoon doing the trapping and replanting, tangata whenua, DOC. This is the thing, we're married. Whatever happens in this space has to happen together. We can't operate without each other."

This has been proven in Mārahau. "Even well before I was involved, every operator was making voluntary contributions to the Abel Tasman Birdsong Trust, voluntary contributions, and not just half of us, every single operator in the park, all of them. And the result is it's only got better, seriously, it's nothing but good news, the state of the bush is undeniably better than it was 30, 40 years ago."

Every activities-based business operating in Mārahau is now zero-carbon certified and Brendan says there are more zero-carbon certified tourism operators in the top of the South Island than any other region.

“Once there was critical mass, and once that spread to transporters, accommodation, we had the ability to create new offerings like zero-carbon-certified itineraries. That critical mass is what got us traction.”

He says zero-carbon certification is an imperfect solution to a problem that is much bigger than any one individual or business. But it does give customers confidence that their experience isn't having a net negative impact on the environment - and that is before you factor in the voluntary and compulsory concessions that fuel the park's conservation efforts.”

Brendan says whether targeted marine restoration visitor offerings would work is a tricky one. “That's something I've thought a lot about in terms of what an offering would be for someone who wants to come and do even more good than donate to restoration and conservation and lower their carbon footprint because it also needs to be commercially viable.

“In terms of the moana specifically, you know we have a marine reserve, but that's not viable as a tourism offering on its own. The kayaking is a full-day, or a half-day guided experience, we have about 4000 customers a year, and that's more immersive, but it's still just explaining, storytelling, it's interpreting, educating, we are not specifically going out there to work with visitors on marine projects. There is not a lot we can do but sit above water and share all that knowledge ... It might not be in our DNA to do that restoration work, but collectively, we can help fund those who are doing it.”

Brendan says things like an out-of-date park management plan, frequent changes in direction at the government level, the sheer number of stakeholders, seasonality, a high degree of regulatory demands, and a lack of a set of standards or clear path to work to, have all put the pressure on. Standards, he says, are also lacking.

“There are things like the Tiaki Promise and Qualmark, but I feel like these are really hollow, there's no guts to them. We need a proper programme and a metric, an obvious points system that is easy to understand, easy to achieve and industry-led that marks up all the potential sustainability measures as a points system but doesn't hinder you or limit you from coming up with new measures.

“At the moment, there's this loose thing about stewardship. Some can point and say, hey, we did this, and others haven't – there's no differentiation or real measure that sets you apart and encourages others to do the same.”

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*“This is the thing, we’re married. Whatever happens in this space has to happen together. We can’t operate without each other.” – Brendan Alborn*

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