

Westhaven Inlet Marine Reserve and Wildlife Management Reserve



NELSON/MARLBOROUGH CONSERVANCY



Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

Introduction

Golden Bay and the South Island's north-west coast are renowned for their diverse and ancient landforms, endemic plants, abundant birdlife and outstanding natural and scenic coastal qualities.

Westhaven (Whanganui Inlet), situated south of Farewell Spit along the exposed west coast of the South Island, is part of this natural wonder. The inlet is one of the largest and least modified estuaries in New Zealand and was formally protected in 1994 with the creation of the Westhaven (Te Tai Tapu) Marine Reserve and Westhaven (Whanganui Inlet) Wildlife Management Reserve.

Tikanga Maori

Kia koutou katoa.

The manawhenua iwi are Ngati Rarua, Ngati Tama and Te Atiawa.

Ko tenei te panui o te tangata whenua kei roto i te rohe o Te Tai Tapu.

Kia koutou katoa: Ko te tangata ka ngaro engari ko Te Whenua me Te Moana ka noho tonu mo ake ake tonu.

Maori have always had a very close affinity with the natural world. The more the natural resources are removed and become remote from our people, the more out of touch we will become with our own culture.

About the inlet

The sea entrance to Westhaven is located 19 km south-west of Farewell Spit on the west coast of the South Island. The estuary is an enclosed, drowned river valley approximately 13km long and 2–3km wide. As the tide enters the inlet it divides into north-east and south-west channels before spilling out onto expansive intertidal flats which dominate the estuary.

Much of the inlet is bordered by coastal forest including kahikatea, pukatea, rata, beech, rimu and nikau palm. Luxuriant saltmarsh communities fringe the shoreline and extensive eelgrass (*Zostera*) beds form a dominant feature on the open tidal flats. These plant communities help maintain the estuary's overall health and support a very



Snapper feed in the tidal channels and over the expansive intertidal flats.

Photo: Malcolm Francis

rich estuarine fauna. The presence of dunes, cliffs, islands, rock platforms and underwater reefs add to the variety of habitats and species found at Westhaven.

Westhaven Inlet is home to a very high number of invertebrate species. Worms, shellfish, crabs and other invertebrates abound, providing a plentiful food source for the many birds and fish that visit or live within the estuary. Approximately 30 species of marine fish use the inlet at some stage of their life history and it is an important breeding and nursery area for snapper, flatfish, kahawai and whitebait. Westhaven is the second most important tidal area in the Nelson/Marlborough region for wading birds including godwit, knot and oystercatcher. It is also the only site on the west coast of the South Island where the threatened banded rail finds a home.

Westhaven provides a rich food source for waders such as these godwits and South Island pied oystercatchers. Photo: Dick Veitch



Eelgrass forms extensive beds across the intertidal flats. Photo: Rob Davidson





The remains of an old tramway, harking back to a time when mining, logging and flax milling were common at Westhaven.

Photo: Rob Davidson

The area has always been important to Maori, both as a food basket and as a place to live. Sacred sites and evidence of previous occupation remain today.

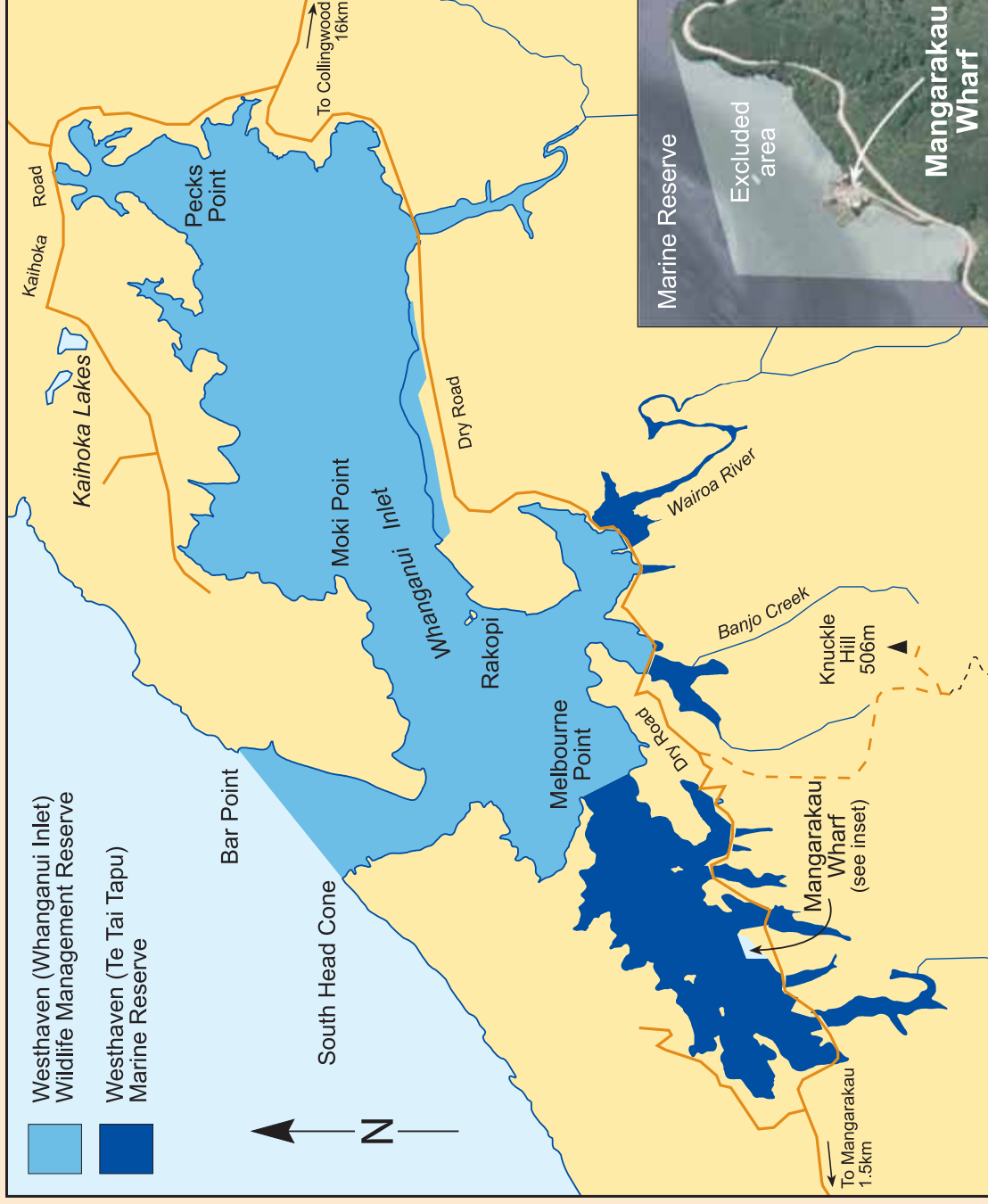
Westhaven Inlet has largely escaped permanent human impact such as pollution, urbanisation, industry and reclamation common at many estuaries throughout the world. Although the coastal forest around the inlet has been clearfelled and selectively logged, the flax milled and the land mined for coal and gold, there is little permanent ecological damage. Most catchments are now covered with regenerating forest.

What are marine reserves?

Our record in protecting natural areas on land is a good one, but only in recent years have we realised the importance and benefits of protecting areas of our diverse coastline and seas.

Marine reserves are areas of sea within which all marine life and habitats are fully protected. As such, reserves are able to recover from past exploitation and function as close to their natural state as possible. They can provide a benchmark against which the effects of other activities in our seas can be measured, and allow us to study marine life and learn about an environment we sometimes overlook.

You are welcome to visit and enjoy a marine reserve. Picnicking, swimming, boating, diving and photography are all encouraged. Educational and scientific activities are allowed too, provided they do not harm or threaten the reserve's plants or animals.



Westhaven (Whanganui Inlet) Wildlife Management Reserve

This reserve stretches over 2112 hectares. It covers all tidal sandflats and channels not included in the marine reserve, inside a line from Bar Point to South Head Cone (see map). It protects the wildlife within its boundaries and the habitats and vegetation on which it depends. The wildlife management reserve allows for fishing and gamebird hunting.

How to get there

Follow the road from Collingwood to Farewell Spit, taking the left-hand fork just north of Pakawau. The wildlife management reserve is about 6km on, just beyond the turn-off to Kaihoka Lakes. Continue on along Dry Road which leads around the inlet to Mangarakau, following the estuary shoreline most of the way.

Vehicle launching of boats is permitted 200m past the Kaihoka Road turn-off on Dry Road, and at Mangarakau Wharf.



Locality map

What to see and do

Whether the tide is in or out, the estuary has a natural beauty which, with the combination of coastal forest and tidal channels, offers a unique experience of breathtaking scenery.

At the top of Knuckle Hill (506m) are outstanding views in all directions. It takes about 1 h 20 min to walk to the summit from the access point off Dry Road (see map). Alternatively, take a closer look at the inlet. Go for a walk at

Kayaking in the winding Wairoa River at high tide. Photo: Simon Noble



Coastal forest and saltmarsh fringe much of the estuary. Photo: Garry Holz

Westhaven (Te Tai Tapu) Marine Reserve

The marine reserve covers 536 hectares and includes all the tidal sandflats and channels south of a straight line between Melbourne Point (Pah Point) and the closest headland of Kahurangi National Park on the opposite shore. It also includes all the tidal areas upstream of causeways along Dry Road, south-west of and including the Wairoa River. An area around the Mangarakau wharf is not included in either reserve (see map).

The reserve totally protects all plant and animal life within its boundaries, benefiting not only fish and shellfish, but birdlife as well.

low tide, explore the many waterways in a kayak or simply take a leisurely drive along the road flanking Westhaven's southern and eastern shores. No matter how you see the inlet, its natural beauty will astound you.

For keen bird watchers many waders and sea birds can be seen on the inlet and flying over farmland. In and around the forest are numerous other birds including pigeon, welcome swallow, bellbird and tui. Some, such as kingfisher and banded rail, find their food in the inlet, but live in forest or wetland, demonstrating the importance of the remaining natural fringe around the inlet.

Monitoring and research

A major benefit of marine reserves is the opportunity they offer to study marine environments in their natural state. Westhaven Inlet's relatively unmodified state makes it an ideal location for research on estuaries.

Who looks after the reserves?

Both reserves are managed by the Department of Conservation. However, their continuing success depends on caring and vigilant visitors.

How you can help?

For the reserves to remain in their natural state and be pleasant places to visit, the rules below need to be complied with.

Please take care if walking in the inlet to avoid disturbing wildlife or trampling sensitive habitats. Keep to hard sand as much as possible.

If you see people taking fish within the marine reserve or disturbing wildlife, please report the activity to the Department of Conservation as soon as possible.

How do the reserves affect you?

Enjoy your visit to the marine reserve and wildlife management reserve. You are welcome to boat, anchor, dive, swim, land, picnic and walk here.

In the marine reserve:

Please remember **all animals and plants, and the seabed, are totally protected in the marine reserve.**

- **No fishing, netting, whitebaiting, spearing, taking or killing of marine life.** All methods of fishing from the shore or at sea are prohibited.
- **No disturbance or damage** of marine life or the estuary bed.
- **No polluting.** Please take all litter and other rubbish away with you.
- **No removal of any natural material** from the marine reserve.
- **No shooting.** Firearms may be carried, but must not be discharged within or into the marine reserve.
- **Please do not disturb wildlife;** approach birds slowly and carefully.

(Note: This is not a complete summary of offences within the marine reserve. Offence penalties carry up to three months imprisonment or a \$250,000 fine. Boats, vehicles and equipment may be seized.)

In the wildlife management reserve:

- **Fishing, whitebaiting and gamebird hunting** are all allowed in the wildlife management reserve subject to normal regulations. Firearms may only be used for gamebird hunting and during the licensed season.
- **All other plants and animals are totally protected.** Please do not disturb protected wildlife; approach birds slowly and carefully.
- **No polluting or littering.** Please take all rubbish away with you.
- **Dogs must be under direct control at all times.** Do not let your dog disturb wildlife.
- **Vehicles** can only be used for moving livestock or launching boats at designated places.
- **Maimais** must be removed on the same day as they are built.
- **No jet skis or hovercraft** can be used in the reserve.

For further information

We hope you enjoy your visit to Westhaven. To find out more visit the DOC website www.doc.govt.nz

or contact:

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Cover: View from the northern head overlooking the wildlife management reserve in the foreground and the marine reserve in the distance.
Photo: Garry Holz