

Oral submission to Select Committee on Marine Reserves Bill April 14th 2003

Bill Ballantine, Leigh Marine Laboratory

Thank you for hearing me.

My commiserations on your difficult task.

The point of my submission is basically very simple. I want you to put some teeth into this Bill. I want you to ensure that something actually happens. I want you to create a real policy based on clear practical principles. I want my grandchildren to inherit a system of fully-protected marine reserves just as we inherited a system of reserves on land.

1. I speak only for myself. Do not represent any interest group, party, industry or organisation. I have never held any appointed or elected position with regard to marine reserves. So you can listen to my ideas without fear or favour. If you agree with any of my ideas, they become your ideas, if you disagree there is nothing I can do about it. I am not personally of any importance.

2. But my experience in this matter is significant. I have worked on Marine Reserves since 1965. I was closely involved with the 6 year struggle to get the original Marine Reserves Act and the subsequent 6 years of negotiation to set up the first marine reserve. I have spent the last 25 years working in and alongside it. I have written papers on the subject, published a book, made a video, and organised an education kit. I have travelled all over New Zealand, giving school talks, presentations to interest groups, advice to activists, assistance to official agencies, and addressing public meetings. I have made many visits overseas, doing similar things, especially to Australia and North America. For past 6 years I have run a 2 week residential course on the subject for professionals and advanced students.

I do know what I'm talking about, whether it is to students of population dynamics, angry fishermen shouting about their rights or ordinary citizens worried about the future.

3. I am aware that this matter is political, marine reserves are a new form of management of large areas of public domain. A policy cannot be decided solely by known facts or analytical science, we do not know enough. Neither can it be decided solely by existing resource managers, however experienced they may in some details, their views are too restricted. It is too broad for either. Policy in this matter cannot be left to the usual existing experts.

4. At present there is no policy. I do not mean we have the wrong policy. I mean there is not real aim or clear principles. In this Bill, the usual experts have, by default, been left to create what passes for a policy. As a result many different views have developed within departments (especially between those who wish to be cautious and those who wish to seize opportunities), and all kinds of arguments have developed between departments

(especially between those in charge of resource exploitation and those in charge of resource protection). The result, inevitably, is a confusion presented as a compromise.

5. This is wrong in at least three important ways. First, it is not the responsibility of officials to create policy, that is the job for Parliament, for elected representatives. Second, the creation of policy should be carried out openly and in public, not in closet discussions. We not only need to make real decisions, we need to know why we made them and what were the alternatives. Third, we should look carefully at actual experience with marine reserves, both here and overseas, and not just theoretical ideas formed from terrestrial reserves or the detailed management of exploitation.

6. New Zealand has 25 years of experience with marine reserves. For most of that time we have been world leaders in the field. We have found that although there is generally a big fuss every time a reserve is proposed, when one is established it quickly becomes successful in many ways. Scientists are able to do their work better and more cost effectively. School children can learn more about the sea and its life. The public has an increased range of recreational opportunities. The conservation of marine biodiversity is vastly improved for any species and habitats included in the reserves.

We have successfully established marine reserves in remote areas (like Kermadecs) and in the centre of a metropolis (like Pollen Island in Auckland). We have made them on open coasts (like Leigh) and in sheltered fiords, around oceanic islands and mangrove lined estuaries. We have a scatter of trials ranging the sub-tropical to the sub-Antarctic.

7. We have done enough trials and tests. We know how to make reserves, we know they provide important benefits. It is now sensible and practical to aim for a system of reserves which will optimise these benefits. The public expects this and the major political parties have expressed support.

8. Two such systems have already been created overseas (last year NZ lost its lead in these matters) – in Victoria, Australia (13 fully-protected marine national parks comprising 5% of state waters) mainly for conservation aims and around the Channel Islands in California (14 no-take areas comprising 10% of the state waters) mainly for fisheries support. They learnt from us, but they have applied the lessons.

9. The principles for establishing marine reserve systems are relatively clear and straightforward. The system must be:

- (a) Fully-protected (against all reasonably-preventable human disturbances). Special arrangements for allocating resources, such as taiapure or mataitai are quite different things and can be arranged outside the reserves.
- (b) Permanent, because the benefits are accumulative. If rotational harvests are useful these can be arranged outside in the exploited areas.
- (c) Fully representative of all biogeographic regions and all major habitats within each region.
- (d) Spatially replicated for each habitat and ecosystem (to guard against accidents, to improve access to benefits, etc.)

- (e) Spread as a network of reserves throughout the region, spaced so as to promote connection by larval drift and to provide benefits equitably.
- (f) Of a size which ensures self-sustainability. Individual reserves can only aim for a degree of ecological viability, but the whole system must be sustainable, even if we make mistakes in management outside it.

10. The Bill should make it clear that a system of marine reserves will be created and that it will conform to these principles. It should include clear time stages, define the primary responsibility, and ensure the cooperation of other agencies.

11. In my considered view, 10% by area at all levels (territorial waters, EEZ, each region and each major habitat within each region) is a practical, sensible and worthwhile aim by 2010. 10% in reserves leaves 90% for direct exploitation and detailed management, but 10% of full-protection would be sufficient to provide for the needs of science, education, many forms of recreation, and would be a significant contribution to conservation. 10% would also be sufficient to test the effects on fisheries.

12. We will continue to manage most of the sea in terms of existing information, and this will steadily improve. But our knowledge of marine life continues to increase rapidly, so it is clear that there is still much to learn. We need marine reserves as a buffer against possible mistakes and as an insurance against our ignorance, as well as to provide the known benefits.