

## **Speech by Dr Bill Ballantine (Leigh Marine Laboratory) Oceans Day 8/6/02**

Prime Minister, Minister of Conservation, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

My course on marine reserves for 4<sup>th</sup> year university students and professionals, runs 12 hours a day for two weeks to cover the topic. Today I have 5 minutes to tell you all about it. Fortunately the important points are mostly commonsense, we just need to put them together.

In New Zealand we have talked about marine reserves for 40 years. 30 years ago we got an Act of Parliament that made such things possible. We established the first reserves 25 years ago, and over the past 10 years we have made another 14 reserves in a wide range of situations.

We have learnt a lot. Marine reserves are important for science. Indeed trying to investigate natural processes in the sea without fully-protected areas is like trying to do chemistry with cracked and dirty glassware. Marine reserves are useful to education, indeed many people feel children have a right to observe the full range of marine life. Marine reserves help recreation. 250,000 people a year visit the marine reserve near Leigh. Marine reserves are essential for conservation. Since we have not described even half the species of our seas, the only practical method of conservation is to protect areas of habitat. We keep discovering new uses, benefits and values.

We have done enough tests and trials. It is now time to change gear. Instead of one at a time, which maximises the local opposition and minimises the support, we should go for a system of reserves created by policy and organised on principles.

Prime Minister, we can now see past the local difficulties to the simple principles. But we need you, your ministers and government to cut through the nonsense and get the important points. Please do not get involved with the messy detail, do not draw lines on the map, do not make any particular promises. But please state policy clearly and firmly. Please put into the revised Marine Reserves Act, and the NZ Coastal Policy and the Fisheries Policy some simple statements:

Marine reserves provide many important benefits the community, so a system of such reserves will be established to ensure that these benefits are widely and appropriately available.

All marine regions will have at least one reserve. In each region, all the major habitats will be represented. There will be replicates, and the system will form a network. The total area will be at least 10% by area of all regions and habitats.

When some recreational fishers try to shout about their rights, just ask them gently if they really need more than 90% of the sea for their amusement.

When some commercial fishermen tell you they can't afford to have 10% 'locked up' remind them that the stock farmers of this country long ago worked out the 'locking up' some of their area into stud farms and breeding units actually helps.

When some of my scientific colleagues tell you they want to survey everything first, just say that if the principle is to include some of everything there is no need for detailed surveys to determine the order or priority.

When some fisheries experts tell you marine reserves are unnecessary because we have quota management, just inform them that good managers know that they are not perfect and some insurance is always a good idea.

When some Maori tell you no-take marine reserves cannot be reconciled with their customary rights, just remind them that the largest mainland marine reserve was formally proposed by the tangata whenua.

The Ngati Konohi of Whangara were taken to court by some local fishermen. Isn't it absurd that we had to get an appeal court judge to say that a Minister of the Crown was entitled to take the general public interest into account. Most of us thought that was what Ministers were for.

We are not asking you to coerce anyone, in fact quite the reverse. We are asking that you prevent short sighted sectional interests from coercing the country. Your government got it right when you stated after the last election that you would act to get more marine reserves.

But at present there is a policy vacuum on marine reserves, which will not be solved by mild tinkering with the Marine Reserves Act. It is an empowering Act. So it needs to say what we want to empower. Three cheers for the students of Kamo High School for formally proposing marine reserves in Whangarei Harbour. But do we really want to leave such important matters to children?

Prime Minister, I am confident that if you, and your colleagues were to decide what to do about marine reserves, you would reach sensible conclusions and act on them. But you are surrounded by officials who are trapped by their detailed experience and cannot see the forest for the trees. Few staff in the Department of Conservation have any marine experience at all. This is not their fault. Fisheries is staffed by people who have spent their entire working lives managing single fish stocks in isolation. Again not their fault.

So we need you to exercise your own judgement and provide leadership. That will not be easy but it is basically simple. Some things are. Wheels should be round, which is the simplest shape. We should be allowed to have female Prime Ministers, for the simple reason that it is absurd to exclude half the population before thinking at the matter.

I will keep my fingers crossed, I will say a little prayer and I wish you luck. Thank you for listening.