



Sound environmental management is good business

CAWTHRON MARLBOROUGH ENVIRONMENT AWARDS 2019

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JUDGES' REPORT MARINE

Marlborough Girls' College Marine Protection Team

INTERVIEWED Holly Wills, Hannah Dickson and Melynda Bentley

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INTRODUCTION

The Marlborough Girls College (MGC) Marine Team are on a mission to find a better way to protect the marine environment in the Marlborough Sounds.

Their project began with a field trip into Queen Charlotte Sound, moved to researching the 1971 Marine Reserves Act and the 2016 proposed Marine Protected Areas reform, and ended up with a request to the Prime Minister for special legislation to create a community-led collaborative group with powers to protect and manage the marine area.



Along the way the students interacted with members of the community, coastal scientists, university academics, the media, Marlborough District Council and Cabinet ministers to raise awareness of the state of the marine environment and the urgent need for better protection.

Their efforts put the Marlborough Sounds into the national spotlight and they are awaiting a decision from the Government on what the next step will be.

The judges were impressed by the persistent and inquiring approach of the students, and also congratulate the College for encouraging the girls to look beyond the classroom to develop connections in the broader community.

GENERAL INFORMATION

The MGC Marine Team project is part of the College's Environmental Sustainability Course which was built on the original Sustainability Course developed by the late Ally Jerram. It is student-led and community focused.

The eight Year 12 and 13 students on the Marine Team are: Hannah Dickson, Demi Fearn, Siobhan Hemingway, Baylee McConaghey, Oceania McClelland-Petersen, Julee Pillans, Stacey Wilkey and Holly Wills. They are guided by teacher Melynda Bentley and mentors Dr Steve Urlich, MDC Coastal Scientist; Professor Simon Thrush, Head of Marine Studies at Auckland University; Professor Conrad Pilditch, Waikato University and Sustainable Seas National Science Challenge Science; and Dr Emma Newcombe, Cawthron Institute.

During a class field trip with Steve Urlich and eco-tourism operator Peter Beech they learned about environmental pressures in the Sounds such as sedimentation from forestry, causes of lower abundance of fish, threats to the endangered Hector's dolphins and the decline in king shags. They visited a salmon farm and discussed the use and protection of the Sounds. These different viewpoints highlighted the complexity of achieving sustainable use of the Sounds.

The students' initial response was to seek more marine reserves and they carried out a survey of 100 people in Picton, Havelock and Blenheim to test public awareness. More than 90% knew what a marine reserve was and 80% said they wanted more of them. However half of those surveyed did not know there was only one marine reserve in Marlborough.

This led to the first of two reports to the Prime Minister written by the Marine Team. It was aimed at getting the new government to take action on the Marine Protected Areas Act that went out for public consultation in 2016. This process is currently stalled, so the Marine Team set out to understand why and to get it moving again.

Their report, based on scientific studies, policy documents and their own survey, included:

- Research on the 1971 Marine Reserves Act and the proposed Marine Protected Areas legislation which allowed for different types of marine protection
- The role of protected areas and their relationship with the recovery of marine biodiversity
- The change of attitudes necessary to protect marine biodiversity
- The benefits of greater marine protection for Marlborough
- The results of their public survey on marine reserves
- Their personal experiences of the Marlborough Sounds and concern about the decline in marine life.

Despite a personal response and encouragement from Jacinda Ardern, the team realised this approach was going to take too long to bring meaningful protection to the Sounds. After further discussion and research they decided on a community-led model to create a Marine Guardians group for the Marlborough Sounds similar to what had been achieved in Fiordland and Kaikoura. This is set up with special legislation and puts marine protection and management in the hands of the locals.

The students identified that The Guardians model is a major advance on the existing situation. The Guardians would be enabled under special legislation to run a timely and efficient collaborative process to secure more marine protected areas.

They wrote a second report and a request for special legislation and presented it to the Marlborough District Council's Environment Committee in July 2018. Councillors were impressed by the team's work and passed a resolution in support and wrote to the Prime Minister seeking special legislation to establish a Marlborough Marine Guardians.



To add weight to this request, the Marine Team drafted the special legislation, which was reviewed by mentors Dr Emma Newcombe (Cawthron Institute), Prof Conrad Pilditch (Waikato University) and Prof Simon Thrush (Auckland University) before being sent to the Prime Minister.

The special legislation broadly outlines the functions and powers of a Marlborough Marine Guardians group made up of iwi, community, Government and Council representatives. The legislation would give Marlborough Marine Guardians the role of running a community consultation over two years to identify and recommend areas to be protected in the Marlborough Sounds and how this could be achieved. Following this they would continue to implement protection via the legislation. They would have the power to make marine management decisions, such as "no take" areas, line-only fishing areas, no seabed disturbance and create traditional Māori fishing reserves.

A similar system in Kaikoura and Fiordland took 10 years to prepare and enact. The MGC marine team believe it should not take this long. "Our plan was to find a way to speed up marine protection for Marlborough. We thought it shouldn't be so hard to look after our marine life." They are waiting to hear the result of the Mayor's letter to the Prime Minister.

In the meantime they have had meetings with Conservation Minister Eugenie Sage and Environment Minister David Parker and taken up many opportunities to talk about their work, including:

- Three articles in Stuff, with national coverage
- Lead article in the Local Government News Bulletin (Sept 2018)
- A presentation to Nelson Marlborough Conservation Board
- Speaking role at the 2018 Sustainable Seas conference in Wellington, as a voice for youth
- Their research and Marine Guardians proposal to be published in the April 2019 edition of the prestigious Resource Management Journal.

Attendance at the conference wrapped up a big year for the Marine Team. They represented the next generation concerned about the future of the marine environment. They were inspired by the expert research presented at the conference that backs up their concerns. And they were encouraged by examples of partnerships with iwi to improve marine protection.

At the end of the 2018 school year, six of the team left college but are still keen to be involved in progressing the special legislation. The remaining two students are continuing with the course in Year 13.

Melynda pointed out that the NCEA assessment for the Marine Team project ended in June. Everything since then, including drafting the special legislation and attending the conference, has been in the students' own time. She acknowledged the students' growth in confidence and knowledge over the year.

PROBLEMS AND HOW THEY HAVE BEEN TACKLED

Settling on the best approach: The students were clear on their objective to improve marine protection in the Marlborough Sounds, but it was an evolving process to find the most effective approach. With the help of their mentors and research into the experience of other regions they eventually settled on special legislation and were supported in this by the Marlborough District Council.

Coping with the workload: It was a tough workload for the students, with the extra demands of following up community contacts, understanding scientific papers, policy and legislative processes and preparing presentations. "We shared the tasks and that made it easier on all of us. It wasn't easy at times but we learned that working together was our strength." They also appreciated the support from Melynda and their mentors.



Establishing links with iwi: It was hard to engage with local iwi who were short of resources and had other work priorities. At the time of judging the students were preparing for a meeting with Te Atiawa. They were also inspired by partnership examples seen at the Sustainable Seas Conference, which led them to think about next steps including understanding Te Tiriti o Waitangi principles and improving links with Te Tau Ihu iwi.

Health and Safety: Education Outside the Classroom such as field trips and external presentations requires a lot of paperwork and permissions. In many cases there were short timelines to take up invitations or arrange visits. This was a struggle for Melynda but with support from the College they were able to attend all opportunities they were given. Streamlined systems will be put in place in the future.

SUMMARY

The Marlborough Girls College Marine Team have made a very strong start in their mission to improve marine protection in the Marlborough Sounds. Whether or not their overall goal of more marine reserves is achieved, their community approach, based on science, will provide long-term benefit to the students and to marine conservation.

They have made the critical link between the marine environment, the commercial and community impacts, and the importance of collaboration to manage the Marlborough Sounds sustainably for future generations. Along the way they have reached out and made valuable connections with local and central government, academic mentors, commercial and recreational users of the Sounds and the media. The challenge will be to continue to build on that momentum.

The judges would have benefited from a more detailed explanation of the students' perspectives about environmental issues in the Sounds but praised them for raising awareness and creating the opportunities that have arisen through this project. They have connected with the media and politicians, and got people talking and taking notice of the Marlborough Sounds on a national level.

Through their course, the students have been exposed to a wide range of career opportunities in environmental science, resource management, policy-making and communications. They have experienced the value of working as a team on big issues and been supported extremely well by Melynda and the College.

SUGGESTIONS

- Use social media platforms to record the Marine Team's work and progress. Share with other schools with similar issues, eg. Kaikoura High School.
- You have created an excellent model for inquiry learning. Share the vision with other staff for a cross-curriculum approach, e.g. English, Social Sciences, Te Reo and Biology.
- Look into procedures used by Kamo High School for establishing Whangarei Harbour Marine Reserve (2006).
<https://www.kamohigh.school.nz/our-school/marine-reserves>
- Make an appointment with the Mayor to keep Council on board and show willingness to work together to get a positive Government decision on Marlborough Marine Guardians.
- Arrange to meet Environment Minister David Parker again and highlight the effect on the Sounds of degraded fresh water, sedimentation, overfishing and dredging.
- As part of your course work, develop more detail about the marine environment in the Sounds. Continue with research into the environmental issues that need addressing.
- Investigate potential barriers to marine protected areas, including how would some stakeholder groups be impacted.
- Focus on studying one potential Marine Protected Area and its habitats and biodiversity. Seek sponsorship to fund the baseline research for the area, for example mapping of the seabed habitats and recording species.
- Consider including estuary and shoreline buffer zones next to marine protected areas as a way to maintain land and sea environmental benefits.
- To add more practical experience to the course, approach Cawthron or NIWA about being involved in marine fieldwork.
- Is there a place for a secondary school representative on the Government's Sustainable Seas Challenge?
- Talk to other Te Tau Ihu iwi, such as Ngati Koata and Ngati Kuia to understand different approaches to the Sounds, including customary and commercial.
- Look at Hauraki Gulf's Sea Change marine spatial plan. This was a two-year process.
<https://www.seachange.org.nz>
- Take part in the Department of Conservation's public consultation on management of Hector's Dolphins (April-May 2019). <https://www.doc.govt.nz/our-work/our-work-with-maui-dolphin/hectors-and-maui-dolphin-threat-management-plan/review/>
- Ask to be put on the mailing list for Marlborough Marine Futures and attend their workshops. <http://www.marlmarinefutures.co.nz>