

Pacific Oyster Shell and Reef Removal

Submission on the Unitary Plan: Pacific Oyster Shell and Reef Removal

Submitted by: **The Manukau Harbour Restoration Society**

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1. Introduction

The Manukau Harbour Restoration Society welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft Unitary Plan (UP).

The Manukau Harbour Restoration Society (MHRS) is a community, membership-based incorporated society. It was formed in 2011 by concerned residents from around the Manukau Harbour with the purpose of encouraging restoration of the harbour to the environmental and recreational quality it once had.

Proliferation of pacific oyster shells and banks since they were introduced 40 years ago is damaging our Manukau harbour beaches. The sharp shells cut feet and bodies of people and pets and damage boats, making beaches and channels unusable. Examples are Waikowhai Beach, Kiwi Esplanade, Weymouth and Onehunga foreshore sailing club areas.

MHRS members have been involved in oyster shell beach cleanups and appreciate the assistance Council staff have given to make these days successful. Community removals have taken place at French Bay, Titirangi Beach, Clarks Beach, Sergeants Beach and Waikowhai Beach in the Manukau Harbour.

MHRS understands the Fisheries Act places restrictions on oyster removal. However, removing shells only does not stop the spread of oysters to beaches that are currently free of them or eliminate the hazards they are creating for pets, swimmers and boats at beaches where they have established.

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2. Summary of MHRs's submission

Draft UP rules which allow removal of oyster shells and using only hand held methods is impractical and will not stop the spread of pacific oysters in the Manukau Harbour. Oyster reefs turn to a concrete-like state. Oyster reefs must be allowed to be removed by mechanical methods including dredging and other methods.

A simple and free process must be put in place to help community groups which want to remove both shells and reefs.

3. Comments on Specific sections of the draft Unitary Plan

3.2.5.1.7 Vegetation: removal of exotic species and pacific oyster shell
MHRs supports objectives and policies enabling the removal of pacific oyster shells but recommends that these sections be amended to enable the removal of oyster reefs themselves, not just shells.

4.3.6 Coastal Zones

4.3.6.1 General coastal marine zones

Activity Table - Pacific Oyster shell removal

MHRs supports removal of Pacific oyster shells as a Permitted activity but recommends that this should also include removal of the reefs.

4. Comments on the explanatory document: Unitary Plan Oyster Management

This document should distinguish between oysters grown as part of an aquaculture operation, oysters that are native to NZ and exotic pacific oysters that are establishing on beaches around our harbours as a result of being introduced in the 1960's from foreign shipping. The three situations are entirely different and should be identified as such in the document. To make it easier for community groups to understand, MHRs suggests that rules pertaining to exotic pacific oysters could be detailed in a separate document.

The document states that pacific oysters are a "significant recreational and Maori cultural fishery" (P2). How is this possible if they are exotic and were introduced in the 1960's (as stated in the document) and are not indigenous?

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Maintaining areas for safe access and recreational use:

MHRS supports the suggestion in this document to identify certain areas around the harbour to be maintained for safe access and recreational use. MHRS recommends the following areas:

Areas where ongoing removal and clean up is required:

French Bay, Titirangi Beach, Clarks Beach, Sergeants Beach and Waikowhai Beach
Faulkner Bay, Granny's Bay, Blockhouse Bay, Weymouth, Onehunga Foreshore, Kiwi Esplanade including the Manukau Yacht and Motor Boat Club and Mangere Boating Club

Areas currently free of oysters which should be kept free: (these are all beaches with high recreational, fishing and boating use)

Little Huia, Huia, Foster Bay, Kaiterakihi, Kakamatua, Cornwallis, Mill Bay, Armour Bay.

Dredging and mechanical removal of reefs

MHRS agrees with statements in the document that some form of dredging or mechanical removal method is required to remove the oyster reefs and that potentially there are beneficial uses to which shells and biota can be put.

Community groups want action to begin now to remove oyster reefs. Because of the high cost, it is probably unlikely Council will establish a large scale removal program, including dredging, in the Manukau Harbour, in a Long Term Plan, in the near future. It would be more efficient and faster to provide a method for community groups to undertake removal in their local areas. However, requiring each group to get resource consent is beyond the capability and finances of most groups.

What they require is umbrella Council policies and permits under which they could operate. MHRS recommends Council provide "master" permits (under the Fisheries Act and RMA) under which community groups can remove reefs using mechanical methods as Council does now for limited removal. Council could develop acceptable methods of mechanical removal in addition to dredging and conditions under which removal could take place. Community groups could provide a proposed removal plan to Council and receive approval to remove the reefs if they meet Council's conditions. No resource consent or fee would be required of the community group.

An alternative process for Resource Consent would be established for groups wanting to use other methods than those specified in the Council umbrella or master permit. Such removal would be a Discretionary activity.

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MHRS also requests Council sponsor research into expeditious mechanical removal methods and beneficial methods of disposal or reuse of shells and biota. MHRS recommends that Auckland Council immediately begin this research in conjunction with Auckland's tertiary institutions and businesses.

5. Conclusions

Pacific oyster removal policies and rules should be amended to:

- 1. Allow for the removal of reefs; and
- 2. Allow the use of mechanical removal methods.

We wish to be heard in support of submission

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