

Information Sheet: The Potential Listing of Ohiwa Harbour as a Wetland of International Importance

The Ramsar Convention

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands recognises the most ecologically important wetlands in the world. On behalf of the surrounding community and the ecosystem within Ohiwa Harbour, Environment Bay of Plenty is considering submitting an application to have the Harbour included in the List of Wetlands of International Importance, under the Convention.

The Convention on Wetlands is a global intergovernmental treaty, adopted in 1971 in the Iranian city of Ramsar. It's commonly called the Ramsar Convention, but the official name is The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat.

The emphasis was originally on the conservation and wise use of wetlands to provide habitats for waterbirds and waders worldwide. Over the years its scope has increased to recognise the importance of wetlands as being ecosystems that are also extremely important for the wellbeing of human communities and biodiversity conservation in general.

More than 1400 wetlands in the world have been included in the List of Wetlands of International Importance. New Zealand became a party to the Convention in 1976 and has been successful in having six wetlands included on the list so far. These are Farewell Spit, Firth of Thames, Whangamarino Wetland, Kopuatai Peat Dome, Waituna Lagoon, and the Manawatu River Estuary, Foxton.

Potential nomination of Ohiwa Harbour

We believe that the Ohiwa Harbour has the types of ecological, social, cultural and historical values a wetland should have to be worthy of Ramsar status. The Harbour is already recognised as an outstanding site for wildlife and represents the Whakatane Ecological Region. It has long been valued by Maori as an important mahinga mataitai (food gathering place), as well as a traditional home with spiritual and historic importance.

What would this mean?

Listing of Ohiwa Harbour would give recognition to its special nature as an important habitat for birds and a functioning ecosystem, as a place of cultural value and natural beauty, and of the importance of using it wisely and sustainably. By being positioned within the larger international network of conservation initiatives, it would increase possibilities for support for current and future conservation projects and sustainable management.

The designation of Ramsar status to Ohiwa Harbour would not, we believe, change the way its residents and visitors use it. The Ramsar Convention obligation to maintain the values that make the wetland significant would be consistent with the resource management of the Harbour that already occurs and that is proposed in the Draft Ohiwa Harbour Strategy.



*Caspian terns at Ohiwa Harbour
Photo by B. Chudleigh*

Ohiwa – Together we're keeping it special He taonga tukuiho ke, ko tatau e nga uri e

Issues that have been identified that impact on the Harbour's ecosystem values include:

- sedimentation, runoff, nutrification, and pollution
- activities that destroy habitat or disturb wildlife, such as vehicles on mudflats
- possibly the spread of mangroves
- unsustainable kaimoana harvesting

None of these are new, and they are mostly already being addressed through various mechanisms such as responsible land management, voluntary actions, regulations and environmental initiatives. It is not seen that Ramsar Listing would create any further restrictions on activities (such as farming or subdivision) that are not already in place in existing regional or district plans. A number of publically supported initiatives, such as subsidised environmental plans and planting programmes, also complement the Ramsar Listing. Responsible land management practices would continue to be supported and the present public uses of the Harbour would not be curtailed, for example, cockle collecting and fishing would still continue.

Should we apply for listing? Tell us what you think

For Ohiwa Harbour to be considered for Ramsar Listing an application needs to be made outlining how Ohiwa Harbour satisfies the various key assessment criteria.

Before an application is made, we want to know what you think. We want to find out if there is support for the potential listing of Ohiwa Harbour as a Ramsar Wetland.

For more information

You can hear more about the proposed Ramsar Listing at the public information sessions for the Draft Ohiwa Harbour Strategy. If you would like us to give a presentation to your group or you have any other questions, please contact Wendy Gaisford or Claire Battersby at Environment Bay of Plenty on 0800 ENV BOP (368 267).

- **Monday, 30 October (5–8 pm)** at Ohiwa Family Holiday Park, Ohiwa Harbour Road, Opotiki
- **Saturday, 4 November** at the Ohope Craft Market
- **Tuesday, 14 November (5–8 pm)** at Port Ohope Yacht Club, Harbour Road, Ohope

A hui will also be held as part of the public consultation process. The details of when and where are yet to be confirmed, and will be advertised in local newspapers. Alternatively, please contact Meagan Edhouse at Environment Bay of Plenty (0800 368 267) for further details.

Key criteria for identifying wetlands of international importance

Group A of the Criteria. Sites containing representative, rare or unique wetland types

Criterion 1: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it contains a representative, rare, or unique example of a natural or near-natural wetland type found within the appropriate biogeographic region.

Group B of the Criteria. Sites of international importance for conserving biological diversity

Criteria based on species and ecological communities

Criterion 2: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered species or threatened ecological communities.

Criterion 3: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports populations of plant and/or animal species important for maintaining the biological diversity of a particular biogeographic region.

Criterion 4: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports plant and/or animal species at a critical stage in their life cycles, or provides refuge during adverse conditions.

Specific criteria based on waterbirds

Criterion 5: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 20,000 or more waterbirds.

Criterion 6: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of waterbird.

Specific criteria based on fish

Criterion 7: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports a significant proportion of indigenous fish subspecies, species or families, life-history stages, species interactions and/or populations that are representative of wetland benefits and/or values and thereby contributes to global biological diversity.

Criterion 8: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it is an important source of food for fishes, spawning ground, nursery and/or migration path on which fish stocks, either within the wetland or elsewhere, depend.