

Ohiwa Harbour Shared Treasure



Working together to care for our estuary
Kia ngatahi te tiaki wahapu



He taonga tukuiho ke, ko tatau ra nga uri e **Ohiwa - Together we're**

Many thanks to the many people who have helped bring this booklet to reality. If you'd like further copies, please call Environment Bay of Plenty on 0800 ENV BOP (368 267).



Cover Photo: At Ohiwa, Donna Reid with Christina and Hone.

He huhua nga korero e pa ana ki te moana nei ki a Ohiwa
Much important dialogue exists about Ohiwa
Ko te nuinga e pa ana ki nga oranga kei reira,
Mainly about the sources of well-being available there
Oranga hinengaro, oranga tinana hoki
Both emotional well-being, and bodily well-being
Otira, nga oranga whanui a ngai taua a te tangata
That is the overall well-being of mankind
Mai nehe ra ano
From time immemorial
Tau noa mai ki naianei
To the present time
Tau atu hoki ki nga ra ki muri nei
And on into the future
Me pehea atu he korero?
What more needs to be said?



keeping it special

We all know that Ohiwa Harbour is a stunning place. It's a natural paradise, an ancestral home, a long-valued food source, a wonderful outdoor playground.

But Ohiwa is also highly vulnerable. As locals, we share a special responsibility - to respect and care for this place we love.

This book celebrates all that's precious about Ohiwa. Most of all, it suggests ways you can help to keep it that way.

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Much to treasure

Ohiwa is one of New Zealand's most unspoiled harbours. The coastal margins are home to many rare and migratory birds. The estuary shores have healthy saltmarsh and plant communities. There is high conservation value across islands, foreshore, saltmarsh and wetlands.

For centuries, Ohiwa has been of huge importance to Maori. It is a traditional mahinga mataitai (food gathering place), a taonga, a treasure to be looked after with pride. In fact, one of the harbour's first names was Te Kete Kai a Taironga, the food basket of Tairongo, an early voyager.

At low tide, over three quarters of the harbour bed is exposed. Because it is so shallow, tidal flows are strong, up to seven knots. This flushes most of the water from the harbour every 24 hours - great for water quality.

However, the shallow water, coupled with the light pumice soils of surrounding land, means Ohiwa is liable to silting. This process has been sped up by human activity such as clearing land, harvesting forestry, and general development.

Ohiwa Harbour Strategy

The Ohiwa Harbour Strategy outlines why people value the harbour, their concerns for it, and their vision for its future.

The strategy recognises that while development is not in itself negative, it must be managed to not diminish the harbour's attributes. The thinking is to preserve the area's natural qualities wherever possible.

The strategy was compiled by Environment Bay of Plenty, and Whakatane and Opotiki District Councils - working together with iwi, individuals, groups and organisations. Every one of us can help to make it happen.



Ohiwa couple farm to conserve

Living on a virtual island, almost completely surrounded by the waters of Ohiwa Harbour, farmers Dave and Theresa Gee take their role as guardians of their environment extremely seriously.

Dave describes their management style as very simplistic, but he and Theresa have only attained that simplicity through years of strategic planning with a focus on environmental sustainability.

Eighty percent of the Gees' 180-hectare farm, Motuore, runs down to the harbour edge.

Dave has continued the buffer fencing between the property boundary and the harbour that his father began more than 30 years ago.

The harbour edge fencing has enhanced wildlife habitat,

encouraging pukeko, pheasant and duck. These species are further protected by the Gees' careful pest management regime that has, over the past 10 years, greatly reduced possum, stoat and rat populations.

Internal farm waterways - drains and ponds - are stock-fenced and the ponds planted with oak trees to feed the ducks, plus natives and willows to provide shelter for the water fowl.

The Gees are fussy about what they put in to their soils, carefully monitoring fertilisers so that only minimal chemicals are applied and Dave applies all mineral supplements directly into the stock water supply rather than into the soil.

Converting from high maintenance bulls to a heifer grazing unit 12

years ago, the Gees now have 540 yearling heifers. These are rotationally grazed in nine mobs of 60 through 146 paddocks, each fenced into 1.1 hectares. This regime not only gives ease of stock management, but the lighter weight of the young heifers is kinder on the land and has enabled paddocks to rejuvenate over the years.

All the Gee family enjoy and share the asset they help protect. Dave loves to fish, dive and duck shoot on the harbour and they never deny access to anyone who wants to cross their farm frontage to the harbour edge.

It is little wonder that this environmentally friendly farming couple won the PPCS Best Livestock category in the 2006 Ballance Farm Environment Awards.



Ohiwa fact file

Harbour

- Covers about 26 square kilometres
- Was formed around 6,000 years ago
- It is protected by two sand spits, 6km long on the west (Ohope) and less than 1km on the east (Ohiwa)
- Has a number of islands, including Ohakana, Uretara, Hokianga and Pataua.

Water catchment

- Starts about 35km inland, south of Waimana, covering around 170 square kilometres
- Has 12 major streams and the Nukuhou river
- Includes land used for forestry, drystock/dairy farming, horticulture, lifestyle blocks and residential living
- Is about half in pasture, half indigenous and exotic forest cover in the upper catchment.

People

- Ohiwa is an ancestral taonga of significance to many Maori groups such as Ngati Awa, Upokerehe, Whakatohea and Tuhoë
- 3,500 people live in the water catchment area
- 2,000 are in residential areas at Ohiwa, Kutarere and Ohope.

The ethic of Kaitiakitanga

Stretching back centuries before the arrival of non-Maori, decision-making and behaviour was guided by tikanga. This affected people's social, economic, cultural, and environmental well-being.

The environment sustained the people, and they sustained the environment according to the ethic and exercise of kaitiakitanga (guardianship).

The ethic of kaitiakitanga requires people to pause, reflect, discuss and demonstrate care for the environment they live in. It's about people being clear about their respective relationships with the environment - and seeking to live in union with it.

Upokerehe, Whakatohea, Ngati Awa and Tuhoë have agreed that as tangata whenua they will work co-operatively to exercise kaitiakitanga of the Ohiwa Harbour.

*E noho ana ki te koko ki Ohiwa
Whakarongo rua aku taringa
Ki te tai o tua o Kanewa
E aki ana mai ki uta ra
Ki te whanau a Tairongo
Ko Tauwhare te kopu o te Ururoa
Ko te kai rari, noa mai te Raweketia
A te ringaringa*

*As I sit on the beach at Ohiwa
I listen to the waves beating over the
sandbar at Kanewa
Against the foreshore
The home of my ancestor Tairongo
My mind wanders to Tauwhare
The birthplace of the hammerhead shark
And to the foodbasket, revered by many hands*

This ancient whakatauki, handed down for many generations, demonstrates the enduring relationships of tangata whenua with Ohiwa harbour and its natural resources. The spawning place of the hammerhead shark below Tauwhare pa is an allusion to the plentiful food supplies available there to nurture the newly-born sharks. This in turn alludes to the bounteous nature of the whole harbour, and the many hands harvesting that bounty from time immemorial ('noa mai' is an abbreviation of 'noa mai ra ano', since the beginning of time).





Work that beats with the spirit of Ohiwa

Herewini Hape is respected as a mover and shaker in her hapu - particularly in encouraging care of the whenua and moana.

As part of the Upokorehe Te Ahi Karoa Trust, Herewini has organised some great environmental work in the Kutarere area, helped by funding from Environment Bay of Plenty's Environmental Enhancement Fund. Herewini is particularly pleased with two projects undertaken by marae members that have started to make a big difference to the quality of the environment and waterways.

The first - cleaning up the Rankin Road area - has started to reverse 50 years of the dumping of cars

and rubbish over the steep roadside bank into the gully.

Although some of the car and truck bodies have been dumped so long ago that they have virtually become part of the bank's stability, the Trust has managed to clear away heaps of rubbish and has planted many natives.

The Trust has also tackled another spot in Harbour Road where household rubbish and whiteware has been dumped into the bush.

There is "huge concern" among the tangata whenua over illegal dumping and the impact it has on the moana and mauri (life force) of the harbour, she says.

For her personally, the essence of the Ohiwa Harbour is that it is "life sustaining" - it is a living taonga (treasure), reflected in the people's songs and history.

"It is the place where tangata whenua have historically gathered kai and the place of spiritual wellbeing that we attach to the waters of the harbour."

Herewini fears for the future of this life force as an increasing population, residential development and nutrient run-off impact on the harbour.

"It's really sad - but to me it is all about restoring the life force of the area - for all of us as the tangata whenua and for whanau from other iwi."

Tide and time

The ecology here is prized both nationally and around the world.

Ohiwa harbour is technically an estuary - the point where fresh water and sea water mixes. Estuaries are vital to the coastal environment, forming a buffer between land and sea that absorbs flood waters and slows erosion. Estuaries are also amongst the most productive of all coastal ecosystems.

Ohiwa is in good health. Much of the high tide area (the 'estuarine margin') is covered in saltmarsh. As well as being rich in plant, bird and other life, these areas create a filter to trap sediments and contaminated run-off before they enter coastal waters.

The filtering helps keep the sea clean. But Ohiwa Harbour is still under real pressure from what goes into the waterways, over the whole catchment. For the complex ecosystems to thrive into the future, Ohiwa needs great care - on land as well as water.

Human activity

Human history has helped to shape the landscape and ecology of Ohiwa.

There are many cultural and archaeological sites here. A total of 91 pa sites have been identified in the Ohiwa area. One site, the 'Tokiitoki midden', is an estimated 600 to 700 years old and is one of the Bay of Plenty's only sites sitting on ash from Kaharoa, a volcano which erupted in 1360.

Two hundred years ago, the harbour was surrounded by bush, predominantly pohutukawa, tawa and puriri. Today, little original forest remains, although bush is regenerating in some areas. Many of the original wetlands are gone.

Less obvious are the signs that Ohiwa was once thriving with trade. In the 1920s Kutarere wharf was the harbour's main





landing point, known as "Port of all the Urewera". The wharf was used until the 1960s when Port Ohope wharf opened. Today, the skeleton of Kutarere wharf still stands.

Shifting sands

Just as people have influenced nature, so nature has influenced people. In the 1870s, a hotel and post office and a

number of homes were built on Ohiwa spit. A wharf was built in 1896. But by 1915, the sea began to wash them all away.

Again in the 1960s, homes were built on the Ohiwa spit. Again, the sands shifted. In 1978, 56 metres was carved from the shore and homes were reclaimed by the sea.

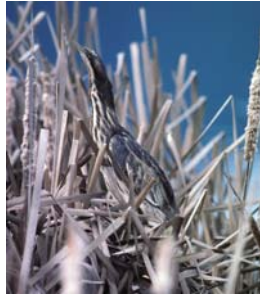
Bird haven

A wide range of local and migratory birds find safe haven in and around Ohiwa. Large flocks can gather on the mud flats - less visible amongst the saltmarsh are endangered species like mohu-pereru, the banded rail.

Some of the birds are incredible. Kuaka, the godwit, flies across the Pacific from the Arctic every spring, and back every autumn - 11,000km each way.

Ohiwa Harbour is also home to a

population of kukuruatu, the New Zealand dotterel. This species nests in dunes, making the birds highly vulnerable to human disturbance. The North Island form of the species numbers only 1,400 nationwide.



Left to right, top to bottom: Banded dotterel, little black shags, fernbird, bar-tailed godwit, Australasian bittern, variable oystercatcher, New Zealand dotterel, red-billed and black-billed gulls.



Photos Courtesy Brian Chudleigh





Lifestyle changes benefit Ohiwa Harbour

Kelly Hughes has a depth of caring for his environment that extends far beyond his own self-interest.

The self-confessed 'lifestyler' has lived overlooking the beauty of Ohiwa Harbour for 10 years, but far from simply taking of its splendour, Kelly lives out the philosophy of conserving and enhancing his natural environment.

His 20.2 hectare lifestyle block, about 1,000 metres from the harbour, takes only the view from its surroundings. All his marginal land is retired and covered with 10,000 trees that Kelly has planted during the past 10 years. The balance is split between dry cattle grazing and non-economic orchard - all of which is organically fertilised.

Reflecting on the history of Ohiwa Harbour, Kelly says it has evolved from a centuries old food and cultural hub to its modern-day lifestyler haven.

Historically tribally occupied by right or by the fight of Te Whakatohea, Ngati Awa and Tuhoe until the turn of the 20th Century, the demographics of Ohiwa were dramatically changed under the impacts of influenza, world wars and modernisation.

Over the past two decades, what had become a relatively unpopulated, inaccessible and neglected backwater, has turned into a magnet for the rural lifestyle dweller and recreational farmer.

Kelly is convinced that this type of land user has been greatly beneficial for the harbour.

"Lifestylers have far less impact on the harbour - they are more focused as caretakers because they do not rely on the land for their income."

In a community that embraces a healthy mix of traditional farmers and newcomer lifestylers, Kelly says there is a growing sense that the environment must be protected and enhanced, and more landowners are retiring marginal land around the harbour.

"The single biggest impact on the harbour has been the retirement of marginal land," he says.

Fish, shellfish and estuary life

While there is still much to learn about many New Zealand fish - there's no question that for some, healthy estuaries are a vital part of their life cycle.

For part of their lives, most of New Zealand's fresh water fish live in salt water. Inanga, a small whitebait, is a good example, spawning in vegetation in the lower reaches of waterways like the Nukuhou River before being washed to sea as larvae.

Tuna, native eels, spend most of their lives in fresh water then swim thousands of kilometres across the Pacific Ocean to spawn. These and other unique species migrate through the estuary and populate the many streams flowing into Ohiwa.

Estuaries like Ohiwa are also important for salt water fish - many species spawn, feed and shelter here.

Life on the mudflat

Look down! Ohiwa's tidal flats teem with life, including many species of crabs, shellfish, heart urchins, snails and worms. These animals may be tiny but they are important. Some help to move nutrients and waste between estuary sediment and water, as well as being an important food source for fish and birds.

Always respect fishing limits and sizes. Note that a rahui, or fishing ban, is sometimes in place. Check for signs around the harbour or call the Ministry of Fisheries.



Saltmarsh and other plants

Ohiwa has special conservation value in its healthy areas of saltmarsh, such as at Wainui (Cheddar Valley), around the mouth of the Nukuhou River. The plants of the saltmarsh create shelter and breeding habitats for numerous birds and other estuary creatures.

Much of the saltmarsh can be submerged during floods and at spring high water. At such times the saltmarsh plants slow down

water flow and reduce wave action - helping to slow erosion. The plants also trap and stabilise sediments and pollutants, helping to maintain water quality.



Mangroves - good and bad

Ohiwa marks New Zealand's southern limit for mangroves. They are noticeably smaller than their northern counterparts. Around Ohiwa, mangroves often grow to around one to 1.5 metres high.

Should they be controlled? There's a lot of debate. Mangroves are native. They provide habitat for some estuarine creatures, such as fish and wetland birds. But they remove habitat for other species, such as shellfish associated with sea grass beds.

With increased levels of nutrients and sediment entering the harbour, mangroves spreading. They now cover more than four times the area than they did 50 years ago. Mangroves could be slowing or preventing silt from flushing from the harbour. In places, mangroves concentrate silt that might otherwise spread more widely across the harbour.

Environment Bay of Plenty monitors the mangroves. At present you are not allowed to remove them without resource consent.



Purdy family passionate about their harbour

The Ohiwa Harbour is so much a part of the Purdy family's life that they cannot imagine ever living anywhere else but on its shores.

Craig and Debbie Purdy, their daughter Erika (15) and sons Matthew (13) and Sean (7), live in Harbour Road on the harbour side of Port Ohope.

The harbour is the first thing they see from their lounge window each morning and it's a view so beautiful that Debbie says it never fails to evoke the "wow" factor.

The harbour inspired the Purdys to move to its shores - and it is an integral part of their lives, serving as a wonderful playground for the three children who swim, kayak

and fish in its waters.

Because it is such an extension to their lifestyle, Debbie says the family has become very protective of the harbour. They are conscious of looking after its waters and they care about how other users treat it.

"The children have grown up instilled with a love of the harbour. We talk about how to protect it and when things change - such as the new subdivision being developed near us - we talk about how that may impact on the harbour," says Debbie.

As operators of a home-based business - the Scilla Chocolate Factory - Debbie and Craig share

the harbour with the many visitors on the Ohiwa arts and crafts trail. Part of the visit is tasting yummy handmade Belgian chocolates in the comfort of the Purdy's lounge - and again - that glorious harbour view never fails to astound visitors.

In this way, says Debbie, they are promoting this beautiful asset and indirectly reminding people of the importance of valuing it as an environmental asset.

"We are so lucky to have been able to build our lifestyle and our business here - and we can show people that you don't have to live in Auckland or other big cities to succeed in a great business," says Debbie.

Threats & pests

24 hours a day, 365 days a year, Ohiwa faces a whole range of threats - and not all are easily seen.

- **Silt** washing into the harbour can change the way water circulates, trap pollutants, and smother shellfish beds.
- **Reclaiming and draining** land breaks up and damages natural areas.
- **Land development** around the estuary boundary can lead to the loss of wetlands, coastal shrublands and forest - a buffer between land and estuary.
- **Stormwater** often contains sediments and pollutants such as heavy metals from roads.
- **Sediment, nutrients and contaminants** are washed into the waterways which run to the harbour - affecting all that lives there.
- **Invasive weeds** can quickly overcome native plants - reducing habitat for native birds and insects.
- **Rats, stoats, dogs and cats** can devastate native fauna - including birds which live in harbour dunes, forest reserves and salt marshes.
- **Stock grazing** can destroy delicate saltmarsh and stream edges - nesting ground for birds and spawning habitat for whitebait.
- **Farm runoff** contains bacteria, nitrogen and phosphorus, polluting the harbour and speeding mangrove growth.
- **Rubbish dumping** contaminates the land and water, spreads weeds and looks terrible.
- **Septic tank runoff** in the catchment can pollute waterways and the harbour and make shellfish unsafe for people to eat.
- **Over-fishing** diminishes future seafood resource.
- **Driving on the beach, dunes or mudflats** can damage plants, birds and other creatures of the estuary.



How you can care for Ohiwa

There are many simple steps you can take to care for Ohiwa Harbour: at home, around your garden or farm, and of course, on and around the water.

Keen to do more? Some community groups are already doing great work to protect and improve the estuary - you may like to get involved. To find out more please call Environment Bay of Plenty on 0800 ENV BOP (368 267).

Your home and garden

- Make sure your septic tank is in good working order
- Don't pour pollutants or wash paint brushes into storm water drains
- Wash your car on grass so pollutants don't go into storm water drains
- Plant native trees and shrubs to help attract birds
- Take rubbish, including green waste, to the landfill not the estuary and recycle wherever possible.

At the harbour

- Help your children learn why the harbour is important
- Walk on marked paths and tracks
- Park in marked areas
- Do not drive on the beach, dunes or mud flats
- Keep your dog on a leash near bird habitats, or avoid walking dogs in those locations. Obey dog exclusion area notices
- Take your rubbish home - even better, pick up and dispose of other people's rubbish

- Regularly check that your boat is not leaking oil or pollutants
- Avoid gathering shellfish after a heavy rain as poor water quality may mean they are unsafe to eat.

Your farm or lifestyle block

- Fence streams and waterways to keep stock off streambanks and out of the water (a reticulated stock water supply provides better environmental care)
- Plant along streams and waterways (ideally in native plants relevant to the harbour environments)
- Avoid overgrazing steep slopes and pasture near waterways
- Catch and control stock effluent
- Avoid spraying chemicals near waterways
- Apply fertiliser sparingly and with care, especially near waterways
- Run a nutrient budget to avoid over-use of fertiliser
- Minimise use of tracks that may damage riparian or wetland areas
- Call Environment Bay of Plenty on 0800 ENV BOP (368 267) for a copy of 'A Guide to Regional Plans - Farming Activities'
- Financial assistance may be available for some of these actions.



Birdsong returns to the saltmarsh

Birdlife in the Nukuhou salt marsh has been thrown a lifeline through the dedication of the Nukuhou Saltmarsh Care Group - a band of conservationists committed to encouraging the birds to return and the predators to leave.

Since 2004 the group has been working with the Department of Conservation and Environment Bay of Plenty to improve habitat and wildlife in the 24.2 hectare largely unmodified salt marsh. Their programme includes monitoring bird numbers and species, eradicating noxious weeds, rejuvenating natural plantings and coordinating a pest search and destroy regime.

Potters Stuart and Margaret Slade have been residents for 21 years in Cheddar Valley and both are determined to help protect and enhance the birdlife in the Ohiwa Harbour catchment.

“Our desire is to reverse some of the changes that have taken place over the years. We have virtually removed all the wilding pines, wattle, gorse, blackberries and pampas grass and we are noticing good regeneration of the natives such as manuka in which the birds love to forage,” says Stuart.

After three years they have noticed an increase in fern birds, banded rail prints and spotless crane. At the start of the

programme about 25 fern birds were recorded in the monthly monitoring - now they regularly record upwards of 60.

Successful pest eradication is a certain factor in this increase. Tracking stoats, weasels, rats and mice proved the presence of predators. In the 12 months from May 2005 to May 2006, the care group trapped 40 stoats, 15 weasels and 23 rats.

It is also hoped that roadside planting will encourage the rare bittern to fly higher and therefore fly higher over the road to avoid ending up as road kill.

Find out more

If you want to know more about environmental care, call Environment Bay of Plenty if you are not sure who to contact. Here we also list other organisations that may be able to help you.

Environment Bay of Plenty Call 0800 ENV BOP (368 267)

www.envbop.govt.nz

5 Quay Street, PO Box 364, Whakatane

The role of Environment Bay of Plenty includes promoting the sustainable management of natural and physical resources, and monitoring the effects of people's activities on the natural environment. The regional council also promotes integrated environmental management through the region.

Contact for: Environment Programmes on privately owned land; pest plant and

animal advice; soil conservation information; riparian management advice; Environmental Enhancement Fund; Estuary Care groups; navigation and safety; coastal management, such as resource consents for structures and discharges etc. Environment Bay of Plenty can also provide financial and technical assistance to help land owners fence and plant waterways entering the Ohiwa Harbour.

Opotiki District Council Call 07 315 3030

www.odc.govt.nz

108 St John Street, PO Box 44, Opotiki

Opotiki District Council covers the area of Ohiwa Harbour from where the Nukuhou River enters the harbour up to Ohiwa Spit, and the water catchment south of Kutarere.

Contact for: resource consents for subdivision and land use; stormwater drainage; water supply; sewage disposal; refuse collection and disposal; local reserves; signs; road works.

Whakatane District Council Call 07 306 0500

www.whakatane.govt.nz

14 Commerce Street, Private Bag 1002, Whakatane 3080

Whakatane District Council covers Ohope Spit, Ohakana Island and Uretara Island, Paparoa and Burke Road peninsulas, and the majority of the harbour's catchment.

the Port Ohope Development Concept Plan (currently being prepared by the council for land it owns); stormwater drainage; water supply; sewage disposal; refuse collection and disposal; local reserves; signs; road works.

Contact for: resource consents for subdivision and land use; information on

New Zealand Historic Places Trust Call 07 578 1219

www.historic.org.nz

28 Wharf Street, PO Box 13339, Tauranga

The New Zealand Historic Places Trust can provide information on archaeological sites in the Ohiwa Harbour catchment. They can also tell you about the National

Heritage Preservation Incentive Fund, which may be able to help in protection of archaeological sites on private property.

Kaitiakitanga - Manager, Environment Ngati Awa at Te Runanga o Ngati Awa Call 07 307 0760

Ngati Awa House, Louvain Street, PO Box 76, Whakatane

Contact for: information on the relationship of Ngati Awa with the harbour and for contact details for other tangata whenua with relationships with Ohiwa

Harbour (including Upokorehe Hapu of Whakatohea, Whakatohea Maori Trust Board, Waimana Kaaku, Western Tuhoie Executive); Kaitiakitanga.

Ministry of Fisheries
Call 0800 4RULES (478 537)

www.fish.govt.nz

The Ministry of Fisheries works to ensure that fisheries are used in a sustainable way and that New Zealand has a healthy aquatic ecosystem.

Contact for: advice on recreational/commercial restrictions on fishing in the Ohiwa Harbour; customary Maori fishing; general fishing information.

Department of Conservation
Call 0800 366 1080

www.doc.govt.nz

The Department of Conservation is the central government organisation charged with conserving the natural and historic heritage of New Zealand on behalf of and for the benefit of present and future New Zealanders.

Contact for: information on management of conservation land vested in the crown, information on indigenous flora and fauna of the Ohiwa Harbour catchment, and advice on conservation programmes that you can be involved in.



This brochure was put together by Environment Bay of Plenty and printed in October 2006. Information is presented as a guide only: if in doubt please talk with an expert.



