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Great Barrier Island Marine Reserve proposal: A great 80th birthday treat for Forest and Bird

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Forest and Bird applauds the Department of Conservation's proposal for a 52,000 ha marine reserve off Great Barrier Island.

“This is a bold initiative that will have great benefits for the marine environment”, says Eric Pyle, Forest and Bird's Conservation Manager. “We have been campaigning for years for more marine reserves and this proposal is fantastic news. Its announcement on Forest and Bird's 80th birthday (today) and the recent announcement of a new marine reserve at Waiheke Island makes for a wonderful birthday treat”.

The proposed size of the marine reserve would make it the largest marine reserve close to the mainland in New Zealand, right on the doorstep of New Zealand's largest population centre.

Much of New Zealand's current marine management does not provide adequately for an ecosystem-based approach, for example the quota management system is single species focused. Research is showing that marine reserves are an essential part of a sustainable marine management regime. At present, less than 1% of the coast is designated as marine reserves.

Marine reserves are some of the most popular natural areas for New Zealanders to visit. Each year over 250,000 people visit the Goat Island marine reserve at Leigh, north of Auckland. “A marine reserve so close to the growing Auckland region will help to more evenly distribute the many people keen to see the wonderful marine life conserved in marine reserves,” says Mr Pyle.

Everyone wins with marine reserves. They result in more fish for fishers, because of spillover effects and because fish grow bigger in marine reserves and bigger fish have more young. People wanting to experience the wonder of our natural marine environment win, as do those who want to see a healthier marine environment.

The Great Barrier Island proposal includes a great variety of marine habitats, which are currently inadequately represented in New Zealand. As well as estuarine habitat, deeper reef systems containing corals will also be protected.

“Everyone in favour of an increase in the number and variety of marine life, in particular fish, should take the opportunity to show their support for the Great Barrier Island marine reserve proposal over the next 3 months,” says Mr Pyle.

For more information on Forest and Bird's marine reserve campaign please see www.forestandbird.org.nz/marine