



# Experiencing Marine Reserves

## Te Kura Moana

### 2022/23 Season Report - National

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## Overview

Mountains To Sea Conservation Trust (MTSCT) was established in 2002 - CC #23406 and is the national body for the Experiencing Marine Reserves (EMR) programme. The EMR brand is unique; we have an active focus on community engagement and marine conservation. We are committed to delivering safe snorkel excursions. We are adventure activity safety audit certified (AAO 534). The national expansion of EMR is based on a non-profit franchise concept. Our EMR endorsed providers are organisations throughout the regions that have been given permission to use our brand. All EMR regional coordinators are fully trained by MTSCT and meet our endorsement criteria.

## What is EMR?

EMR empowers schools and communities by providing hands-on experiences in the ocean. Our goal is to raise awareness, understanding and support for marine conservation throughout Aotearoa (New Zealand) through the provision of dynamic experiential marine education opportunities.

The full EMR programme concept:

- Introduction to marine biodiversity
- Investigation of local/unprotected marine areas
- 1:2 adult/student ratio aim = many whānau (family) share the experience
- Look and learn – no hurting tangaroa’s children (marine creatures)
- Experience/research a marine reserve/rahui
- Be engaged and inspired
- Make comparisons
- Take ACTION for marine conservation through a kaitiaki action project

We strengthen community connection with the water through our unique and innovative events. Our events focus on improving knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours in order for them to take personal responsibility for their own water safety.

One of the biggest challenges this year was the weather, especially cyclone gabrielle and the impact it had in some of our regions , especially Tairāwhiti/Gisborne.



EMR has a team of 27 coordinators based in seven regions (with Otago/Rakiura being a satellite region) with our regional provider organisations.



### Wellington



### Nelson/Tasman



### Taranaki



### Tairāwhiti Gisborne

*He Awa Ora, He Tai Ora,  
Healthy Rivers, Living Sea  
Education Trust*

### Auckland/Northland



### Coromandel

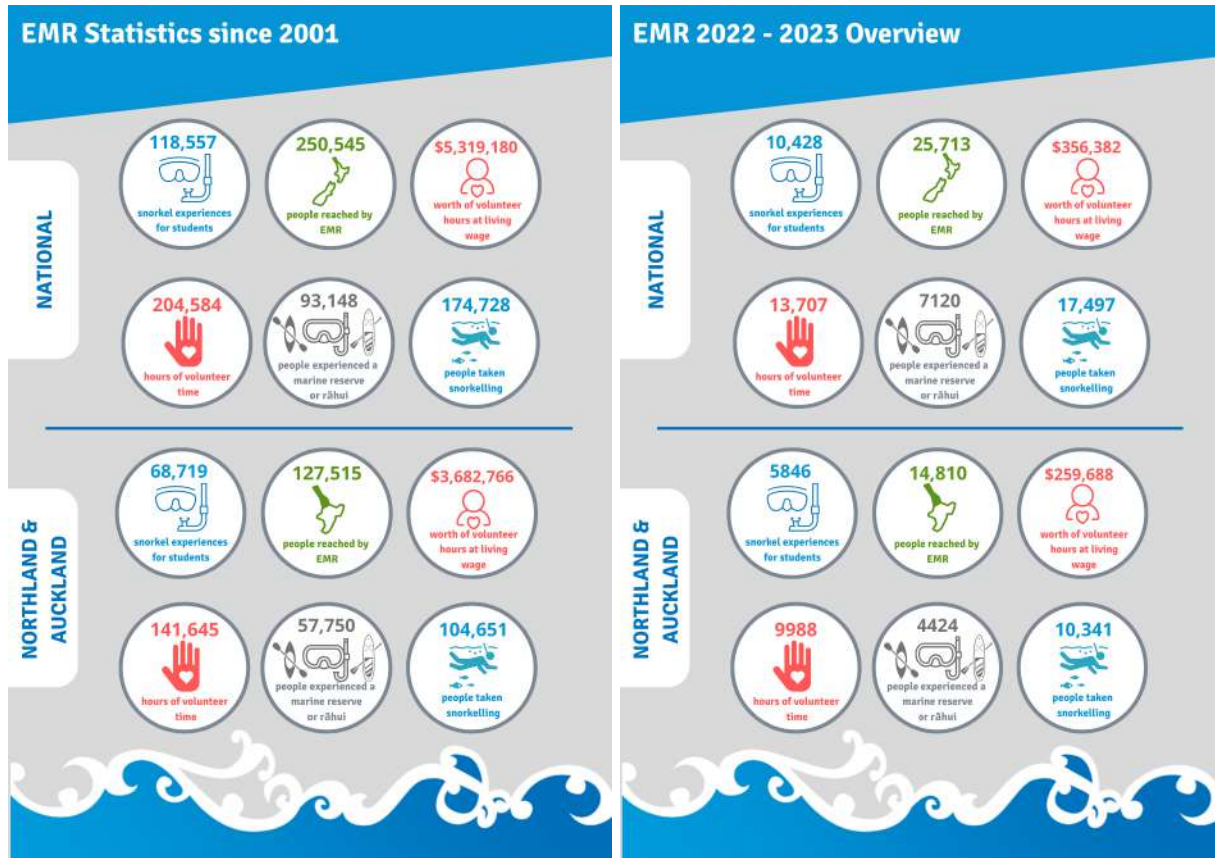
*The Friends of Te  
Whanganui-A-Hei Marine  
Reserve Trust*

Since 2001, EMR has provided snorkel experiences to **174,728** people. Of these, **91,329** experienced a NZ marine reserve or rāhui. We have delivered **413** community guided snorkel and kayak events to date, engaging **32, 016** people. We have also delivered **118,577** snorkel experiences for students and inspired **3169** kaitiaki action projects that have reached the wider community and school whānau.

During the summer of 2022/23, we had **59** Community Guided Snorkel and Kayak days throughout NZ, involving **4,829** participants. A summary of some of the key statistics can be found below.







## Highlights

EMR featured in the [New Zealand Geographic](#) 'Taking on Water' which shares stories of Aotearoa's marine reserves and the complex history and future of marine protection in Aotearoa.

"Since 2001, a programme called Experiencing Marine Reserves has immersed school students in the moana, teaching them about marine conservation and providing hands-on experience in the ocean. Here, they venture across the reefs at Goat Island Marine Reserve—New Zealand's, and perhaps the world's, first marine reserve. It now hosts 300,000 visitors every year, many coming for their first look at a relatively intact marine ecosystem."



Read the full article here: <https://www.nzgeo.com/stories/taking-on-water/>

 [www.depth.co.nz](http://www.depth.co.nz)



## Auckland

Auckland had another extremely busy season, finally being able to deliver free of any lockdowns but with new weather based challenges. Despite substantial disruption from multiple flooding and cyclone events the Auckland EMR team was able to deliver 15 full Mountains to Sea Programmes, 20 casual snorkel experiences, three spotlighting events, three volunteer training days, two marine monitoring workshops 2 stand-up paddleboarding days, 10 kayak days, and 12 snorkel days. The Auckland team also trialled their first ever night snorkel at Enclosure Bay and then again at Torbay with great success.

Through our school programmes we reached a total of 2,721 students, teachers and whānau. With an additional 2,394 community members reached through our events. Our epic team of 93 volunteers donated 1850 hours of their time, with an additional 3900 donated by school student's whānau. Our top volunteer for the season Becky Carton donated a whopping 116 hours during the 2022/23 season, which broke our previous record. Our total reach in the Auckland region in the 2022/23 season was 9,627, breaking our previous record by over 1000!



Auckland has also begun running marine monitoring workshops for community groups to upskill locals in the timed swim survey method created by Vince and Oliver and originally developed for Reef Savers. We are hoping to build on this monitoring support for community groups next season. Our team members Koha and Sophie also partnered with Auckland University to run a kina wānanga for Auckland based rangatahi, to learn about the research being undertaken by the University on kina removal and the speed of kelp forest recovery.

For our public events we continue to build on our local collaborations to create a more holistic, well rounded event experience for participants. Including incorporating activities like guided walk, freshwater monitoring workshops, raranga workshops, para kore workshops, beach clean ups, information stalls, and more. We also continue to prioritise local attendance on events by using access codes for locals on event registrations, which continues to prove successful in boosting local participation and follow through in local conservation initiatives. We continue to get a high level of participants experiencing snorkelling for the first time, sometimes getting in the ocean for the first time and it is always a joy to see their beaming smiles as they discover the wonders of te moana.

A couple of particular event highlights in Auckland was a bottlenose dolphin encounter with



Whakatane Intermediate. Pictured below.





We ran 6 brand new events, one of which was a Pupuke Lake Snorkel and Kayak Day, in collaboration with the Pupuke Songbird Project. This event was a great way for locals to learn about the importance of Lake Pupuke, the challenges facing this environment and what they can do to help.

Another event highlight was our two night snorkels we ran which were very popular and were a hit with our volunteers as well, we look forward to running them again next season. We also triumphed in the fact that we were finally able to run our Tāwharanui Snorkel Day in the actual marine reserve for the first time - weather and ocean conditions had meant that the past 8 attempts had been unsuccessful.

### Northland (Te Tai Tokerau)

This season we delivered 21 community events and we continued to engage taitamariki/rangatahi as snorkel guides and ran training events in both Whangarei and the Far North. EMR provided hands-on training for these guides during pool sessions in the Far North and Whangarei Pools with additional ongoing practical training in the field.

This has attracted active Maori youth (including young women) engagement in our programmes, also becoming water safety ambassadors. Taitamariki helped at all of the events over the summer of 2022/23 and we are set to provide similar training opportunities with pathways into marine conservation for 2023/24. More than 3994 people were engaged in snorkel experiences in the Northland region. EMR reached 3104 students of all ages from a variety of backgrounds. Many of these students were able to see the effects of marine protection first hand through snorkeling in a marine reserve or protected area.

In addition to this, 890 members of the public participated in EMR community snorkel or kayak days with 1085 volunteers hours helping out during the events. Our reach in Northland this season was 4948.

We supported a 'Under water Lovers' competition trip to the Poor Knights thanks to a donation from the dissolved Whangarei Underwater Club, we were also able to support free guided snorkel experiences for schools that would not of been able to attend otherwise. The Northland EMR crew hosted their first night snorkel at Matapouri which turned out to be a huge success. The sunset, the full moon and the awesome energy from everyone who came along meant it



was a super fun evening for all! We found that the night snorkel attracted a different type of participant, experienced freedivers that were keen to try night snorkeling.

For a second year in a row, the Northland Regional Council marine biosecurity team joined us at the majority of our events with a focus on providing the public with information on marine pests. EMR also continued the engagement of taitamariki/rangatahi as snorkel guides and have continued to develop our 'Marine Mahi for Rangatahi' project with our top (Over 52 hours) taitamariki volunteer Noah Edwards being *Winner of the Youth environmental leader award at the 2023 Whakamānawa ā Taiao – Environmental Awards*.

*Group photo of all those involved with the running of the Taputaputa Snorkel Day*



EMR is extremely grateful for the continued manaaki shown by [Ngāti Kuri](#) to partner with us to deliver this event at the unique estuary of Taputaputa for our Far North community. This year we had 90 people participate in this event, which helped EMR communicate some important water safety information, such as to be prepared, know your limits, be aware of dangers and watch out for yourself and others.





## Taranaki

One of the highlights was seeing the passion from the coastal Taranaki kids about marine reserves after visiting Goat Island. The trip north inspired the students to write a letter to our local MP, Glen Bennett about setting up a more accessible marine reserve in Taranaki.

We had a lot of people snorkelling for the first time this season and several families followed up with a snorkel at Nga Motu Beach after first learning to snorkel at one of our pool snorkel trails. We even had South Taranaki families travelling for our Nga Motu community snorkel days



*Snorkel pool trials*



## Wellington

We've had over 1000 students and 256 adults from 25 different schools and community groups take part in marine experiences and community events throughout our summer education programmes across the region. Our free community snorkel days continue to exceed the previous year's numbers, with attendance reaching 629 participants that joined us for guided in-water tours and free gear hire in the waters of Titahi Bay, Whitireia Park and Taputeranga Marine Reserve. The paid event out at Kāpiti Island was sold out over two days attracting 140 participants. Due to weather and cancelled sailings - 60 participants were able to take part.

Marine conservation action and awareness-raising events have engaged a further 204 people who have helped with coastal clean-ups, citizen science or been part of celebrations and advocacy. This year Mountains to Sea Wellington dove into the fourth year of the Love Rimurimu education programme for schools with funding support from WWF New Zealand, Wellington Zoo and Eurofins. As of 2023 the Love Rimurimu – Restoration project has now entered the planting phase. The project aims to transplant the first lab-grown seaweeds into the moana by August 2023.

This season our dedicated team of volunteers committed a combined 489 hours to guide and engage participants at our Community Snorkel events.



### Wellington Participant event quotes:

"First time, felt very safe and supported, the guide was patient, saw beautiful Rimurimu / Paua/fish" - Lizzie

"How many fishes are out there! As was seaweed! Mental health gets balanced with wide open sea and community vibe" - Anonymous

*Love Rimurimu project education at EMR community guided snorkel day*





## Nelson/Tasman

Shrieks of joy and excitement were heard during the Rotokura (Cable Bay) Community guided Snorkel Day. Papatuanuku put on a beautiful show as the sun was shining, water was glistening and a bit of a swell was rolling in. Participants from Nelson/Tasman communities, 117 to be exact, got the chance to snorkel for free with a guide. Marine life sightings included sea stars, banded wrasse, paua, an eagle ray, squid, kahawai and of course the ole' reliable spotties!

Snorkelling guides started their adventure with a strong message about water safety, the importance of observing conditions and assessing risk.

Each student came up with amazing action projects from computer programmes, board games (with some very interesting facts), dioramas and intricate artwork. You could tell that there was a lot of thought and research that went into each project. These were shared during a celebration day where students showcased their work for their parents.

One highlight happened during the Whakamana te moana o te tai o aorere Wananga where 4 adults who all had a bit of anxiety around water were able to overcome their fears and by the end of the session had gained considerable confidence during snorkel session and made comments about visiting the moana in the future and bringing their tamariki. It seemed to have reopened a connection back to the sea.





It was beautiful to witness but also humbling as I realise that there are so many adults who have lost connection to the sea or never formed a relationship with the moana. Other highlights include seeing the quick confidence boost from a tamariki visibly shaking with fear to the end of the session where they are happily exploring and being amazed at what they can see. Also seeing the hard work and thoughtfulness that went into the action projects.



**Nelson events participant quotes:**

"All the volunteers were lovely! I felt confident and safe on the water." *Anna Mae*

"I felt safe enough to overcome my fear of snorkelling." *Anonymous*







### Tairāwhiti (Gisborne)

Te Tapuwae o Rongokako Marine Reserve Community Snorkel Day April 2023

We had to reschedule due to the cyclone impacts but we had a beautiful day with some sunshine and awesome participants!

It was an early start to coincide with low tide but everyone enjoyed themselves and had some tamariki who had never snorkelled before - what an amazing place to learn and in a safe environment with our team.

### Otago Satellite

This year, due to a lack of funding there were no school programmes or community events run in Otago, however two students were picked based on their video submissions to represent their region at the Annual Poor Knights Competition Trip.

The winners were Sophie McWilliam from Waikouaiti School and Cormac McAvinue from Balaclava School.

Cormac's video can be found [here](#).



## Inspiring action

EMR action projects foster kaitiakitanga - guardianship and facilitate action to address marine issues. Some schools go above and beyond with their action projects and creativity to help look after their marine environment.

### Northland

Taipa Area School is one of the closest kura to the Maitai Bay Rahui. When the year 7 & 8 students set out to snorkel their local rahui, they wanted to monitor the number of fish they saw. Each group had a recorder to record the number of fish seen during a timed swim along the snorkel trail (fixed transect) These surveys provide an effective and simple means for participants to engage with their local marine environment and learn more about its health and functioning.

#### Some student learning below:

Q: A rahui is when you can't take things from an area to protect important resources. Why is there a rahui at Maitai Bay?

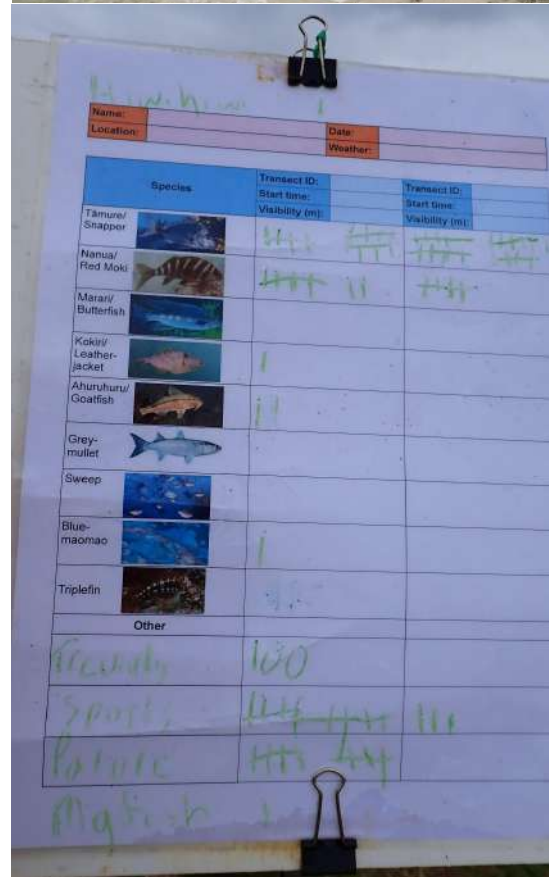
A: The reason why there's a rahui at Maitai Bay is to grow the ecosystem under the water. This is because a few years ago anyone was allowed to fish and basically take anything they want to. Soon this escalated very badly because there were barely any fish so Te Whānau Moana ordered a rahui on Maitai Bay and the rahui has been there for five years.

Q: What are Te Whanau Moana trying to achieve?

A: Te Whanau Moana are the people who put a rahui on Maitai Bay to help the ecosystem grow. The rahui has been on Maitai Bay for five years. For the past five years the sea creatures have been doing very good. There are more kinds of fish, shellfish and general sealife.

Q: What kinds of sealife were there?

A: There were all kinds of sealife. There were snappers, triggerfish, stingrays, leatherfish, and much more.





The Whananaki School action plan had a focus on cleaning up the estuary, especially after Cyclone Gabrielle. Senior students Katie Mander and Tamanui Mita-Warren teamed up with Seacleaners.com to remove rubbish from their estuary. Whananaki School has been participating in EMR since the programme's inception and due to the school being adjacent to the estuary, they have always had a strong focus on action to protect the estuary, including monitoring and removing rubbish from the catchment.

## Auckland

In Auckland there were many students that completed individual as well as group actions to help enhance, protect and restore their local taiao. Some examples of student actions included weeding native plants around local waterways, riparian plantings, marine education websites, digital games, community posters, litter trap designs, stormwater art, letters to council, wai care monitoring, MM2 surveys, fundraisers, pest monitoring, beach clean ups, and more. The main environmental threat areas that were covered by students were plastic pollution, stormwater pollution, overfishing, lack of marine protected areas, lack of local biodiversity, loss of habitat and environmental pests.

Mana Whaitake- This was an action project started after Brooklyn Schools EMR programme in the Tasman region. This has become a yearly all day event involving 11 Tasman district schools and 260 students (numbers from March 2023 event). It involved 25 minute sessions of different activities and science-based exercises, rotating through nine stations set-up on Kaiteriteri beach and surrounds. Activities were run by a mix of scientists, enviro groups, empowered older students (who created and ran the activity), and Tasman Bay Guardian who took the year 7 & 8 students snorkelling. This has been such a successful event that we are considering replicating it for Nelson district schools.



## Community Led action

### Litter Intelligence Surveys

Auckland had two schools (Papatoetoe West and Waterlea) complete litter intelligence surveys up at Goat Island as part of their Mountains to Sea Programmes and in collaboration with Sustainable Coastlines. This proved very impactful to the students as many focus their action projects on monitoring rubbish in their local community and coming up with creative solutions to stop rubbish entering the environment in the first place.



*Left image: Waterlea students' action project of a self designed litter trap to help stop litter entering the stormwater drains Right image: Waterlea students completing a litter intelligence survey at Goat Island with Sustainable Coastlines*

### Subtidal Monitoring

The Rakino snorkellers group were trained up on the timed swim survey method by the Auckland team so that they are able to monitor the rocky reefs around Rakino, this was generously funded by the Waiheke Local Board. The Auckland team also hosted a second marine monitoring workshop on Waiheke for locals and the Waiheke Marine Project to also learn the timed swim method and how to incorporate it into existing monitoring programmes.



*Waiheke local completing a timed swim survey at*

*Enclosure Bay*



## Kina Wānanga

During the April school holidays we teamed up with [University of Auckland - Waipapa Taumata Rau](#), [Goat Island Marine Discovery Centre](#), and [Para Kore ki Tāmaki](#) to bring together rangatahi from across Tāmaki Makaurau together to learn more about rocky reef restoration in Tikapa Moana Te Moananui-ā-Toi Hauraki Gulf, with a particular focus on kina and their impact on the rocky reef ecosystem.

University of Auckland lecturer Nick Shears and Phd student Kelsey Miller shared their work looking at the relationship between kina and diminishing kelp forests and how to restore reefs to a healthier balance. Rangatahi carried out experiments on kina collected from a healthy kelp forest compared to a kina barren to see the impacts of these two habitat types on kina health. Rangatahi also got to hear from Brianne who has been coordinating the [Waiheke Marine Project's](#) kelp gardeners group throughout the summer, aiming to reduce the number of kina on the rocky reef in Enclosure Bay, in the hopes that the kelp forests get a chance to grow back.

After their session in the lab rangatahi then got a chance to explore Goat Island marine reserve and observe kina in their natural habitat along with an array of other marine life that call Goat Island home. As an extra special bonus some of the Rangatahi also got to learn about hydrophone research from Tim Haggart and University of Auckland Phd student Nakita Daniel, as well as getting the chance to make their own hydrophone to take home with them. Hydrophones are used in order to record the sounds that occur underwater, which can provide key insights on a variety of different marine issues.



*Top image: Nick Shears teaching rangatahi about his kina research in Tikapa Moana. Middle left image: Rangatahi exploring Goat Island Marine Reserve. Middle right image: Team member Koha*





leading a kina experiment with rangatahi. Bottom image: Rangatahi learning how to make hydrophones with Tim Haggart.



EMR- Te Kura Moana went out to Maunganui Bay (Deep Water Cove) with [Nga Kaitiaki o te Ahi](#), a marae based learning programme to see the difference from the unprotected Tapeka Poit to the no-take Rāhui. The rāhui means no taking any fish species/marine life (except kina) and it was initiated under the Fisheries Act by local hapū Ngati Kuta and Patukeha of Te Rawhiti. Maunganui Bay was closed in December 2010 under section 186A of the Fisheries Act 1996. Initially this was set down for two years with an extension granted every two years and it is still in place today. We came across a garfish, that was incredible rare to see around the mainland coast. The observation was added to our iNaturalist database.





EMR actively encourages schools and communities to contribute to existing databases like iNaturalist. EMR has over 1053 recorded observations of 311 species on iNaturalist with schools being able to upload their own observations after their snorkel experiences.







### Northland Marine Hui

This was an opportunity for 20 educators to learn from each other, network and plan awesome collaborative activities for the benefit of our marine environment, communities and taitamariki. Hosted by EMR with [TriOceans](#), [Northland Regional Council](#), [Ocean-Spirit](#), [EcoSolutions](#), [Seaweed](#), [Patuharakeke Te Iwi Trust Board](#), [NorthTec - Te Pūkenga](#), [Sails for Science](#), [Kohatu Development](#), [Enviroschools](#) and the [Ocean Mind](#) project.

### Pourewa Valley catchment restoration Year two

In continuation from last years Pourewa Valley catchment restoration project the Auckland team worked with an additional two schools (St Thomas' and St Joseph's) as well as Meadowbank again to continue monitoring and restoring the Pourewa catchment in partnership with Whitebait Connection, Auckland Sustainable Schools and Nga Kaitiaki Hapori o Pourewa. Students assisted in installing artificial inanga spawning habitat, inanga egg checks, infill riparian planting and weeding. We also ran a community fish survey workshop as well as a spotlighting event to help engage the wider community in this restoration initiative.



*Left image: Wednesday showing Pourewa community members the fish that live in their local stream. Right image: participants spotting glow worms during the Pourewa spotlighting event*

### Once in a lifetime snorkel experience - celebrating student action, art and leadership



Experiencing Marine Reserves (EMR) - Te Kura Moana ran their 22nd annual Poor Knights competition trip on Friday 12th May, sponsored by Dive! Tutukaka and The Bobby Stafford-Bush Foundation. EMR is a programme of the Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust. The day started with a minute's silence to show respect and aroha to the young man and his whanau following the recent tragedy at Abbey Caves.

Students came from as far north as Peria (Kaitia) and as far south as Dunedin to experience one of Aotearoa's oldest marine reserves. Students are selected based on action projects they have undertaken and the enthusiasm they show when studying & experiencing the marine environment. The national delivery of EMR is thanks to a network of provider organisations across the country and would not be possible without the amazing support of the The Tindall Foundation and Lotteries National Community.

EMR started in Tai Tokerau/Northland in 2001 with just three schools and the idea of comparing unprotected marine areas to fully protected marine areas with water safety messages embedded throughout the programme. Seeing huge tāmure/snapper swimming has inspired thousands of kids to take action for the marine environment and exercise kaitiakitanga - guardianship for their local beach or harbour.

For this year's trip we had 32 students and 30 guardians representing 26 schools from 7 regions of Aotearoa including Northland, Auckland, Taranaki, Gisborne, Wellington, Nelson/Tasman and Otago. Since 2002, we have taken representatives from 399 schools, totalling 563 students! Each student attends with a parent or guardian. We also had some second generation students attend as guardians!

"Action projects this year included monitoring rimurimu with the Love Rimurimu project in Wellington, rahui monitoring, comparison of marine species at different areas, invasive species research, a kina barren board game, litter blitz with Sustainable coastlines, informative video about the impacts of microplastics and the local rahui says EMR founder Samara Nicholas.

In addition to the opportunity to represent their school or region for the EMR ACTION prize, we offer the EMR Ocean Art prize. The Bobby Stafford-Bush Foundation supports this special prize for young kiwis that have experienced the marine environment with EMR and display that passion and experience through art.

This is the fifth year we have offered the Darren Shields Wettee Spearfishing & Wetsuits freediving representative prize, for a Northland high school student that shows talent for freediving. This year's winner was Noah Edwards from Whangarei Boys High School.





On board the vessel 'Perfect Day' our snorkel site this year was the stunning 'Garden's at Maroro Bay, part of the Poor Knights Islands that have been protected by no-take status since 1981. Participants were delighted to see thousands of two spot demoiselles, black angel fish, snapper galore and the friendly sandagers wrasse. With this being the first time most of the students and guardians had ever visited the Poor Knights!

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*Feedback from participants*

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"Thank you for taking me to the Poor Knights to go snorkeling. I had an amazing time and it was a really fun day. I have never been to the Poor Knights before and I wouldn't have been able to go without all the help. The islands were really pretty and I saw lots of cool fish. My favourite thing was seeing a stingray and going in the cave. From Josie (Taipa Area School, Northland)"

"A highlight of the trip for me was experiencing first hand the abundance and friendliness of fish inside the marine reserve. Because of the safety the reserve provides, you can observe so many different kinds of fish up close which is an unparalleled experience. It has inspired me to speak up in my own personal life to educate people around me and advocate for the existence of more marine reserves" Bella Tissink

**Ollie Smith - St Thomas School** - "Thank you for taking me on the best experience of my life so far. It was my first time at the Poor Knights and I liked all the different types of diversity of fish and seeing the schools of blue maomao swarmed around me. It was really exciting to be picked and it felt really special even though I didn't think I had done much. I am an enviro leader and help do litterless lunches. I'm doing overfishing and raising awareness for my action project. I'm not sure of my plan yet but I am planning now. The poor knights were definitely a lot different than my local area. My local area has lots of mud and my local area could look more lively if we banned fishing."

**Sarah Smith (Ollie's mum)** - "It was such an awesome experience to share with Ollie. I grew up in Whangarei so it's really special to share this experience with him".

**Natasha Foulagi (Guardian to Serene)**: "I thought the trip today was really fantastic. It's such a good experience especially to see the kids experience it too it will help them to do some good too. We would love to do something similar. It was really cool and kind of you to pick Serene. You don't want to miss these opportunities, we normally wouldn't be able to do it. It's super cool that EMR comes to the schools and shares ideas and help to inspire the kids. They really enjoy it. It's great for them to learn and be aware about the environment and teach them about the future and be more open minded about the problems around it.



**Jody Curran (Mum):** It was pretty amazing, as parents you're so proud that they've done something really cool that will hopefully improve marine life for the future. It's really epic that she got to come and do this, it's an amazing reward for all her mahi. I've had a few of my students win this trip before, and now my own daughter.

**Bailey Liu - Glenbrae** - "This was my first ever trip to the poor knights it was really cool. I got to see all the different kinds of fish and how to snorkel properly. It was quite different to goat island, this time the sea was a lot deeper, clearer and way more fish. I was really excited to be selected, for my action project I'm an enviroschool leader, I learn about wastes and rubbish. I want to make my community cleaner by picking up rubbish. I don't know how I'm going to do it yet."

Rimu Taiapa (11 Years old, Mokau primary)- "It was fun because I saw hundreds of fish swimming underneath the boat, an eagle ray, baby snapper school . I had fun on the paddle board as well and think I saw a shark in the cave. Finding the bright shells for our necklace was cool."

Ken Taiapa - "I really appreciated the chance to connect with a lot of like-minded people. I really liked that our tamariki got to connect with the EMR staff and got further insight into this mahi. Also I really appreciate the EMR team correctly pronouncing Te reo and including tikanga and local stories into teachings about marine biology and biodiversity."

Flynn Brydon (9 years old, Hira School)- I saw this huge blue fish, an eagle ray and a stingray and a black triangle fish in the seaweed. Travelling out and back on the boat was fun especially getting splashed at the back of the boat. I liked making new friends. During my project I was surprised at how much rubbish we found in the creek at our school.

Cormac McAvinue (9 Years old, Ballaclava School)- "I really liked the snorkelling. There were so many snapper and when we were in the shark cave and came out into the sun the snapper looked very shiny and cool. We also saw a fish on the rocks and a grey fish swimming through the seaweed. I liked shooting the video for my project and all the jokes were mine. "

Sean McAvinue- "My son was feeling a bit weary to snorkel at first but he gained confidence and ended up getting in 3 different times and went into the shark fin cave, which he was very proud of. The staff were very patient with him and didn't push at all and just let him do it at his own pace."

Muri Sullivan- "For me the best part was interacting with the kids and seeing how excited they were when they were snorkelling. I really enjoyed visiting the pinnacles as well and comparing this marine reserve to Wellington's."

Charlie Kirona (10 Years old, Poroutawhao School). The water was so blue i thought I was in Fiji, and I noticed that there were too many kina and not enough seaweed at whale bay. I thought it was so cool when we went into the cave and how the water went from dark to light. It was my





first time seeing snapper in the water. I really enjoyed making the maro for my project and I remember when mum came to pick me up from school I didn't want to leave until I finished it.

Carl Johnson- "It's been a once-in-a-lifetime adventure that was well-organised and full of amazing experiences. It was also great meeting new people from the other regions that had common interests.

Aio-Bebe Waitai-Hollis (17 yrs old -Te kura o manutuke).- " When asked about career paths I said that I was interested in Marine biology and my teacher gave me an opportunity to enter the contest to come to Poor knights. I liked diving at Poor Knights and that the fish were not afraid of me so I could get very close to them."

Margot Manson (8 years old, Wainui Beach School)- I really liked how friendly the fish were and you could get really close and you could see how colourful and beautiful they were. I also spotted a camouflaged scorpion fish hidden on a wall. I loved meeting Sophie and the other kids, and making the lockets (of micro mulloscs) was really cool cause I have something to remember the trip by.



*Group photo from the Poor Knights Competition trip in May 2023*

Brian Stafford-Bush attended our annual trip in 2023, with the Bobby Stafford-Bush Foundation being the main sponsor for the trip, tragically Brian Stafford-Bush recently



passed away. We have had a almost decade long relationship and with the support of the Bobby Stafford-Bush Foundation, we were able to expose thousands of families in Auckland to the underwater world and introduce the opportunity of bringing representatives from all over NZ from Stewart Island to Kaitaia for the ultimate marine experience at the Poor Knights Marine Reserve, since 2015. Please see some tribute quotes below. *Moe moe ra Brian, you will be missed xx*

"Our daughter deeply treasures her memories of her trip to the Poor Knights and they continue to trigger her interest in ecology and the marine world. She had the privilege of meeting Brian. We were struck by how he combined a very approachable and personable style with a deep commitment to making a difference. We feel very privileged to be among the numerous whanau who have benefitted from his vision and drive"

"I'm a 9-year-old Dunedin boy and I was on the trip this year. I was extremely nervous because had never snorkelled in the open water before and never been surrounded by schools of fish.

I was lucky enough to be buddied up with Brian on the trip and he helped keep me calm in the water. He helped my confidence grow to a point where I could enter Shark Fin Cave and experience the light entering a cave and making the all fish sparkle. Thank you Brian for the once-in-a-lifetime experience"

"I had a lovely chat to Brian and Paddy at Schnappa Rock after the boat trip this year. They had so much passion and enthusiasm and you could really see the delight they took in providing such amazing opportunities to so many children (and the adults that come with them!). I'll never forget the moment my son Ollie looked up from snorkelling and said "this is the best experience of my life so far". For a child who has often been wary and anxious about new experiences, this was so special to hear him say this. This would not have been possible without the support of the Bobby Stafford-Bush trust and we will always be grateful that we got to be part of such an incredible opportunity"

"I'll never forget this experience. How great was it to share it with my mum!?! This perfect day will inspire my art works in times to come"

"The support the Bobby Stafford-Bush Foundation has shown is underwritten by action and deeds of such value that they will remain with those children lucky enough to experience them for a lifetime. The opportunities and experiences afforded to those children (and parents) by the caring and selfless acts of Brian and the Bobby Stafford-Bush Foundation are completely priceless and give us all hope for a truly brighter, more sustainable, and more enlightened future. As a representative of the Trust Board, one of us was lucky enough to attend the dinner at Schnapper Rock following the trip to the Poor Knights (2023). The looks on the faces of the children, parents and caregivers betrayed nothing other than gratitude, wonder and respect for what Brian and the Bobby Stafford-Bush Foundation have done for





them. Brian was a gift, and The Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust are truly grateful to have shared in the celebrations he brought with him"



*Xander Vanstones with the late Brian Stafford-Bush*

## **Community Guided Snorkel & Paddle Days**

During the summer of 2022/23 we had 59 Community Guided Snorkel, Kayak & SUP days throughout NZ, involving 4,829 participants. Community events continue to play an important role for EMR and engage the wider community.

EMR has continued to expand the range of experiences and locations and is able to cater for a wide range of snorkelers/paddlers - from complete novices to experienced freedivers. Especially the 'Adventure snorkel days' to some of the islands in the Hauraki Gulf run by EMR Auckland attract some passionate ocean-lovers and provide a unique opportunity to explore some of the



less accessible snorkel sites. They are also a great way to highlight and collaborate with local organisations so that more community members can engage with local conservation initiatives. This season we trialed a number of night snorkel events!

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*Feedback from participants*

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*"Felt totally safe. Good communication between supervisors and helpers. My grand kids were really well supervised and have really increased their snorkelling confidence. Thanks Ray, Annika and Laura for your guidance." - Joanne Higgins*

*"I enjoyed spending time with my family in a fun and safe environment. I enjoyed also having my nieces with me learning about the importance of having marine reserves!!! Thank you volunteer guides Landi and Andy for a great snorkel trip :-)" Maggie Qu, Shakespear Snorkel Day*



*Auckland Coordinator Wednesday ready to take her group out exploring Army Bay reef*

## **Volunteer Update**

A large team of volunteers continue to support the EMR snorkel days all over the country. Many of them were participants prior to volunteering and they are amazing ambassadors of the EMR programme.



Auckland continues to hold volunteer training sessions at the start of the season and have streamlined their volunteer process to build an army of dedicated gold-star volunteers.

A high proportion of our Northland volunteers are regular volunteers. In Northland we ran pre-season training in collaboration with Freedive Aotearoa.



*Some of our regular volunteers Les and Sachet modeled the safety briefing to taitamariki at the Oneroa Bay, Russell snorkel day to ensure consistency.*



*Pre-season taitamariki snorkel training with Freedive Aotearoa*



Our volunteer's hard work and passion is incredibly valuable to our organisation and we greatly appreciate their contribution to creating the future kaitiaki of te moana. They assisted as guides on snorkel days, wrangled boogie boards on the safety kayaks, washed and organised snorkel gear, buddied with participants on kayak days, helped us make ratios on school delivery days and helped us with trailer maintenance. Many of our senior guides also acted as great mentors, supporting and teaching our newest volunteers how to guide participants.

Over the 2022/23 season, volunteers have contributed 13,707 hours of their time across Aotearoa. With one top volunteer in Tāmaki Makaurau spending 116 hours assisting our mahi.







*Torbay Snorkel Day in Auckland had a record breaking 37 volunteers helping out throughout the day!*

## **Mountains To Sea Conservation Trust Wānanga 2023**

Our annual national Mountains to Sea wānanga with our sister programme Whitebait Connection was in October 2022. What a treat to come together in the rohe of Patuharakeke at Takahiwai Marae to explore the theme of Te Kotahitanga.

Highlights included:

- 🌿 Our amazing keynote speakers; Rereata Makiha, Sheridan Waitai, Eimear Egan and Dr. Irene Middleton

- 🌿 The field trips to the Whangārei Harbour Marine Reserve, Ruakākā River inanga spawning habitat restoration project site and NIWA Hatchery.

- 🌿 Uku/clay kotahitanga workshop

- 🌿 Social evening with quiz night and DJ Koha

- 🌿 Exploring the Poor Knights Islands and Waipū River tributaries during coordinator training and finding a Hochstetters Frog!

Common themes that emerged were centered around the power of kotahitanga/unity. It's vital to be open and make space for multiple perspectives through creating supportive and safe spaces for honest korero, and recognizing that different perspectives are an opportunity, not a threat.

During our workshop we worked together to come up with a whakatauki:

Mā te ta me te hi



kia mauri tū, kia mauri rere,  
ki ngā ao e rua,  
hei whakakotahi ai i a tātou

From the blend of this and that we become one,  
Take in the ever flowing life force, review the two worlds,  
through two contexts, two perspectives,  
to unite us.

Huge thank you to our funders Foundation North, 2plus, Ministry for the Environment and to our partners and collaborators Experiencing Marine Reserves - EMR, Patuharakeke Te Iwi Trust Board, NIWA, Oceandiversity Sea Adventures, Francida, Maria Lawton, The Porthouse Bar and Eatery, DJ Koha, Wednesday Davis (Quiz Master extraordinaire), Davina Duke and Hera Johns (Uku Shack), Luana Pirihi, Ruakākā Scout Den, Dive! Tutukaka, Tasman Bay Guardians, He Awa Ora, He Tai Ora, Healthy Rivers, Living Sea, Mountains to Sea Wellington, EOS Ecology Participatory Science & Engagement, Northland Regional Council, Carolyn Smith, MTF Finance, NZAEE.

<https://youtu.be/4hhMMLAwuHE> Video clip and images by 📹 Sophie Journee



## Continuing projects and conservation initiatives

### Celebrating Seaweek - Te Ika o te Tau (Fish of the Year)



Seaweek - *Kaupapa Moana* took place in the second week of March with many events nationwide celebrating our ocean. Like every year, EMR has contributed significantly to the success of Seaweek. EMR's annual Fish of the Year/*Te Ika o Te Tau* competition aims to raise awareness for some of the issues our awesome ika face and teach people about the incredible biodiversity in our freshwater and marine environments. Voting was open to the public between the 4th of March to the 31st March 2023.

### Marine Mahi for Rangatahi

*Marine Mahi for Rangatahi* supported taitamariki/rangatahi to develop new skills and opportunities for career pathways. The training involves snorkel training in the pool, mentorship in the field and opportunities for this age group assisting as snorkel guides at our events. We identify rangatahi to participate through our volunteer training events. Our participants gain increased knowledge of environmental issues and the actions needed to take to resolve them. They also have skills and practical experience in implementing the solutions. However, most importantly, they are inspired to protect and restore our shared life-sustaining ecosystems for future generations. We joined forces with [Freedive Aotearoa](#) to deliver a free





diver course to our 'Marine Mahi for Rangatahi' mentees. We had a awesome bunch of Whangarei based taitamariki who have an affinity with the moana. This course included freediving foundations, 200m swim test, 25m dynamic apnea and free dive rescue techniques.

We focus on marine pest detection, marine biodiversity monitoring, snorkel guiding, marine reserve/ rāhui surveillance and marine education. We work alongside the NRC marine biosecurity team so we can help to detect invasive species. We are extremely happy to announce a further partnership with [Dive! Tutukaka](#) where we have chosen Noah as our EMR representative from our 'Marine Mahi for Rangatahi' project to gain SCUBA training and work experience thanks to sponsorship from Dive Tutukaka this winter!!! Congratulations Noah !



*Noah assisting with the removal of invasive fan worm at Reotahi Marine Reserve*

## Health and Safety

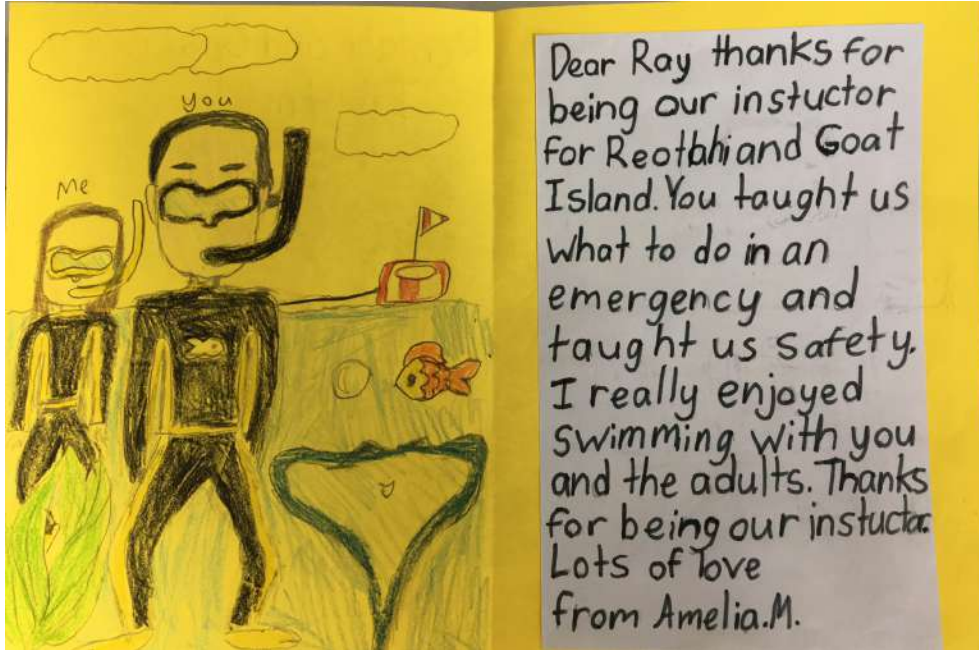
As the national umbrella organisation for all other regions, the trust's Health and Safety management for the team, volunteers, participants and everyone we associate with is our number one priority. The trust is accredited Adventure Activity provider (AAO 534) with Qualworx . New coordinators always receive full training prior to the start of the programmes and are provided hands-on support with their initial delivery to ensure all H&S procedures are understood and followed at all times.

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*Teacher's feedback*

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St Francis Xavier Catholic School showing appreciation to EMR coordinator Ray Downing

*"This type of hands of education was so valuable for our ākonga and their whānau, being based in urban Auckland we often feel disconnected from te moana so programmes like Experiencing Marine Reserves is critical in helping build our connection back to te taiao" - Marama Nepe, Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Piripono (Auckland)*



St Joseph students snorkelling with a school of silver drummer at Goat Island marine reserve

## EMR in the Media around the country

- National:  
- NZ Geographic



- NZUA Annual Report



#### Northland:

- Northern Advocate FOY
- Bay Cronical
- NZ Herald - Maitai Bay



Here is a little [clip](#) made by some of our participants that have a Youtube channel

#### Auckland:

- Enclosure Bay Snorkel Day, Waiheke Gulf News
- Mana Whenua Te Matuku Paddle, Waiheke Weekender

#### Nelson/Tasman:

- Tonga Island Snorkel Day, Stuff article
- Riwaka school students at Poor Knights Competition Trip, The Leader Tasman Edition
- RNZ interview with Tasman Bay Guardians
- Tonga Island Snorkel Days, Guardian article

#### Wellington:

- RNZ interview about the Love Rimurimu project  
<https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/afternoons/audio/2018875364/bumper-year-ahead-for-wellington-s-kelp-forests>
- Kapiti Newspaper article about Kāpiti Island community snorkel and the Love





Rimurimu project  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jtj34DJORoVXZOqbDESxd5Tk3sOuYXvo/view>

- Wellington City Council promoting the Community Snorkel Event as a “must-do” in the Wellington region  
<https://www.stuff.co.nz/environment/128774191/as-the-climate-warms-wellingtons-underwater-forests-are-in-trouble>

## National Funders and partnerships

- Bobby-Stafford Bush Foundation
- Dive! Tutukaka
- Seaweek
- Tindall Foundation
- Wettle Wetsuits and Spearfishing
- Lotteries (National community)
- Water Safety NZ
- Moanamana (NZL Blue Belt project)

## Regional funders and Supporters

### Northland

Foundation North, Lotteries- COGS, Sport Northland - Tu Manawa Active Aotearoa, Water Safety NZ, Northland Regional Council, Lotteries (National community), Whangarei Underwater Club (dissolved)

### Auckland

Fullers 360, Auckland University (G.I.F.T), Active - Tu Manawa Active Aotearoa, Auckland Council Biosecurity, Uru Whakaaro, Recreation Solutions, Eastern Bays Songbird, Pupuke Birdsong, Auckland Council Parks, Auckland Council Local



Taputeranga Snorkel Day (Wellington)



Papakura Paddle Day (Auckland)



Boards, Fortuna Foundation, Foundation North, Bobby Stafford Bush Foundation

### Tairāwhiti Gisborne

Department of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Education

### Wellington

Eurofins, Friends of Taputeranga Marine Reserve Trust, Greater Wellington Regional Council, Hutt Mana Charitable Trust, New Zealand Community Trust, Pelorus Trust, Wellington City Council, Wellington Community Trust, Wellington Zoo and WWF New Zealand

### Nelson/Tasman

Z Energy, Abel Tasman Eco Tours Abel Tasman Sea shuttles, Kaiteriteri Recreation Reserve Board, Port Nelson, Motueka Top Ten Holiday Park, Guardians of the Sea, Cable Bay Kayaks

## Partnerships

### Northland

Fish Forever, Northland Regional Council, Ngati Kuri, DOC Whangarei, Seaweed, Sport Northland, Te Whana o te Nanakia Trust (Whananaki CLD), Te Rangi i Taiawhiaotia Trust, NZUA - New Zealand Underwater Association

### Auckland

Aotearoa Lakes, Auckland Council Biodiversity, Auckland Council Sustainable Schools, Auckland Sea kayaks, Auckland Sea shuttles, Charlie's Birds, Friends of Te Auaunga (Oakley) Creek, Friends of the Farm, Friends of Long Bay, Goat Island Marine Discovery Centre, Hapua Thrive, Kaipātiki Project, Kelly Tarltons Marine Wildlife Trust, Leigh Marine Lab, Mission Bay Watersports, Motutapu Outdoor Education



Maunganui Bay Snorkel Day (Northland)



Lower Moutere School Snorkel Experience (Nelson)





Centre, MERC, Nga Kaitiaki Hapori o Pourewa, Noises Trust, Para Kore Ki Tāmaki, Pest Free Kaipātiki, Rakino Snorkelers Group, Restore Hibiscus and Bays, Rotoroa Trust, Sustainable Coastlines, SUP Waiheke, Te Pua Nga Mara, Tāmaki Sports, Uru Whakaaro, Waiheke Marine Project, Waiheke Resources Trust, Whangateau Holiday Park, Whitebait Connection, Wildlife Shaun, Young Ocean Explorers

### Tairāwhiti Gisborne

Gisborne District Council, Friends of Te Tapuwae O Rongokako Marine Reserve Trust, DOC Gisborne

### Nelson

Abel Tasman Sea Shuttle, Wilson's Abel Tasman, DOC Nelson, Richard De Hamel, Kaiteriteri Beach Reserve, Tasman District Council and Nelson City Council.

### Wellington

Our amazing MTSW Volunteers, Conservation Volunteers NZ, Dive Wellington, EnviroSchools, NIWA, Freedive Aotearoa, Friends of Taputeranga Marine Reserve Trust, Guardians of Kāpiti Island Marine Reserve, Kāpiti Island Nature Tours, Kristine Zipfel, Octacle, Make Ripples, Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust, NIWA, Papa Taiao, Salvation Army, Sustainable Coastlines, Te Aho Tū Roa, Victoria University Coastal Ecology Lab, Wellington Underwater Club

**Other organisations** that have supported and engaged or collaborated with us through schools, events and action projects

Auckland freediving club, Waiheke Dive, Auckland University Dive Club, Dolphin

### Highlands Intermediate Action project Winners (Taranaki)



### Coburn School snorkelling experience (Tairāwhiti)



*Ecoquest students learning how to carry out fish transects (Auckland)*



Underwater Club, Long Bay Okura Great Parks Society, Live Ocean, Auckland Zoo, EnviroSchools, Ngati Kahu Social Services, NZAEE, TriOceans, Ferrier Family, Young Ocean Explorers & New Zealand Underwater (NZUA)

*Ruapotaka students showing off their drain art designs and new littla trap (Auckland)*

**National EMR programme areas and contact emails:**

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**For more information**

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**Experiencing Marine Reserves (EMR) - Te Kura Moana**

[www.emr.org.nz](http://www.emr.org.nz)

[www.whitebaitconnection.co.nz](http://www.whitebaitconnection.co.nz)

[www.mountainstosea.org.nz](http://www.mountainstosea.org.nz)

