



# The Inlet

Newsletter for Guardians of Pauatahanui Inlet

APRIL

2015

*The Inlet is a newsletter that brings together local and regional news affecting the Pauatahanui Inlet and its environs.*

*The Inlet comes out three times a year and current or back issues can be downloaded from our website.*

*The newsletter includes items of concern that affect the area as well as general interest topics for everyone.*

*Please contact us if you would like to contribute to **The Inlet**.*

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## FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

By the time you are reading this, the winning shots will have been selected in the 2015 Photographic Competition. For the committee this is almost as exciting as it is for the entrants. The standard of entries seems to grow each year, which means the winning prints will be eye catching, to say the least.

The competition is one of the most rewarding of our regular activities. It is a highly effective means of passing on to the community our message of what an ecological, visual and recreational jewel the Inlet is and, through the Human Impact section, why we have to work to keep it that way.

A further bonus for the committee is the satisfaction of seeing the wonderful photographs that the competition has inspired, particularly those taken by the younger competitors.

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I'm sure you will have noticed that construction has started on the Transmission Gully project base at Lanes Flat. Planning of the motorway has been going on for several years but what we see now is a major milestone. The Porirua Harbour Trust recently invited us to attend a briefing given by senior members of the project team. A detailed report from that presentation follows in this edition of *The Inlet*.

\*\*\*\*\*

My final message to you is a reminder that our AGM will be in late June. We will of course send out the agenda and papers for this in due course but in anticipation of this important event I want to encourage you to come along. We are always grateful to have your ongoing support behind the scenes but we would love to see you there and meet as many of you as we can. There is nothing like the encouragement gained from personal contact, especially over a cup of tea and biscuit.

**Tony Shaw**

**Footnote:** If you can't open the links in this newsletter by clicking on them please copy the link from the page as displayed and paste into your browser.

## SEA GRASS TRANSPLANT TRIALS

You may recall that in *The Inlet* of December 2013 we featured an article about sea grass, *Zostera muelleri* (or as we called it at the time, 'eel grass')\*, with particular reference to its importance for the survival of many other organisms in the Inlet.

Well, within the last couple of weeks, a trial has been set up to test the viability of transplanting small plots of sea grass within the Inlet to an area where it currently doesn't grow but is known to have existed in the past.

The trial was designed by staff from Greater Wellington Regional Council and NIWA (National Institute of Water & Atmospheric Research). Small teams of GOPI members and people from Ngati Toa assisted with the wet and muddy task of digging up six small plots of sea grass from one location and moving these into the test area.



A team from GOPI will now start a monitoring programme to record how well the transplanted plants re-establish themselves at the new location and also how successfully the area from which they were taken recovers from the scars left behind by the process. The trial is expected to run for at least 6 months before conclusive results can be ascertained.

Implementing this sea grass restoration plan is part of the Harbour and Catchment Strategy and Action Plan. As a group, the Guardians are very pleased to be involved with the trial and eager to learn how well sea grass in the Inlet can recover from possible severe grazing that can be experienced from the activity of a large black swan population.

*\*Footnote: We have been advised that 'eel grass' is not internationally recognised anymore and that we should now use the term 'sea grass' instead.*

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## PORIRUA HARBOUR SCORECARD

By producing an annual Porirua Harbour Scorecard the Porirua Harbour Trust is playing an important role in measuring the progress the City and Regional Councils are making in implementing the Harbour Strategy and Action Plan. In addition to monitoring this progress, the scorecard highlights changes in key aspects of harbour and catchment quality and attractiveness to the community. The five indicators used to measure these key aspects are: agency action, sedimentation, recreational usage, ecological health and quantity of waste items being deposited and removed.

The 2014 scorecard shows that there is already some improvement in sedimentation and general ecological health. It admits however that these are early days for the implementation programmes being put in place and that it is, as yet, unrealistic to expect more than a slight improvement in conditions.

The full scorecard is available at <http://www.poriruarharbourtrust.org.nz/assets/PHACCT-2014-Porirua-Scorecard-Report.pdf>.



## NOTES ON THE PROGRESS OF TGM PLANNING

On 7 April 2015 a PHACCT meeting was presented with a report on the current progress of the Transmission Gully Motorway planning and construction phases. Thanks to John Wells we are able to give you the following summary of major points of interest:

- ◆ Detailed construction plans for the entire highway are now being written with actual construction expected to begin in late 2015.
- ◆ Plans for environmental management, erosion control and sediment control are being developed in consultation with PCC and GW. Resource consent applications are expected to be lodged during September-October.
- ◆ Baseline monitoring of physical and ecological conditions of the 112 freshwater streams that the motorway will cross has been completed. This data, covering a 12-month monitoring period, is being analysed by NIWA.
- ◆ Similar baseline monitoring of the marine environment, encompassing the whole harbour, began in February.
- ◆ Many areas adjacent to TGM will be planted out with appropriate native plants. It is intended to establish a podocarp woodland along the route and currently seed is being collected, with nurseries being established to raise the seedlings for this project.
- ◆ Lanes Flat is currently being prepared mainly as a site for coordinating construction. Sewage and waste water from this site will be piped into the PCC sewage system and consultation on this is in progress now. Storm water will be filtered through swales before entering a sediment retention pond or the Pauatahanui stream.
- ◆ As all concrete and steel parts of the motorway will be made elsewhere and trucked to the site traffic routing plans are currently being worked out to minimise impact on roads around the Inlet and through Pauatahanui village.

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## INTRODUCING MARY DINNISS

The Guardians would like to welcome our latest committee member, Mary Dinniss.

Mary is a horticulturalist with 20 years experience in Production Horticulture and spent 10 years working in Horticulture Industry Training. She left the workforce in 2013 and has spent a year studying for a Certificate in Environmental Management with the goal of being able to contribute, in some way, to the restoration of Pauatahanui Inlet and Porirua Harbour.

She volunteers at Pauatahanui Wildlife Reserve and has a keen interest in the Pauatahanui Inlet.

She spent her childhood living in a coastal / estuarine environment and still enjoys the leisure activities these environments offer.

Mary lives in Whitby, Porirua.



## GUIDED INLET WALK

You may have read a report in the April issue of *Whitby Newsbrief* about the guided walk we organised on Sunday 1 March. We were very pleased with this new event for GOPI members and others interested in the Inlet, and we hope it will become a regular item in our calendar.

We had been thinking for some time that members might be interested in learning more about certain aspects of the Inlet, so when we were invited to develop a Seaweeek activity, we seized the chance to try out a guided walk. The challenge then was to design the walk in such a way that it fitted in with the Seaweeek 2015 theme of 'Look beneath the surface'. Short of organising an underwater swim, which seemed unlikely to be a wild success, how could we look beneath the surface of the Inlet?

What we decided in the end was to look beneath the surface manifestation of plants and animals to appreciate what sustains the Inlet ecology, and to combine this with looking beneath the surface of the present day to learn more about the area's history. We have experts on our committee in both areas – John Wells for the ecology and Denis Fairfax for the history.



*Participants in the Guided Walk*

The walk started at Motukaraka Point and followed Te Ara Piko, the Inlet pathway, as far as Ration Creek and back. Stops were made along the way at points of either ecological or historical interest, and at one of these stops Denis was able to recount the history of travel in and around Pauatahanui. In the 1830s and 40s early missionaries and travellers such as Edward Jerningham Wakefield would have had to be ferried across the Inlet mouth. In the 1840s however, Governor George Grey authorised a military road to be built around the Inlet's southern shore and over the hill to Paekakariki, and the focus shifted from the Inlet mouth to Pauatahanui village. The use of the village as a staging post between 1850 and 1885 is fairly well known and Denis reminded the group that this importance only lessened in the 1880s because the Wellington-Manawatu Railway Company put a line through to Longburn to open up the Horowhenua.

With growing use of the motor car, the top end of the Inlet regained importance as people travelled over the hill road, but dropped away again when the Paremata Road bridge and the coastal road were opened in the late 1930s. There was much interest from the group in this waxing and waning of the area's transport importance but there was equal interest in the military aspects of the Inlet's history.

From Te Rauparaha's arrival in the early 1820s and the confrontation between Te Rangihaeata and British troops in the 1840s, to young men who are commemorated in the local war memorial and the arrival of the US Marines at Motukaraka Point in 1942, the area has had a varied and interesting military history.

It also has an ecological history, particularly in relation to the rushes at the eastern end, and John Wells told the group that to truly understand the importance of the Inlet they needed to understand this ecological history. Until the Horokiri valley was converted to farming in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the whole area was dense with rushes, and even though they are now much reduced, the rushes are the key to the Inlet's ecology. Many in the group were surprised to learn that although the Inlet is described as the largest estuary in the lower North Island, it isn't strictly speaking an estuary. A true estuary has much lower salinity levels than the Inlet has, and it's the high salinity levels of the Inlet that sustain the ecology. The rushes absorb the salt but they do their job so well that they survive for only one year. Bacteria then break down the dead material, and it's this broken-down plant material that provides the basic food for most of the animals. Seventy percent of the particle intake of the cockles, for example, comes from the breakdown of the rushes at the eastern end of the Inlet.

John also spoke to the group about the Inlet's importance as a nursery, especially (but not only) for rig, snapper and kahawai. He emphasised that the fish don't breed in the Inlet; they spawn elsewhere and then return as juveniles, where they rely on the Inlet's sea grass for shelter and sustenance.

Those who took part in the walk returned to Motukaraka Point very enthusiastic about their afternoon.

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## PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION UPDATE

At a loose end on Saturday 23 May? We warmly invite you to come along to our photo competition prizegiving ceremony in the Helen Smith Room at Pataka, starting at 2pm. We know you will be amazed at the quality of the winning and highly commended photos, all of which will be on display. The competition was as well supported this year as ever, and the standard of prints just keeps on getting better as entrants challenge themselves to find the shot that will catch the judge's eye. Swooping birds, footprints in the sand, the ever-popular boatsheds etc etc - there is no end to the potential for great photos. We're especially pleased with the increase in numbers in the Youth and Junior sections, partly thanks to the very successful Youth workshop run on our behalf by Destina Munro in late February. We know you will be blown away by the talent shown by these young photographers.



Junior Nature. Michelle Pearson: Crab

If you can't make it to the prizegiving ceremony, the prints will be on display in various venues around the city: Porirua Library 23 May-7 June; Palmers Plimmerton 7-21 June; Whitby Mall 21 June-5 July; Lighthouse Pauatahanui 5-19 July; and Emerging Light Gallery Plimmerton 19-26 July. Don't miss them!

*One of the Junior winners from 2014*



## WHAT ARE THOSE PEOPLE DOING OVER THERE?

Head down to the Inlet on a Saturday morning and you may see a group of women appearing, from a distance, to be walking on water. Has the Inlet suddenly become the Dead Sea, with salinity levels so high it's impossible to sink?

Fortunately, no. But what you're looking at is nevertheless pretty exciting for those taking part. It's the fast-growing activity of Stand-up Paddle Boarding (SUP to its friends), now being enjoyed on the Inlet by adults and children alike. 'If you can stand up and hold a paddle, you can paddle board,' says local resident Chris Brown, who owns Ocean Outfitters in Mana. It's his wife Kate out there with the women's group.



**Women's Group**

skills of a great activity.' Lessons are taught by qualified tutors, as Ocean Outfitters is one of only three providers in New Zealand who have been granted 'fully audited' status by Worksafe NZ – and the only one in Wellington.

Although Chris sometimes uses the word 'sport' when talking about paddle boarding, he's also quick to point out that it can be enjoyed as recreation ('just cruising') as well as for low impact exercise and general fitness.

'It's pilates on water,' he says. 'It builds core strength and helps posture.'

People also use it for rehabilitation from injury because the particular movements involved help build up stabilising muscles. And you can even fish for your dinner from your paddle board. 'But it's also just fun. You're out in the fresh air, you can do it when it's calm or you can ramp up the challenge by pitting yourself against the wind.'

Porirua Harbour is fast gaining a reputation for being one of the best places in the country for paddle boarding as it offers a huge variety of areas to paddle in. The more experienced can challenge themselves in the surf areas, while the Inlet is recognised as an ideal place to start out. 'And to do yoga.'

Sorry? Yoga? On a paddle board? 'Well, you've got a nice stable board you can kneel or sit on, you're in calm water, you're surrounded by hills – it's a perfect environment for doing yoga.'

What are the chances of falling off? 'People might feel a bit wobbly when they first get on but they don't

Chris and Kate's shop in the Marina View complex by Paremata bridge is a friendly, welcoming place (it came second out of 800 in the 2014 national Top Shop competition) and they are keen to see people come in and be encouraged to give paddle boarding a go. 'We can hire you a board for just \$25,' says Chris, 'or you can add 90 minutes of expert tuition for an extra \$40. In fact, in just three 90-minute lessons we will teach you the basic



**Chris Brown**

fall off because we teach them properly.’ And gear? ‘You don’t need a wetsuit. Just some thermals and a pair of neoprene booties so you can grip the board.’

Chris got into paddle boarding because he wanted a water-based activity for the windless or no-surf days that meant he couldn’t go surfing or windsurfing. He shares the activity not only with Kate but also with his two young daughters. The decision to open the shop came from a passion to introduce paddle boarding to locals. ‘We’re a local business, part of the local community, and we want locals to enjoy what we enjoy. The Inlet is just a gorgeous place for paddle boarding.’

For more information, check out Ocean Outfitters’ website <http://www.oceanoutfitters.co.nz/>.



*Children’s Group*

## SPARK FOUNDATION COASTAL CLEAN-UP

On Friday 27 March, SPARK Foundation joined with the Porirua City Council, Mayor Nick Leggett and MP Kris Faafoi in conducting the first Coastal Challenge Clean-up.

Approximately 150 SPARK employees spent their annual paid volunteer day cleaning up a remarkable 48 km of the coast line, harbour and estuaries of Porirua. The clean-up included all of the Inlet shoreline.

The increasing number of corporate groups who choose to make a contribution to the community in projects like this is a very positive trend and of course we are particularly appreciative that the Inlet is being included.



*Photos provided by Spark Foundation*



## FEATURE ARTICLE

*In December's The Inlet we featured the Pauatahanui Wildlife Reserve located at the eastern end of the Inlet and described how it was conceived and developed. As a history, the features of importance to its evolution were explained in some detail, and a number of managerial problems highlighted.*

*In this issue we explore more of the natural history aspects of this extraordinary site and where the management focus is being directed today.*

### PAUATAHANUI WILDLIFE RESERVE PART 2



#### Ecology of the Reserve

**A**s you walk along the paths leading to the hides and approach the Inlet shoreline you will notice a range of small trees and shrubs gradually giving way to increasing amounts of dull green and brown rushes. Is there any significance in this sequence of vegetation, or is it just random?

Wanda Tate has been involved with the nature reserve since the early 1990s and has dedicated her time to the management of the reserve ecology. She is keen to point out that the environmental development here was *not* a restoration project as it is often called, but is instead the 're-creation' of an authentic estuarine ecology aimed at providing a typical wetland habitat for wading birds. The word 'restoration' refers to work undertaken to bring a habitat back to as close as possible its former state. Pauatahanui Wildlife Reserve, however, was never vegetated in the way that the management team have developed the land. The aim of this feature article is to show how the creation of this nationally important wildlife location has followed a highly structured plan.

Prior to 1855 most of the ground now planted with coastal tree daisy and saltmarsh ribbonwood was an area of mud flats. The earthquake of that year lifted the terrain by around 60cm, changing the landscape for ever by pushing the water's edge further out into the harbour. Since then the land has been utilized for a number of human activities such as sports and recreation, stock sales and a dog pound. Forest and Bird took on the management of the Reserve in the early 80s and the management team drew up plans to develop the four distinct habitat zones of a typical estuarine vegetative sequence.

The first of these zones is the saltmarsh, closest to open water, where tidal inundation by seawater occurs each high tide. Plants in this environment are largely salt-tolerant rushes, a few shrubs and mat-forming, often succulent, herbs like glasswort.

Back from the water's edge is the zone of salt and wind-tolerant shrubs that grow on mounds and ridges between 50cm and 100cm above spring tide level. It is here that you will find the saltmarsh ribbonwood,

**FEATURE ARTICLE cont....**

coastal tree daisy and taupata.

Further inland, above high tide level, freshwater areas derived from the river and streams running out through the estuary create freshwater swamps where you will find raupo, flax, toe toe and cutty grasses.

Finally, farthest from the shoreline where land is over 1 metre above sea level, are well-drained silt soils populated with manuka, kanuka, karamu and ngaio.

Apart from the saltmarsh rushes the vegetation by the late 1970s was largely exotic, with very few native plants represented. The major task therefore was to populate the area with the kind of plant species associated with estuarine conditions, and in particular, species that as nearly as possible could all be found in the region. The initial focus was on plants already found in limited numbers in the reserve itself but to expand the biodiversity the management team had to look further afield for logical species from similar sites around the region. This required gathering seed manually and then raising the seedlings until ready to be planted out in selected locations. This work was undertaken by the Forest and Bird volunteers who established a nursery within the reserve boundaries to cultivate all their own plants.

In developing each habitat several factors needed to be considered. Because the reserve had been primarily designed to attract wading birds of various species their needs had to be catered for all year round. Questions to be answered were: how do we ensure nesting sites for pied stilts, pukeko, shovellers and paradise ducks, and how do we ensure continuity of food supplies as the seasons change? Over time, with more thought directed towards such questions, the concept of an estuarine ecosystem was extended to include the development of the invertebrate population. Many such species don't travel far from their home territory, so they need to be brought into a new area by hand.

The other significant factor to consider is how the saltmarsh connects with the Inlet as a whole and governs the quality of the marine environment. A saltmarsh is one of the most productive ecosystems in the world and the Pauatahanui site is no exception as it forms an extensive base to the Inlet's food chain.

Its major plant, the sea rush, grows in dense clumps throughout the saltmarsh where, as noted above, the tide submerges the root systems twice a day. The sea rush is able to cope with flooding of its roots for up to four hours per day.

Sea rush has hollow leaves that channel life-giving oxygen from the atmosphere down to the roots because the saturated muds they grow

in are oxygen deficient. When these leaves die back they break down and crumble to a fine sediment which is carried by tidal action out onto the mudflats. This material provides at least 60% of the organic material for the filter feeders of the Inlet such as the cockles, crabs, copepods and Nereid worms.

As well as this vital food function, the roots of sea rush stabilise the sediment preventing it from being washed away by tidal currents thus building up the saltmarsh faster than it can be eroded. The rush also acts as a filter for storm water and helps reduce pollutants from road run-off getting into the Inlet.

It has been a strategy of the management team to plant along the stream edges so as to reduce bank



*Sea rush at low tide (Photo: Michael Waldron)*

## FEATURE ARTICLE *cont...*

erosion to enhance this characteristic of the rush lands.

While the reserve is primarily designed for the birdlife it was always the plan to have an educational side to the project, allowing both serious study and general enjoyment by the public. The challenge here has been to balance both recreational and environmental issues. It is important to avoid fragmentation of the ecology while still providing visitor access to significant sites. To encourage visitors the walking tracks are largely flat, giving ease of access to aged care groups, but they have also been kept to a minimum to avoid fragmentation of the habitats, thus reducing the risk of introducing unwanted exotic plants. The hides were introduced to give key viewing vantage points while leaving the birds undisturbed.

As you can see, everything done in developing the reserve has been carefully planned to enhance the location for the wading bird population while allowing the general public to benefit from the work that has been undertaken to create this outstanding habitat.

Although the reserve is now well established and all objectives are considered to have been met, a programme of ongoing maintenance is still in place, and the work never ends. The purpose of this maintenance and the tasks required are the subject of the third and final instalment in this series of articles.

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## ON THE HORIZON

### **P**hotographic Competition Prizegiving Ceremony

Where: Helen Smith Room, Pataka, Porirua

When: Saturday 23rd May

Time: 2pm

Prints on display from 1:30pm

See our article about this year's competition as it includes information about the dates for viewing the winning and highly commended entries following the ceremony.

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### AGM

Where: Mana Cruising Club

When: Late June - date to be confirmed

Time: 7:30pm

We encourage you to come to this meeting and meet the committee. We are planning to have a guest speaker and judging from past years you will have a very interesting and worthwhile evening.



## FAMILY CORNER

### Word Find—the plants of the Wildlife Reserve

A real challenge here for those interested in the various plants that can be found in the wildlife reserve. Seven common names are hidden in the box below and there are clues to help you find them. Words go diagonally as well as up and down. You can refer to our website for more help. Answers at the bottom.

1. Found in the drier parts this has small leaves and twisted branches
2. Long ribbon leaves and large yellow flowers on tall stalks
3. It's found along the pathways, has small leaves on interlacing branches and dense clusters of flowers
4. A small tree with large glossy leaves and orange fruits
5. A succulent shoreline plant
6. Large areas of the salt marsh areas are filled with long slender leaves having pointed tips
7. Usually found submerged, this grass-like plant covers wide areas of the mudflats

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**ANSWERS:** 1: Mingimingi; 2: Flax; 3: Ribbonwood; 4: Taupata; 5: Glasswort; 6: Sea Rush; 7: Sea grass.

## PLEASE SIGN UP A FRIEND OR NEIGHBOUR

Sign up a neighbour, friend, or another family member. Just explain to them that membership numbers really count in giving us a strong voice to argue for what we all value about the Inlet. Membership forms can be downloaded from our website <http://www.gopi.org.nz/assets/membersForm/Membership-new.doc> or copied from the one at the back of this newsletter. Better still, if you've received this newsletter by email, just forward it to others with a note encouraging them to join.

### EMERGENCY NUMBERS FOR THE PAUATAHANUI INLET

**Pollution:** Discharges of contaminants to air, land, storm-water drains, streams, rivers or sea and for after hours consent enquiries: Greater Wellington 0800 496 734 (24 hours)

**Boating infringements:** Greater Wellington 384 5708 (24 hours)

**Illegal fishing activity:** Ministry for Primary Industries 0800 476 224 (24 hours)

**Pauatahanui Wildlife Reserve:** Department of Conservation 0800 362 468

Let us know what you have reported so we can keep an accurate record and follow up if necessary.

233 9391 (Chairman, GOPI) or [pauainlet@gmail.com](mailto:pauainlet@gmail.com).



## Guardians of Pauatahanui Inlet

[www.gopi.org.nz](http://www.gopi.org.nz)  
[pauainlet@gmail.com](mailto:pauainlet@gmail.com)

### Membership Form: new members

To join the Guardians of Pauatahanui Inlet, you can pay your subscription either online or by post.  
**IF YOU ARE PAYING ONLINE, PLEASE REMEMBER TO FILL IN THIS FORM WITH ALL DETAILS, AND EMAIL OR POST IT TO US.**

#### Online payment

1. Pay your sub via e-banking into our Westpac account 03-1533-0009387-00. In the 'Particulars' or 'Reference' columns, **YOU MUST** write your surname **AND** initials **AND** the period of your sub (1-yr or 5-yr).
2. Then fill in this form and either email it to us at [pauainlet@gmail.com](mailto:pauainlet@gmail.com) or post it (see next column for our postal address)

#### Postal payment

1. Write a cheque made payable to 'Guardians of Pauatahanui Inlet'.
2. Then fill in this form and send it, along with your cheque, to: Membership Secretary, Guardians of Pauatahanui Inlet, Box 57034, Mana, Porirua 5247.

Please fill in your details for our records. If you are filling in this form electronically, **click** at the beginning of a dotted line and then type.

Name: .....

Address: .....

E-mail: ..... Phone: .....

Please put  next to the subscription you are paying (electronic completion – **highlight** the box and type lower case x.) We are also very grateful for donations. (We are a registered charity for tax purposes: registration number CC47523.)

|                               |  |                                |                          |
|-------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| One-year individual (\$12.00) | <input type="checkbox"/>   | Five-year individual (\$50.00) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| One-year family (\$15.00)     | <input type="checkbox"/>   | Five-year family (\$60.00)     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Donation: \$ .....            | Do you require a receipt for your sub? <input type="checkbox"/> or your donation? <input type="checkbox"/> |                                |                          |
| Date subs paid: .....         | Reference appears as: .....  |                                |                          |

*(e-banking only)*

We'd like to send you newsletters and notices via email. May we do this?

Please tell us which of our activities you would like to be part of.

|                            |                          |  |                          |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| Annual Clean-up day        | <input type="checkbox"/> | Submissions to local bodies            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Three-yearly cockle survey | <input type="checkbox"/> | Our educational programmes for schools | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Website and video clips    | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other:                                 |                          |

**NOW EMAIL OR POST THE FORM. THANK YOU AND WELCOME**