

The Inlet

Newsletter for Guardians of Pāuatahanui Inlet

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

P O Box 57034
Mana
Porirua 5247
pauainlet@gmail.com
www.gopi.org.nz

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AUGUST

2018

FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

n Sunday morning, 19 August, I was lucky enough to see a leopard seal on the beach near the entrance to the Mana Marina. The leopard seal's normal habitat in our part of the globe is the Antarctic and Sub-Antarctic but it isn't unknown for them to travel this far north.

This particular individual did not appear to be in good health. It had a fish spine embedded into one side of its mouth and a fresh, and serious-looking, gash to the other side of its face. These injuries, together with a lack of movement, led me and some others to conclude that it was



on the shore because it was seriously ill. One gentleman was of the view that the kindest thing to do would be to shoot it, putting an end to its suffering.

Happily a DOC staff member, who was there to watch over the situation, joined us and explained that it is quite normal for these animals to spend time out of the water and that they are known for their ability to recover from these type of injuries. He also explained that the gash to its face was caused by a dog off-leash, attacking it the day before. As we kept watching, the animal became more active, gradually entering the water and, to the delight of those present, swam quite vigorously out into the channel.

I tell you this story because it is a reminder of what we should do when we encounter any marine animals in the Inlet. By all means enjoy the chance to look at them but from a respectful distance. For our own safety and theirs do not try to feed them, and take care not to get between them and their escape route. Dogs obviously must be kept under control under all situations.

I was also reminded that those of us who live in local communities are privileged to be able to see, and be near, all the wildlife that the Inlet and its surrounds are a natural habitat for. This privilege comes with the responsibility to do all we can to safeguard and restore this habitat.

Tony Shaw

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2018 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

This year's Annual General Meeting was a great success with a good attendance of over 40 members and other interested parties.

The meeting was notable for a number of current issues that were raised. As explained in the annual report GOPI was active in the area of submissions on a number of local body long term plans put out for public discussion during the year. Of particular interest was the Porirua City Council's Long Term Plan that addressed the ongoing concerns related to harbour health. Its plan to review the harbour strategy in 2020 was met with a negative response in our submission as we feel that urgent action is needed now. We were, in hindsight, informed that the review was due to begin this year and this was good news.

We also had to report, sadly, that John Wells, who had been on the committee for 18 years, including a 10 year spell as Chairperson, had stepped down and he will be sorely missed. As science officer and the organiser of the triennial cockle survey since 2004 his contribution to our organisation was outstanding. In recognition of his services to GOPI and the harbour, we announced his status as a Life Membership of GOPI and presented a certificate in his absence. Read more about this award in the following article.

Elections for the 2018-19 committee confirmed the current membership will continue in the coming year but Tony Shaw did explain that, due to his own future plans, this would be his last as Chairperson.

We are therefore keen to find someone who can take over this very important role in 2019.

The committee for 2018-19 is:

Tony Shaw Chair
Helen Reilly Secretary
Stephen O'Neil Treasurer

Janet Ryan Committee (Membership secretary)

Michael Waldron Committee (Newsletter editor and Webmaster)

Christine Stanley Committee
Lindsay Gow Committee
John McKoy Committee

After the official business was completed we were delighted to introduce our guest speaker this year, Alison Duncan, who is a Victoria university graduate currently doing her PhD on the seagrass in Porirua Harbour. Alison introduced the subject by reviewing the importance of this species to the Inlet habitat and then gave a fairly detailed summary of the research she has undertaken and insights gained. Her own summary of this research is the subject of an article later in this newsletter. x

TE ARO PIKO WALKWAY

The next phase of the Te Aro Piko, the walkway around Pāuatahanui Inlet, is underway with construction from Motokaraka Point towards the Kakaho Bridge where it will meet up with the section that crosses the Kakaho estuary.

We are keen to see the next phase get underway and will be monitoring the progress with keen interest. ¤

JOHN WELLS RETIRES FROM GOPI

e were sorry to announce, at this year's AGM, that John Wells has retired from the GOPI committee. A resident of Whitby with a home overlooking Pāuatahanui Inlet, he has been a member of GOPI since 2000.

In his earlier career John was a Professor of Zoology in the department of biological sciences at Victoria University, advancing to Dean of Science before retiring in 2001 after 25 years. John joined GOPI as an ordinary member in 2000 and became a committee member from 2002 onwards. In 2003 he began his term as Chairperson, a role that lasted for 10 years. During this time John's knowledge and experience of the Inlet ecology was invaluable and his skills as an organizer and statistician enabled him to run a successful triennial cockle survey of the population of this important indicator of Inlet health from 2004 to 2016.

In addition to the working with GOPI John was also a member of the Porirua Harbour Advisory Board and the Pāuatahanui Inlet Community Trust as well as a founding trustee of PHAACT (Porirua Harbour Trust).

In recognition of his time with GOPI, the committee decided that our second only Life Membership award should go to John and this was presented, in his absence, at the AGM.

We will miss John very much and wish him all the best in his retirement. ¤



BANDED RAIL SPOTTED IN THE RESERVE



Banded rail. Adult. Great Barrier Island, January 2014. Image © Bartek Wypych by Bartek Wypych

On August 3, ecologist Jon Terry was visiting a hide in Pāuatahanui Reserve and spotted an unusual bird in the adjacent marshland. He took a photo and showed it to Graeme Taylor of the Ornithological Society. They were able to confirm the sighting was of a banded rail (like the one in this picture), a native bird that is rarely seen in New Zealand. It is considered a resident only of the far north of the North Island, the Nelson-Marlborough region and a few of New Zealand's Islands.

This is the second sighting in the lower North Island and begs the question: where did it come from?

It's good news for the reserve, however, showing how the environment there is becoming ever more attractive to our native birdlife. ¤

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A SEAGRASS STUDY IN PORIRUA HARBOUR



The guest speaker at our AGM was Alison Duncan (presently a PhD student at Victoria University Coastal Ecology Laboratory) who had conducted research on seagrass in the Porirua Harbour for GWRC and Victoria University. Alison gave a summary of her research and this is a precis of her presentation.

ew Zealand's only seagrass species, Zostera muelleri, occurs both intertidally and subtidally in the Porirua Harbour. Seagrass meadows are as important within their ecosystems as are coral reefs in theirs. They provide nursery grounds for flounder and snapper, as well as recycling nutrients and stabilising sediments. Below the mud level, the roots anchor the plant in the sediment and the rhizomes store energy reserves in the form of carbohydrates. Above the mud the blades photosynthesize.



I started my research for a summer scholarship in 2014-15 and set out to quantify the condition of seagrass in the Porirua Harbour to identify the most effective indicators of its condition. Seagrass can adjust its growth to take advantage of environmental variables and while we can look at a site with small blades, or a low shoot density, and say: "there isn't much surface area for photosynthesis", that doesn't mean that the meadow is in a 'poor' condition; it may just be responding to seasonal influences.

Some measures of seagrass condition are shoot density, weight (dry) of the blades or roots and rhizomes, root depth, blade width/length/area. To measure these variables I took seagrass samples across 7 sites within the Harbour - two meadows at Elsdon, and the single meadows at Paremata Station, Mana, Ivey Bay, Browns Bay and Bradeys Bay.

I already knew that exposure to anthropogenic and natural processes varied across these sites but by examining these samples I found that the overall trends were:

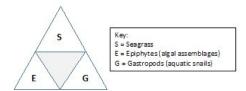
- a high variation between sites of almost all of the variables investigated;
- blade area, and above-mud biomass, increased with distance from shore, suggesting that, as we'd expect, seagrass requires a greater photosynthetic surface area in deeper water.

During this first study I had noticed that gastropod and algal assemblages on the seagrass varied across all sites, so I decided, for my MSc project in 2015-16, to investigate how seagrass and its associated algal epiphytes (often early life-stages of seaweeds) and gastropods vary through time and location within the Porirua Harbour. I chose the sites at Elsdon (industrial with freshwater inputs from Porirua stream),

A SEAGRASS STUDY IN PORIRUA HARBOUR cont....

Paremata Station (well flushed, near the entrance to harbour) and Browns Bay (sheltered, surrounded by development of Whitby suburb).

The study highlighted a relationship between the three that can be thought of as a triad.



The triad of seagrass, epiphytes and gastropod grazers basically boils down to:

- Epiphytes can be beneficial, detrimental, or even have no net impact on seagrass depending on how
 much surface is covered with epiphytes, the season, or other factors. For example epiphytes can
 reduce UV damage during low tide in summer (beneficial), or prevent light from reaching seagrass
 blades (negative).
- Some gastropod grazers consume the epiphytes, thereby reducing shading effects on the seagrass.
- When nutrient levels are elevated for a short period of time (such as in the days following heavy rain), both seagrass and epiphytes remove nutrients from the water column, as both utilise nutrients to grow.

Trends in the total number of gastropod grazers showed a significant decline from summer to winter, which coincided with an increase in epiphytes. This suggests that the gastropod grazers do play a pivotal role in removing the epiphytes, though the scope of these surveys wasn't sufficient to definitively confirm this.

There was also an interesting trend in the seagrass condition from summer to winter. The above-mud biomass decreased in winter, while the blade area increased. This isn't surprising in terms of how seagrass is influenced by the tidal cycle and season. When the tide is in, seagrass blades stand roughly upright but when the tide is out, the blades lie flat on top of each other. In summer, at low tide, desiccation and UV damage can be reduced for those blades that are covered by others, so a greater number of smaller blades is desirable. In winter, however, light is at a premium so it's advantageous to have fewer but larger blades to catch as much sunlight as possible while reducing the chance of shading by a neighbouring blade.

Parallel to this field-based research, I also conducted some experiments at the Coastal Ecology Lab in Island Bay. I found that, unlike samples from Elsdon, the seagrass from Browns Bay showed possible symptoms of nutrient toxicity at levels that could only be expected after heavy rain at Elsdon.

In conclusion, my recommendations from the study were that above-mud and below-mud biomasses, blade area and rhizome length were the most effective measures of condition for comparing meadows in the Porirua Harbour. \times

Acknowledgment: Images by Mel Dohner (A Vic Technician)

See Page 11 for news of another research project taking place in Porirua Harbour.

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FEATURE ARTICLE

Pāuatahanui Inlet has been identified by Greater Wellington Regional Council as an outstanding landscape based on its characteristics and features. The Inlet is well recognised as an area of high ecological, aesthetic, recreational and cultural importance to the city of Porirua. It is classified as a Site of Special Wildlife Interest by the Department of Conservation and recognised in the WRC Regional Coastal Plan (May 2000) as an area of significant conservation value.

Everything the Guardians of Pāuatahanui Inlet do is aimed at the promotion and protection of these values. One of our formal objectives is the support of the **Porirua Harbour and Catchment Strategy and Action Plan**. However, recent news about the state of the harbour has raised concerns that this action plan is not achieving its objectives. The following Feature Article addresses the concerns and questions how this trend can be reversed.

Current State of the Harbour

peaking at the AGM on 20 June our chair, Tony Shaw, said that GOPI was increasingly concerned about the level of degradation of the Inlet and the lack of progress in combating the causes. In referring to the Porirua City Council's Long Term Plan Tony pointed out that, in this plan, the harbour strategy was set to be reviewed in 2020. On a positive note we have since learned the review will begin this year. We are keen to see this get underway with all the energy that the council staff can muster. We are also keen to see what positive action is proposed and what degree of resourcing those actions might receive.

In this article we want to explore some of the objectives of the strategy and where it is felt these are not currently being addressed in an appropriately focussed way.

First, a bit of history. Since the 1850s European settlement and development around Pāuatahanui Inlet has resulted in the progressive degradation of a once pristine estuarine environment and a food-basket for the Māori inhabitants of the area. Degradation accelerated in the 1950s as the city of Porirua was established and urbanisation around the harbour increased. The key human activities that caused the decline were removal of forest cover, conversion of land for farming, the building of suburban houses and businesses, and the creation of roads around 75% of the Inlet's shoreline. This resulted in a huge increase to the background sedimentation rates, addition of nitrogenous and phosphoric fertilizers and effluent, and metal contamination in the form of zinc, copper and lead. Increasing numbers of stock in the catchment and inadequate sewerage treatment resulted in significant increases in faecal contamination in the Harbour with serious impacts on many water based activities and the gathering of kai moana.

GOPI was formed in 1991 by a group of local residents who were concerned about the degradation. They felt that although the Inlet environment had, for many years, been under threat from human activities, no organisation with comprehensive interests in defending Inlet ecology existed. GOPI set a number of objectives which can be found listed on the website. Paramount among these is, 'consistently with its ecological values, to encourage, promote, protect, maintain and foster the natural, historic and cultural values of the Pāuatahanui Inlet'. The term 'ecological values' is the key concept, because GOPI's primary focus is to advocate for the protection of the natural ecosystems that are of such high value for the Inlet.

One of the key indicators of harbour health has been, since 1976, the population of cockles that are present in their millions. For that reason GOPI organised a triennial cockle survey from 1992 onwards and documented the slow climb in numbers towards the original 1976 estimate of 500 million. That original survey was conducted as part of a thorough investigation into the harbour when significant changes to the

Current State of the Harbour cont....

Inlet had been planned based around growing the village of Pāuatahanui itself. This also involved the development of a major industrial area between Pāuatahanui and Judgeford, together with reclamation for road and rail on the north side of the Inlet. These changes, eventually, were not implemented.

In 2002 the Pāuatahanui Inlet Community Trust (PICT) was set up to support the implementation of the *Pāuatahanui Inlet Management Plan – Towards Integrated Management* which had been developed by the community based Pāuatahanui Inlet Advisory Group. PICT's work contributed in 2012 to the development of the *Te Awarua-o-Porirua Harbour and Catchment Strategy and Action Plan*. GOPI has strongly supported this plan in the belief that such a coordinated and concerted approach to the harbour's environmental values would result in the significant improvements it desired.

In 2011 The Porirua Harbour Trust (Porirua Harbour and Catchment Community Trust [PHACCT]) was established to, among other things, 'advocate for the sustainable management of the harbour and its catchment'. This trust was tasked with advocating for the management of the whole harbour, both the Pāuatahanui Inlet and the Onepoto Arm, and their contributing catchments. PHACCT has developed an extensive education programme in the community and has undertaken to report annually on the state of the harbour with reference to five key indicators. This so-called 'Scorecard' serves to raise awareness and report on long-term progress towards meeting the objectives of the Porirua Harbour and Catchment Strategy for 'a healthy catchment, waterways and harbour'.

So, a lot has happened since the early nineties towards advocating, monitoring and planning for improvements in the health of the Inlet. GOPI has been, and still is, pleased to see the Porirua City Council, GWRC and WCC support of the Harbour Strategy and the efforts of individuals and groups in tackling the key issues addressed in the document. However, we are increasingly worried that little significant progress has been made and the actions identified in the plan have been inadequately resourced.

In 2013 Greater Wellington expressed its concerns for the harbour as a whole, stating 'Porirua Harbour's ability to support life, and its overall ecological health, is beginning to be affected by the build-up of sediment, nutrients and stormwater contaminants' (GWRC State of the Environment Reports). And the 2017 Scorecard should be a wake-up call to action because it does look as though the issues of sedimentation and nutrient supply are increasing and their sources are not being addressed in an effective manner.

The Guardians strongly supports the management principles as listed in the *Strategy and Action Plan*, and in particular No. 4: 'Evidence-based decision-making and management'. However, it is concerned that the activities considered in the action plan are either not vigorously supported by the relevant authorities, not having the right effect or are not sufficiently focussed. Part of the reason for this is the thought that the measures listed in the plan are very broad and the approach to problem-solving does not include sufficient results-based measurements and targets. The 'big three' issues for the inlet, as specified by the Strategy and Action Plan, are sedimentation, pollution and ecology. To managed these issues more effectively, all three must be measurable.

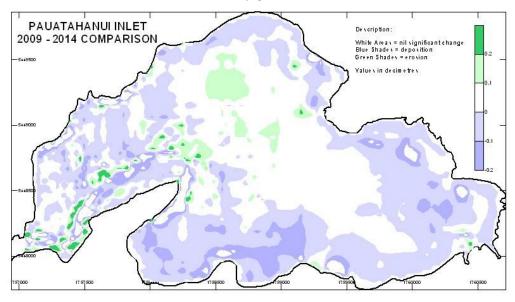
Sedimentation

In the case of sedimentation an attempt to quantify the target and monitor the rate is being made with the Strategy and Action Plan aiming to reduce sedimentation rates to 1mm per year by 2031, averaged over the whole harbour. However the different parts of the Inlet have significantly different rates of deposition and, while the average of 1mm may sound good in principle, the problem lies in areas of deposition that exceed this value by significant amounts.

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Current State of the Harbour cont....

To illustrate this point, a bathymetric survey of the harbour, published in 2015, compares measurements between 2009 and 2014. It is represented pictorially below where the blue areas indicate increases in sediment over this time while green areas show reduced sediment, normally due to the activity of flushing by faster moving currents. Green areas are found in the deeper channels while the many dark blue patches are in shallow areas where there has been a build-up greater than 1mm.



Survey by Discovery Marine Ltd (13 February 2015)

Significant sources of sedimentation continue to be: inadequately vegetated steep country in the catchment, earthworks associated with housing development and the construction of the Transmission Gully motorway. This is made worse by the increasing frequency of major rainfall events in the region.

Pollution

The Pāuatahanui Inlet is unusual in that it is bordered on all sides by roads, some of which have high traffic volumes. The only buffers from roads are the Mana Esplanade and Camborne walkway in the west and the Wildlife Reserve adjacent to Pāuatahanui Village in the east. Vehicles drop toxic substances such as copper from brake pads, zinc from tyres and a whole range of contaminants from lubricating oils and fuel combustion, not to mention the compounds in bitumen that get released with traffic impacts. All this gets washed, completely untreated, from the roads straight into the Inlet.

In addition to the road based sources of pollution, storm water, especially from urban sources, contains many contaminants, especially copper, zinc and lead. There is little information on trends and locations of all this contamination, much less what effects it has on the harbour's ecosystems.

A further problem with pollution is now showing up in the form of increasing nutrients entering the system. These come from both urban and rural sources with the application of fertilisers and related nitrogen being a primary source. So far the effects of nutrients are moderate and we don't yet have some of the worst results such as algal growths in summer that render near-shore areas unpleasant and even toxic. But a wet winter followed by a dry, hot summer may change this.

Current State of the Harbour cont....

In the next three months the Whaitua Committee is expected to release its final report on the process that has been undertaken to detail the important issues relating to the harbour catchment as a whole and to establish strong guidelines with specific targets to aim for. This should address issues such as stormwater run-off and how this needs to be handled. We look forward to the outcomes of this process in the hopes that it will result in more concerted efforts to reverse the current trends.

However new and measurable limits on pollution won't by themselves resolve the problem. The key focus from this point onwards must be towards reduction of sediment and pollutants reaching the harbour. This will require a concerted and continuing effort to better manage and, where necessary, change land-use. This involves extensive re-vegetation, riparian planting, pest and weed control, stock management and careful control of activities such as forest harvesting. It also requires the improvement of the stormwater system capacity and treatment (eg. larger pipes, the use of swales and wetlands to prevent sediments reaching the Inlet, and improved isolation of the sewerage systems from the stormwater system).

As it happens, authorities such as Porirua City Council, Greater Wellington Regional Council and Wellington Water are undertaking work in all these areas. This is both necessary and desirable and it is a good start on what will be a long-term and increasingly difficult path ahead.

Even with the current commitment, we consider that the local bodies responsible for implementing the harbour strategy, and with them the community, need to attack the issues even more energetically and thoroughly in the next few years. Otherwise the habitat in the Inlet will continue to degrade and the harbour that we love will lose the values that we are fighting for. \aleph

ON THE HORIZON

Inlet Clean-up

This year's Inlet Clean-up is on Sunday 18 November. Everyone is welcome to come along and help with the clean-up exercise and partake of the barbeque put on by Rotary at the end of the morning.

⇒ Meeting place: Brown's Bay, Whitby, at 10:30am. ¤

Lamb and Calf Day

he annual Pāuatahanui School Gala, known by all as Lamb and Calf day is scheduled for Saturday 3 November. GOPI usually has a display on site during the day, staffed by members of the committee, and we enjoy talking about our work and the issues that concern us with anyone who would like to introduce themselves to us. ¤



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FAMILY CORNER

WHERE DO OUR BIRDS NEST?

The table below lists six birds that can be found in and around Pāuatahanui Inlet. It also describes the type of nest site used by these birds. The problem is that this list is mixed up and the nest sites are not in the correct order. Can you work out which nest site belongs to which bird? The number in the left column should be matched with the letter on the right to give the correct answer.

Answers are upside down at the bottom - but it's best not to look at those until you have had a go yourself.

	BIRD	NEST	
1	Pied Shag	Feather-lined cup in dense vegetation	Α
2	Pied Stilt	A hole dug into cliffs, banks and cuttings	В
3	Kingfisher	Hidden in raupo, sedge or long grass at waters edge	С
4	Pukeko	In trees along coastal cliffs	D
5	Oystercatcher	Raised pad on the ground close to waters edge	Ε
6	Fernbird	Simple scrape on the shore between rocks	F

Answers to Family Corner

1-D: 7-E: 3-B: ⊄-C: 2-E: 0-∀

ANOTHER RESEARCH PROJECT in Pauatahanui Inlet

There is currently another important research project going on in Porirua Harbour. This is on the metal ion concentrations found in flatfish and shark due to the build up of metallic elements in the food chain. MSc student Liana Cook-Auckram of Victoria University has kindly given us a summary of the work she is conducting in this area.

etallic residues are discharged into coastal marine ecosystems by a variety of natural and man-made sources, with pollution increasing over the last few decades. Many metallic ions are characterized by high toxicity, persistence and accumulation in estuary fishes.

Fish are among the top consumers in aquatic ecosystems and accumulate a range of pollutants in their tissue. Demersal species like common sole, flounder, stingray and rig shark are endemic fishes that occupy Porirua Harbour and are exposed to metals through their bottom-feeding methods. These common species may, therefore, be indicators of heavy metal pollution in the Inlet environment.

Metal accumulation in fish can disrupt physiological activities and can result in morphological deformities and death. In addition, contaminated fish poses a threat to human consumers as they may cause acute and chronic disorders. Metal ion accumulation in New Zealand flatfish has been recognised in Manakau Harbour and Avon-Heathcore Estuary. Little is known about metal concentrations in rig shark. Establishing if metal accumulation is occurring in fishes in Porirua Harbour is of particular interest as *Ngati Toa* have gathered sea food from this region since their arrival.

The broad aims of my thesis are to:

- a. compare levels of heavy metals in tissue of rig shark, stingray and flounder caught in the two different arms of Porirua Harbour;
- b. examine each fish sampled for other general measures of health;
- c. examine movement of fishes between the two arms using mark-recapture methods.

Additional funding may allow flatfish and rig shark to be analysed from Wellington Harbour. X

Liana Cook-Auckram

PLEASE SIGN UP A FRIEND OR NEIGHBOUR

ign 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 PĀUATAHANUI 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)

Pāuatahanui 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.



Guardians of Pāuatahanui Inlet

www.gopi.org.nz pauainlet@gmail.com

Membership Form: new members

To join the Guardians of Pāuatahanui 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.

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- 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 or post it (see next column for our postal address)

Postal payment

- 1. Write a cheque made payable to 'Guardians of Pāuatahanui Inlet'.
- 2. Then fill in this form and send it, along with your cheque, to: Membership Secretary, Guardians of Pāuatahanui 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

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