

He Rāhui

by Arielle Kauaeroa Monk (Muaūpoko, Ngāti Raukawa ki te Tonga)

*Me tiaki e tātou te tipa. Me tiaki e tātou te taiao – ki uta, ki tai.
We must care for the scallops. We must care for our natural
world – from the mountains to the sea.*

We're a country known for our clean beaches and sparkling waters. Our coastline is a special place, where people like to spend time – and gather kaimoana. Every stretch of the coast, including the marine species that live there, deserves our care.





Opito Bay

Protecting the tipa

At Opito Bay and Kūaotunu Bay on the Coromandel Peninsula, Ngāti Hei are doing all they can to protect their tipa (scallops). People are concerned about the effects of pollution, **sedimentation**, and climate change – but they are especially worried about the problem of overfishing. As **mana whenua**, this small iwi says it's their job to care for the environment, including the sea and all its creatures.

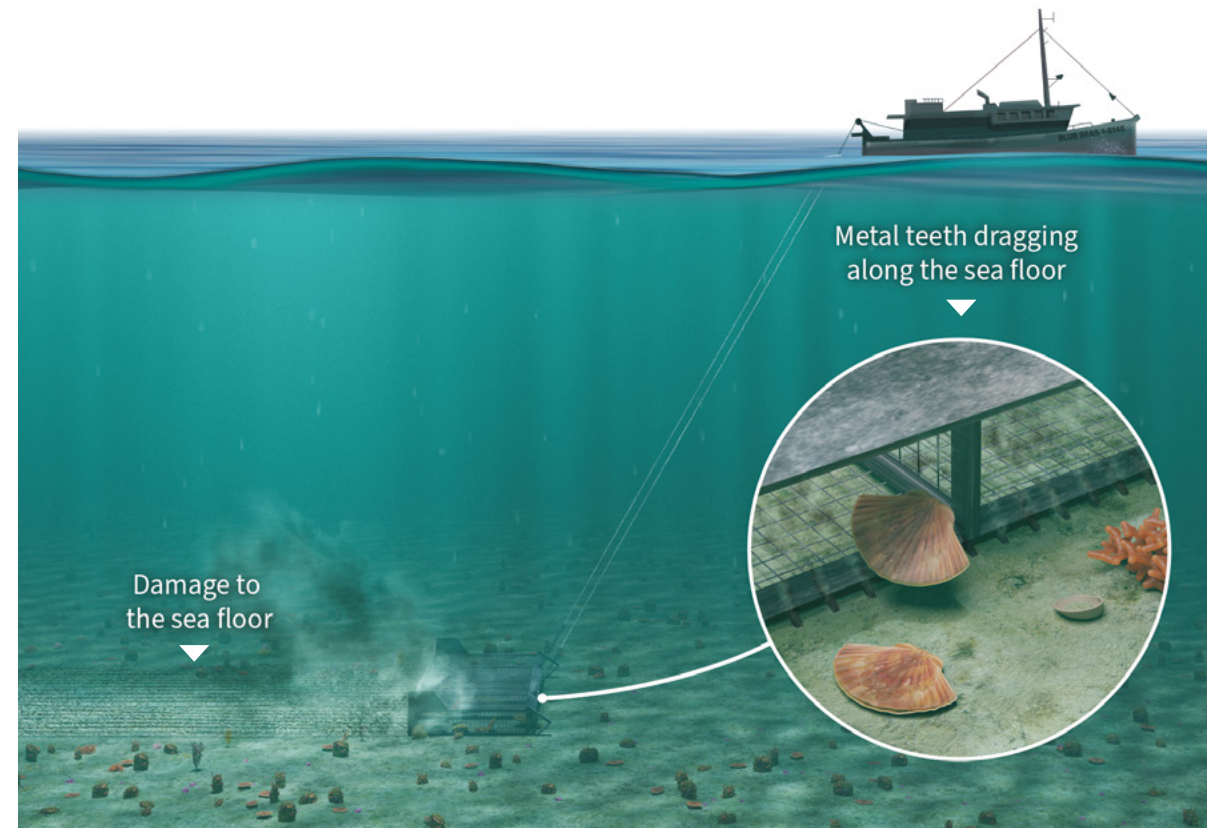
Tipa have always been an important source of food for Ngāti Hei. Kaumātua

remember a time when they could scoop up handfuls of the shellfish with ease – there were so many of them. But over the last five years, the people of Ngāti Hei and many others in the area have struggled to even *find* tipa, let alone collect them. Each time they went out to gather kaimoana, it was getting harder and harder to find enough tipa for tangihanga or hui – or even for just a feed.

Metal teeth

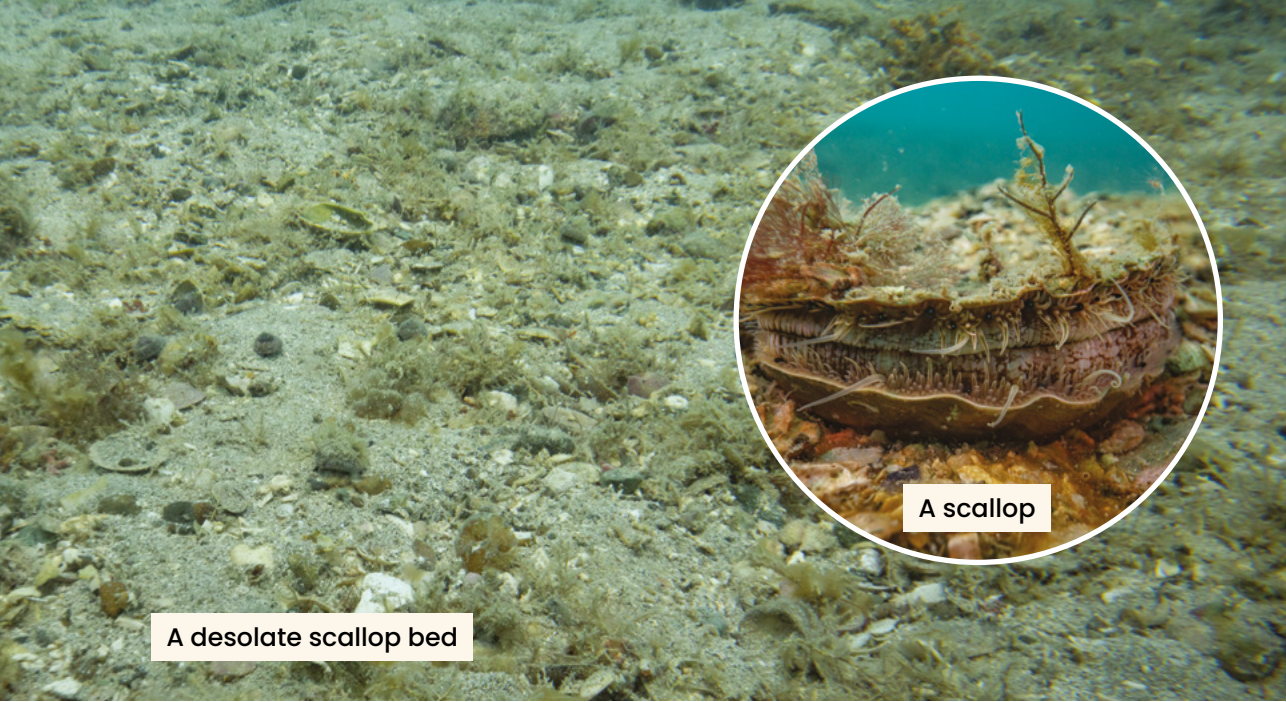
Tūpuna Māori always collected tipa by hand, and they took only enough for a feed. Then, in the 1980s, some big **commercial** fishing companies began to dredge large numbers of scallops to sell. By 2020, Ngāti Hei kaumātua Joe Davis had real concerns about the **sustainability** of tipa fishing. The shellfish were being dredged over and over. It felt like a precious resource was dwindling away.

Dredging is when metal-framed cages are dragged along the sea floor. These cages have rows of metal teeth that dig into the sand, then flip the tipa into the cage. Joe says the shellfish don't stand a chance. Dredging can take thousands of tipa at a time. It also damages the sea floor, where the tipa breed and grow. The people who had harvested this kai for generations were missing out.



sedimentation: when debris settles at the bottom of a body of water, such as a river or the sea
mana whenua: people with the authority to speak for the land they stand on

commercial: when a person or company aims to make a profit (money)
sustainability: when there is enough of a resource left for future generations



A desolate scallop bed

A scallop

Time to get political

Joe and whānau of Ngāti Hei decided it was time to take action to support the recovery of tipa in their **rohe**. They united with other groups in the community to call for change – and they began by taking action with the power of the pen.

In 2020, the groups wrote a letter to the Minister for Oceans and Fisheries. They explained the harm they felt dredging was causing in their rohe and asked the government to stop it. The community wanted time for the seabed to rest and the tipa to recover.

Kaumātua met with whānau, and they agreed to put a rāhui (ban) in place. Joe explains that although this rāhui was voluntary, “the **tikanga** was something we asked whānau, **hapori**, and commercial fishers to respect”.

The rāhui raised public awareness, especially over the summer. People in the area on holiday understood what was at stake. But still, Ngāti Hei wanted the rāhui to be made official. It wanted the government to support a two-year ban on taking any tipa from the rohe, before it was too late.

rohe: territory or area

tikanga: the correct way of doing something, a Māori customary practice

hapori: local community

Rāhui

A rāhui is a temporary ban that prevents people from using a resource or going into a certain area. It is tikanga that has been passed down through the generations. Each iwi and hapū has its own way of using rāhui, but it is always to protect people, the water, the land, or taonga species.

Conservation rāhui are put in place to manage a natural resource. For example, a hapū might notice fewer kōura (crayfish) several years in a row or a disease affecting a certain kind of tree, such as kauri. When this happens, mana whenua can use a rāhui to ensure a season of rest so the species can recover.

Sometimes rāhui are used to set aside an area or resource for an important occasion. This might be a big hui or a special project such as weaving a cloak for a rangatira. During this kind of rāhui, only certain elders are allowed to enter the area.

Rāhui can also be put in place after a drowning. To respect grieving whānau, people can't go into the affected area or fish or gather shellfish until the rāhui has been lifted.

Rāhui are put in place by the mana of an iwi, hapū, rangatira, or whānau. They end when people agree the right amount of time has passed. All rāhui are lifted using a special karakia.

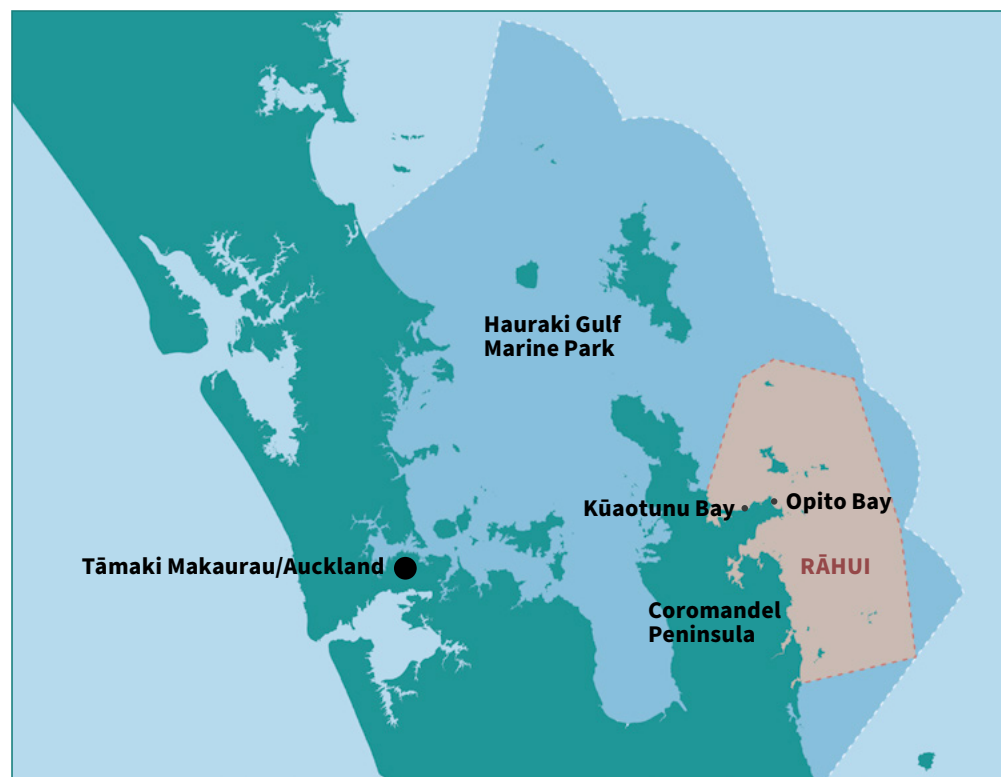


The whole community

The government encouraged everyone to have their say about the rāhui that Ngāti Hei wanted. People made around two thousand submissions, mostly in support of the ban. In September 2021, the government made the rāhui official. It would be illegal for anyone to take tipa from the rohe for two years. This included both commercial and recreational fishers.

The ban covers a big area (almost 2,500 square kilometres) off the Coromandel Peninsula's east coast. In September 2023, the government

will meet with Ngāti Hei and other community groups to discuss how the tipa are doing. These groups include LegaSea – an organisation that represents the views of recreational fishers. “It’s important to remember that the rāhui isn’t just a Māori thing,” says Sam Woolford, who works at LegaSea. “The ban is something the wider community supports. It’s sensible – and the best choice for our natural world. We all need to embrace Māori perspectives and practices. It’s time to adapt.”



Joe Davis with the rāhui sign at Opito Bay

Active kaitiaki

Both Sam and Joe want people to rethink their behaviour when it comes to taking food from the sea, especially tipa. “We need to ensure there is kaimoana for future generations,” says Sam, “and that might mean a permanent ban on dredging.”

Joe always hoped a rāhui in his rohe would spark kōrero in areas close by. “Our rohe isn’t the only place suffering from overfishing and dredging,” he says. Sure enough, other iwi in Tikapa Moana (the Hauraki Gulf) also called for a rāhui on local tipa beds – and now, there’s a total ban on commercial fishing and

recreational harvesting, backed by the government, across all of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park.

All around the motu, iwi, hapū, and whānau are using tikanga to protect Tangaroa. They are showing us that Māori customary practices have an important role to play if we want to care for te taiao – the natural world. Joe says rāhui are a way for **tangata whenua** and **tangata Tiriti** to be active kaitiaki. “We need to take responsibility for te taiao and work side by side. There’s still a lot of mahi to be done,” he says.

tangata whenua: people of the land (Māori)

tangata Tiriti: people of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (non-Māori)

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Published 2023 by the Ministry of Education,
PO Box 1666, Wellington 6140, New Zealand.
www.education.govt.nz

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Enquiries should be made to the publisher.

ISBN 978 1 77690 972 8 (online)
ISSN 2624 3636 (online)

Publishing Services: Lift Education E Tū
Editor: Susan Paris
Designer: Jodi Wicksteed
Literacy Consultant: Melanie Winthrop
Consulting Editors: Helen Pearse-Otene, Emeli Sione, and Lisa Fueamana



SCHOOL JOURNAL LEVEL 3 JUNE 2023

Curriculum learning areas	Science (The living world) Social sciences
Reading year level	Year 6
Keywords	ban, climate change, community, dredging, environment, indigenous knowledge, kaimoana, kaitiaki, kaitiakitanga, ocean, overfishing, pollution, rāhui, resource management, scallops, sea, shellfish, sustainability, tikanga, tipa