

## Teacher Guide

### Kaipara Harbour

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This is the largest harbour and estuarine system in New Zealand. It is very broad and shallow and covers an area of 500 km<sup>2</sup>. The Kaipara has more than 800 km of coastline and is separated from the Tasman Sea by two large sandbank peninsulas. Extending for some 60 km from north to south, the harbour has a 4 km wide entrance halfway along its length framed by the North Head and the South Head. The Northern Wairoa River, Northland's longest river, is a wide navigable estuary flowing into its northern end. There are several large arms extending into the interior of the peninsula from the northeast section of the harbour, one of them ending near the town of Maungaturoto, only ten kilometres from the east coast. The Kaipara River drains into the southern end of the Kaipara Harbour via a mangrove-lined estuary.

Administratively, the lower part of the harbour, south of the Ōruawhoro River lies within Auckland while the upper half is within the Northland Region.



Today, the Kaipara Harbour is rarely used for shipping, owing to the fast-running, treacherous tides and bars at its mouth. There are over 113 shipwrecks on the coast around the heads. The first in 1839 was the *Aurora*, a full-rigged ship of 550 tons. The last recorded was the yacht *Aosky* in June 1994 (Ref Te Ara). For this reason, no large settlements lie close to its shores, although many small communities hug its coastline. Helensville, the region's biggest town thrived in the late nineteenth century as a busy port and kauri milling centre. Prior to that, the area was described as the 'food basket' of Ngati Whatua.

Because of the very strong tides, which can run at 9km/hour at the harbour mouth, Crest Energy has planned to install underwater turbines to produce electricity. There are many objectors to this scheme as it could affect the local fauna especially the 30,000 migratory wading birds that roost and feed in the central and southern areas of the harbour every year. It is also an important feeding ground for marine mammals – orca and dolphins are often seen in the harbour. The Forest and Bird Society are trying to get Ramsar status for the area. Other activities in the harbour include sand mining, fishing and aquaculture. However, there is a rahui effective for the whole of the harbour. There is to be no taking of scallops. Penalties for breaching this katiakitanga include fines, seizure and forfeiture of provisions under the Fisheries Act 1996.





Figure 2: Te Rau Beach  
Courtesy Auckland Regional Council

There are two Auckland Regional parks on the Kaipara, Te Rau Puriri and the newly opened Atiu Creek (April 2008). They are located on the South Head Peninsula and the Tapora Peninsula near Port Albert, respectively.

Atiu Creek parkland protects Te Arai Point where at least nine nationally threatened birds including the grey duck and North Island fernbird have been seen. The 23km long beach is a real attraction for summer visitors.

Te Rau Puriri is unique because it offers access to one of the best beaches on the Kaipara Harbour and the major fresh water lake (Lake Ototoa) on the peninsula. Trout fishing is popular in this large, deep sand-dune lake. No motorboats are allowed on the lake and the strong wind that can blow down the lake can make rowing a boat very difficult at times.

## **Water Safety and the Kaipara Harbour**

(Also see ‘Key Water Safety Messages’ Teacher Guide)

With few large settlements around the Kaipara Harbour coastline recreational activity within the harbour is limited. Fishing appears to be one of the most popular activities, from trout fishing in fresh water to sea bass in the harbour. Much of this is done from small boats and kayaks. Shelly Beach Camp has one of the few boat ramps and wharfs in the harbour.

Small craft need to be seen to “Stay on Top”. Kayakers should have flags and lights on their craft. For further information see ‘Staying Bright on Top’ in Clean Seas, Safe Seas July 2007, Maritime NZ.

*Make sure you check the craft before you leave, tell someone where you are going and when you will be back, go with someone else, take all that safety gear, wear a lifejacket, check the weather and tides and if in doubt don’t go out. Use the Maritime NZ Two minute form.*

There are no patrolled beaches in the Kaipara harbour. Swimming in a rising tide is safer than swimming in an ebb tide. However, away from the entrance, the beaches of the inner harbour are generally safe for swimming. At the southern end of the harbour near the Kaipara River estuary extensive mangroves need to be avoided.

*Take a buddy, tell someone where you are going and a return time. Wear appropriate swim gear, keep a point of reference at some place on the beach so you do not drift away from your gear. Actively supervise children. Watch the water before you enter, know the tide - if in doubt stay out.*

## **Beach water quality**

Several years of water testing have shown that Rodney’s beaches were free from pollution and the public can be confident that they would be safe for swimming. As a result, the council decided not to continue the SafeSwim testing programme. This has not changed with the new Auckland Council.