

## Seaweeds - gardens and forests of the sea

Wellington Underwater Club and local mural artist Tam Kogler have combined to showcase the significance of seaweed and celebrate Wellington's marine life with the installation of a seaweed mural at the Whairepo Lagoon, Frank Kitts Park on Wellington's waterfront. The art and outreach project highlights the importance of seaweed as a vital and productive coastal marine ecosystem.

Wellington harbour is home to a range of native seaweeds that create underwater gardens and tall forests. Seaweeds are an indicator for the health of our marine environment. They provide a three-dimensional structure, shelter and food for many species such as juvenile fish and other undersea critters such as octopuses and seahorses. Seaweeds also protect our coast from erosion by buffering waves.

That's not all - seaweeds are real superstars! Food products like nori (sushi wrapper), karengo (New Zealand nori) and seaweed crisps are commonly found in supermarkets. Like plants on land seaweeds grow using sunlight to convert carbon dioxide and nutrients to biomass. By absorbing the carbon dioxide seaweeds help to mitigate ocean acidification. Over 70% of the oxygen we breathe is produced by marine plants and algae as a side product during photosynthesis. However, seaweeds are under threat from land reclamation, pollution, overfishing and warming oceans.

"I really love the comparison of seaweed habitats to land based forests. If forests are the lungs of the land, then marine plants are the lungs of the ocean." says artist Tam Kogler. "By creating the seaweed mural in the heart of Wellington we are highlighting the important role of seaweeds in the marine environment, and what everyone can do to protect them."

"We are very lucky in Wellington to be able to enjoy such diverse marine life," Nicole Miller, president of the Wellington Underwater Club notes. "Not everyone is able to get underwater, so we are thrilled to be able to give people a glimpse of what we see, without even getting their feet wet. By celebrating our underwater world through the mural, it is another way to connect with the marine environment. We also want to remind people that what we do on land affects the marine life around Wellington's Harbour and Coast. We want to make sure that the octopus, and all its friends, continue to have beautiful gardens."

Join the Wellington Underwater Club and local marine community groups at the pedestrian bridge across the Whairepo Lagoon, Frank Kitts Park on the **18 February, 10am-12pm**. Experts will be on hand to talk about seaweeds and local marine life. The mural will be unveiled at 11am.

For more information, to arrange interview and images, get in touch with Nicole Miller by email to [wellington.underwater@gmail.com](mailto:wellington.underwater@gmail.com).

The project is funded by the Wellington City Council and supported by the Nikau Foundation and Friends of Taputeranga Marine Reserve.

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