

## **Marine Tourism in New Zealand: Operator Profile and Environmental Management.**

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### **Abstract**

Marine tourism is an industry experiencing rapid growth, both worldwide and in New Zealand (Orams 1999; Hall 2001). Marine tourism operations are diverse in nature, encompassing physical activities such as sea kayaking and diving, as well as more passive observation of wildlife and scenery. This study was designed to address the lack of research focussed on the marine tourism sector in New Zealand. The primary goal of the research was to profile marine tourism operators with respect to the nature of their businesses, and also to investigate the extent and use of environmental management methods by marine operators in New Zealand. Some aspects of the study were directly comparable to a similar earlier study conducted by McKegg (1996; McKegg et al. 1998), which made it possible to draw comparisons in terms of growth and development since 1996.

This study has developed a clear profile of marine tourism operations by collecting data using a questionnaire, which was sent to all marine tourism operators in New Zealand in September 2002. Since the last study of marine operators in New Zealand was conducted in 1996 (McKegg 1996) the number of operators has increased by 57%, with sea kayaking and yacht charters experiencing the largest relative growth. Regulation of the marine tourism sector was investigated with respect to operator opinion of central, local and self regulatory authorities. In general, operators have become increasingly approving of regulatory bodies since 1996 which could, in part, be a function of the Safe Ship Management system developed by the Maritime Safety Authority. Environmental management is a growing issue in the wider tourism industry, and this study has found that accreditation, codes of practice and environmental planning are increasingly being adopted within the marine tourism sector, although there is still a great deal more progress to be made.

The marine environment provides the backdrop for a significant proportion of tourism activities in New Zealand, with natural resources such as scenery, marine mammals and seabirds being amongst the most popular attractions in the coastal environment. This dependence on a relatively unspoilt environment in creating opportunities for tourism must be the driving force for ensuring that marine tourism is managed appropriately.