

# **The sustainability of tourism in Ninety Mile Beach – An exploratory view**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The following paper will discuss the main findings of this research and outline the key issues identified by stakeholders. Stakeholder theory was used as a key theoretical basis for this research and a kaupapa Māori research methodology was used for the collection and analysis of data.

This study aims to determine the existence of various management and environmental strategies and analyse their nature and effectiveness to manage tourism growth at Ninety Mile Beach, in the Far North of New Zealand. An additional component of this research will be to assess the strategic and environmental interface with local community perspectives and aspirations. The following preliminary stakeholders and target groups were identified: Far North District Council, Northland Regional Council, Department of Conservation, Ministry of Tourism, various tourism organisations operating on Ninety Mile Beach or in close proximity, related tourism operators e.g. local businesses/organisations, iwi and hapū based runanga, iwi/hapū groups e.g. Ngāti Kurī/Te Aupouri/Te Rarawa/Ngāti Kahu/Ngāi Takato, tangata whenua and related community groups. This research was deemed necessary because the number of tourists visiting Ninety Mile Beach is increasing, and consequently a number of positive and negative effects have resulted. A range of strategies, policies or best practice initiatives need to be assessed or developed to provide for the resulting environmental, social and economic outcomes.

The research findings were organised in terms of the research objectives identified. Each objective provided key issues pertaining to the overall key areas of interest. These were some of the key issues identified including, traditional conservation methods, Māori & community disengagement, environmental impacts of tourism and collective management of resources. As a result of this investigation four key recommendations were developed, including improving on beach vehicle regulation, improving conservation measures, developing adequate waste management plans and creating a stakeholder management plan.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

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This section introduces the reason why sustainable tourism needs to be addressed for Ninety Mile beach and also why it is deemed a delicate and controversial issue. Firstly the background issues that frame this problem are introduced, followed by the purpose of the study and the research questions that guide the project.

## 1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

The last decade has seen significant changes and extensive debate in the tourism sector of the New Zealand economy. A number of key government reports have focused on constructing the emerging tourism sector and have identified pressures for change in the industry. As a result of this increased interest, a re-examination of the role of sustainable tourism in and around New Zealand's natural resources has been prompted (Rentschler, 1999).

The availability of natural attractions in New Zealand is a key draw-card for international visitors. Nature-based tourism is defined as tourism activities which take place in the natural environment (Ministry of Tourism, 2009a). In 2006, approximately 15.7 million tourists, both domestic & international, took part in nature-based tourism activities. The most popular of these involved beaches, particularly for domestic tourists (ibid). In ecological terms, the Far North is one of the most fascinating parts of New Zealand and regarded as one of New Zealand's key natural attractions. This area extends north into the subtropical South Pacific and its uniqueness is reflected in the distinctive plants, animals, and environments not seen elsewhere. Yet in any assessment of the Far North's growing potential for nature-based tourism, many of the environments on which qualities and uniqueness such ventures may depend barely survive in their natural state. In addition, the Far North is the setting for some of New Zealand's earliest, and historically perhaps most important human stories, which are rarely heard beyond the area where they originate. The participation by tourists in nature-based tourism activities is on the rise according to figures recorded over the 2002-2006 period (ibid). Yet the sustainability of this natural resource remains in question.

“Māori cultural tourism provides a unique point of difference for the New Zealand tourism industry” (Ministry of Tourism, 2009b). For international tourists this cultural aspect provides an important point of difference with approximately 80 percent of international tourists in 2006 experiencing some element of Māori cultural tourism during their visit (ibid). Development for agriculture and more recently, plantation forestry has reduced the number of high quality sites of indigenous ecosystems and unspoiled environments. Loss of tribal land and a push to the cities via urbanisation has fragmented many Māori communities. Consequently, much traditional knowledge and the transmittal of stories is in danger of being lost. Sadly, this is reducing those features that distinguish the Far North from the rest of New Zealand especially in terms of authentic and legitimate Māori cultural tourism experiences available. The New Zealand Tourism Strategy (NZTS) 2010 (Ministry of Tourism, 2009c) was developed and implemented to influence the sustainable growth of the tourism sector. Cultural tourism was specifically identified as a key area for development (Ministry of Tourism, 2009b). In 2008, we saw the release of the New Zealand Tourism Strategy 2015 (Ministry of Tourism, 2009d), which seeks to improve and broaden the scope of Māori cultural tourism as outlined in outcome one of the strategy. With these strategies there is potential to improve the scope of Māori cultural tourism in New Zealand and improve upon what we currently have and need in the future.

This research into the sustainability of tourism in Ninety Mile Beach was deemed necessary because the number of tourists visiting Ninety Mile Beach and the Far North is increasing. The repercussions of this increase in tourism levels have proved both positive and negative. The resulting effects need to be managed effectively in order to preserve the natural treasure and resource that is Ninety Mile Beach while providing a level of economic growth through tourism in the region. A range of strategies, policies or best practice initiatives need to be assessed or developed to provide ideal environmental, social and economic outcomes.

### **1.1.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MURIWHENUA REGION**

Muriwhenua literally means end of the land, hence Muriwhenua territory is located in the Far North of New Zealand, extending from the Maungataniwha Range up to Cape Rēinga (see Figure 1, over page). The Muriwhenua people based in this area are a conglomerate of six main iwi (tribes) specifically: Ngāti Kuri, Ngāi Takoto, Te Pātū, Ngāti Kahu, Te Aupouri and Te Rarawa (Taonui, 2006). This landmass forms the tail of the fish that the legendary hero Māui pulled from the ocean. The traditional name 'Te Ika a Māui' refers to the entire North Island of New Zealand which symbolises the massive fish Māui pulled from the ocean depths. At the tip of the tail rests the northern most part of New Zealand, a location of jagged extremity and the meeting place of two clashing seas namely 'Te Moana-a-Rehua' and 'Te Tai-o-Whitirea' otherwise known as the Tasman Sea and Pacific Ocean. This place is known to Māori as 'Te Rerenga Wairua' (Cape Reinga), meaning the leaping-place of spirits. Māori believe the spirits of their dead departed this place to return to enigmatic Hawaiki, the ancient resting place or spiritual realm of their ancestors. This place of barren extremity is reached by the departed spirit via a pathway known as 'Te Ara Wairua' which lies in the area along the coast of Ninety Mile Beach between the points of high and low tide. It is said that "the departed soul waits for an out going tide before it commences the journey back to Hawaiki" (Cloher, 2002).

Figure 1: Map of Muriwhenua (Te Ara, 2008)



The pathway of 'Te Ara Wairua' commences at Ahipara and leads to various locations of spiritual significance and cleansing. An account of this journey was recorded by the late Reverend W. G. Puckey who was guided from Kaitaia to Cape Rēinga and recorded an explicit account of each location, stream, hill and tree which had special significance to Māori on this spiritual journey (Mitalfe, 1981). The tribes of Muriwhenua see themselves as the guardians of this precious ancestral treasure, the path that all the departed souls of Māori must travel to reach their spiritual homeland of Hawaiki (Cloher, 2002).

### 1.1.2 TE ONEROA-A-TŌHĒ (NINETY MILE BEACH): A NATIONAL TREASURE

An important ancestor of Muriwhenua was a chief named Tōhē, from Ngāti Kahu. He lived at Maunga Piko in Kapowairua Bay (see Figure 1); he longed to see his only daughter Rāninikura, whom married a man from Kaipara near Dargaville some distance from Tōhē's homeland. When Tōhē was very old he announced his intention to journey one last time, south to see his daughter. His people were concerned due to his age and ill health that he would not survive the journey and thus pleaded with him to stay. This was Tōhē reluctant reply (Te Ara, 2008):

*Whakarua i te hau, e taea te karo.  
Whakarua i taku tamāhine, e kore e taea te karo.  
Taea Hokianga, ā hea, ā hea.  
Ko tā koutou mahi e kapo ake ai, ko taku wairua.*

*I can shelter from the wind.  
But I cannot shelter from the longing for my daughter.  
I shall venture as far as Hokianga, and beyond.  
Your task (should I die) shall be to grasp my spirit.*

Tōhē's journey south proved a challenging one. There are remnants of Tōhē's journey still remaining, as he named over 100 places along the western coast. However, sadly he died at Whāngaiariki near Maunganui Bluff, before he had a chance to reach his beloved daughter. The places named by Tōhē stand as a memorial to this sad journey. The most well-known is Te Oneroa-a-Tōhē (the long beach of Tōhē), also called Ninety Mile Beach (ibid). Te Oneroa-a-Tōhē is arguably a more accurate name than Ninety Mile Beach, since in fact the beach is just under 56 miles long (Mitalcfe, 1981). Ninety Mile Beach is on the western coast of the northern tip of the Far North. It is fixed between rocky volcanic headlands, Scott Point to the north and Reef Point to the south. Between the two points is a seemingly endless beach of beautiful white sand with the Tasman Sea splashing at its feet (Te Ara, 2008). The name Ninety Mile Beach is a miscalculation; it is actually 88 km (55 miles) long however there are various theories for this misnomer (McLintock, 1966).

Ninety Mile Beach is the only official beach roadway in New Zealand although it lacks the markings and road signs you would usually expect on such a road. This sandy

access way is still used on a daily basis as an alternative roadway to the largely poor quality official route, state highway one, north from Kaitaia.

### **1.1.3 OVERUSE AND ABUSE OF A TREASURE; A MURIWHENUA DILEMMA?**

The importance of Ninety Mile Beach as an access way is ever increasing, but little is known on the number of vehicles using this route or the damage they may be causing the natural environment. For example, in 1997, The New Zealand Herald reported on the state of hundreds of residents and tourists isolated and stranded in the Far North after a bridge approach on the only road access via State Highway One to Cape Reinga was washed away by torrential rain (Gee, 2007). As a result, this left the isolated community with only three options, either wait until the bridge was fixed, exit via helicopter (for emergencies only) or exit via Ninety Mile Beach in 4WD.

Ninety Mile Beach is backed throughout its length by a belt of ever moving sand dunes. Various projects to fix the sand and prevent erosion include the 1970s project involving the planting of lupines and marram grass. During this time many forestry projects were initiated. Where bare sand dunes once were, now large pine forests dominate the landscape (J. Conrad, personal communication, January 3, 2007). A number of studies over the last ten years have looked at specific environmental outcomes which may be related to the impact of tourism in the area (Morrison, 2001; Clocombe, 1993).

## **1.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

This study was concerned with determining the existence of various management and environmental strategies, and if so, analysing their nature and their effectiveness in regards to their ability to accommodate tourism growth in Ninety Mile Beach. An additional component of this research was assessing the strategic and environmental interface with local community perspectives and aspirations.

Thus, the overall purpose of this study was to compare the aspirations of key community stakeholders, along with those of various tourism operators with the range of regional strategic plans and environmental policies, aimed at sustaining the tourism industry and related activities based on Ninety Mile Beach in the Far North

District area. For the purposes of this study, the following stakeholder groups are involved in this research:

- Far North District Council & Northland Regional Council
- Department of Conservation
- Various tourism organisations operating on Ninety Mile Beach or in closely related areas
- Local businesses/organisations
- Iwi and hapu based runanga, iwi/hapū groups e.g. Ngāti Kurī/Te Aupouri/Te Rarawa/Ngāti Kahu/Ngāi Takato, tangata whenua and related community groups.

### **1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

This research investigation is aimed to produce the following outcomes:

#### **1.3.1 OBJECTIVE 1: MAORI AND TOURISM INDUSTRY**

Identify the key issues pertaining to the partnerships and cooperation with Māori or tangata whenua in tourism within the Ninety Mile Beach area.

#### **1.3.2 OBJECTIVE 2: ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND TOURISM INDUSTRY**

Collate data on the current tourism ventures operating on Ninety Mile Beach and identify key models of industry best practice in regards to maintaining a healthy co-existence with the environment and community.

#### **1.3.3 OBJECTIVE 3: COMMUNITY AND TOURISM INDUSTRY**

Provide feedback on levels of tolerance by local communities and the interrelationship with the tourism sector and environment.

#### **1.3.4 OBJECTIVE 3: GOVERNMENT AND TOURISM INDUSTRY**

Develop an inventory of various government or public sector lead strategies and policies aimed at accommodating and sustaining the growing tourism industry specific to Ninety Mile Beach.

## 2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

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This investigation is positioned in the field of qualitative inquiry. A Kaupapa Māori research methodology was utilised in conjunction with the collection of secondary data for the purpose of this investigation.

### 2.1 PRELIMINARY STEPS IN THE RESEARCH DESIGN

Preliminary steps were needed in order to establish the research design and complete the initial stages in contacting, preparing for, and conducting the interviews. Based on the initial research and identified target groups, it was determined that a Kaupapa Māori research methodology would best suit the majority of stakeholder groups. It should be noted that the majority of interview participants were of Māori ethnicity, therefore, a research methodology was required which recognised the cultural significance and backgrounds of these participants. “Kaupapa Māori research methodology is the collection of assumptions about research that informs the process of inquiry and hence determines the methods used” (Barrett-Ohia, 2007), in a Māori context. Graham Smith (as cited in Smith, 1999), summarised the methodology as follows:

1. Is related to ‘being Māori’;
2. Is connected to Māori philosophy and principles;
3. Takes for granted the validity and legitimacy of Māori, the importance of Māori language and culture; and
4. Is concerned with ‘the struggle for autonomy over our own cultural well being’.

Utilising this research methodology meant a number of important principles were upheld. Firstly, the outcome of this research aims to make a positive difference for the people interviewed and the communities they represent. Also, it was important to acknowledge the cultural grounding of this research, this meant the heritage and whakapapa (genealogy) of participants was established and the information

provided was protected and respected. The participants in this study are not explicitly identified; their input will be discussed as representatives from various stakeholder groups. Whanau (family) based mentorship was utilised in this study. This ensured culturally relevant and at times, sensitive information, was protected and remained legitimate. The initial aim of this research was to produce a descriptive case study from the results, using thematic analysis of the data. This narrative structure was chosen to most effectively represent the results as the importance of context was considered significant to the research. However, for the purpose of this research paper the results have been simplified and expanded upon within the discussion section.

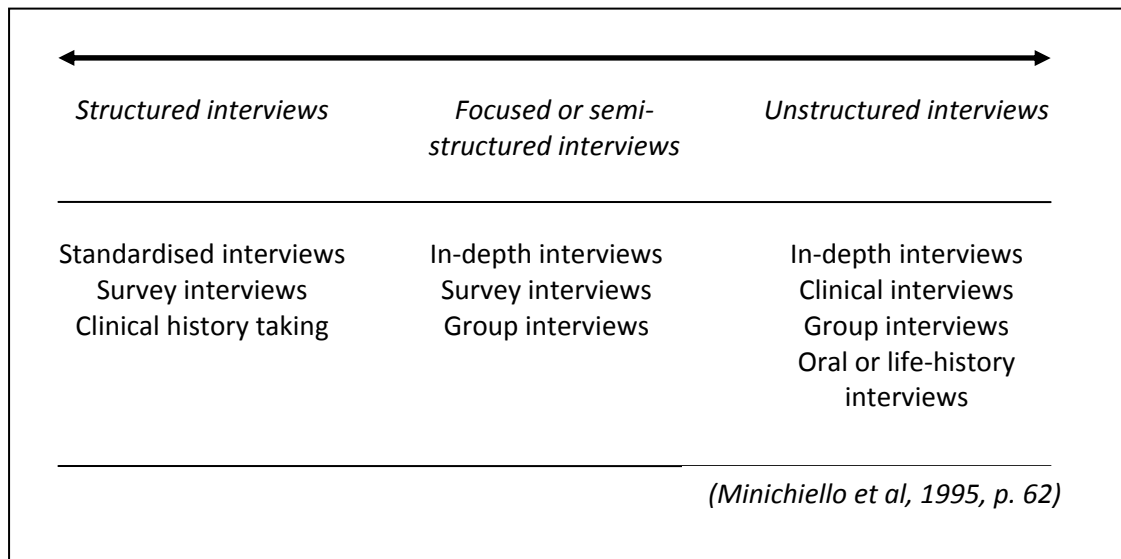
## **2.2 IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS**

Ten in-depth interviews were conducted over a period of four weeks, with representatives from each of the mentioned stakeholder groups. Interviews took place in areas of convenience to the participant, ranging from home locations, work places, cafés and work vehicles. Interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 1 hour and 30 minutes.

### **2.2.1 DESCRIPTION OF INTERVIEWING METHOD USED**

Interviews used in qualitative research can be in-depth, unstructured, and guided by open-ended questions or prompts. Unstructured interviews can range along a continuum; from non-directive and totally open ended, to being guided by the researcher by using a prepared list of questions. Similarly, the nature of questions used can vary from broad to fairly specific. Yin (1994) classified qualitative interviews as open ended or focused, which is a useful distinction, and helpful to a researcher trying to decide which method along the continuum best suits the topic under investigation (see Figure 2). A further distinction has been made by Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, and Alexander (1995) between the goals of the interviewer, and the process of the interview, with the goals directing the process employed.

Figure 2 - Interviewing Methods: The Continuum Model



The interviews used in this research project were semi-structured and followed a recursive model of in-depth interviewing (ibid), whereby interviewees are encouraged to offer relevant information in a conversation format. As discussed by Minichiello et al (1995), the goal of in-depth interviewing is to gain an understanding of the world of the informant/participant without going to the extreme of participant-observation (actively participating in and observing a situation). The in-depth interviewing method as described by Minichiello was merged with an overall Kaupapa Māori research methodology.

### 2.3 SECONDARY DATA COLLECTION

Qualitative methods of research should involve the collection of secondary data (Morris, 1994). To fulfil the goals of this research the collection and analysis of documents, literature and reports relating to the tourism industry and cultural sector – both in New Zealand and internationally were utilised. The current marketing literature relating to tourism, Māori tourism and Māori cultural literature as well as the limited information relating to tourism in Ninety Mile Beach were researched. The data was obtained via electronic sources, from lecturers at The University of Waikato and from libraries. As well as a secondary data collection process for the industry, it was also imperative to conduct a literature review of the topic of the investigation.

## 3 RESULTS

This section introduces the results of the in-depth interviews. The following table identifies the key organisations involved in the research. The key themes that were established from the in-depth interviews are provided in Table 2 – 5. These results will be presented in themes under the research objectives that guided the study. The themes are discussed further in chapter five of this report.

### 3.1 WHO WHERE THE KEY STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED IN THIS RESEARCH?

Table 1 Identifies the key stakeholder groups represented by the respondents included within the in-depth interviews.

*TABLE 1: Respondent Information*

Stakeholder Group	Organisation	Organisation role/function
Government	Northland Regional Council	Resource Management: Develop policies & strategies in conjunction with the RMA to manage the use of coastal area.
Government	Far North District Council	Resource Management: Develop policies & strategies in conjunction with the NRC to manage the use of coastal and land areas.
Government	Department of Conservation	Conservation and maintenance
Iwi/hapu based organisation	Te Runanga o Te Rarawa	Kaitiakitanga
Iwi/hapu based organisation	Te Aupouri Māori Trust	Kaitiakitanga
Iwi representative	Ngāti Kuri/Te Aupouri	Kaitiakitanga
Iwi representative	Ngāti Kahu/Te Rarawa	Kaitiakitanga
Tourism organisation	Individual tourism operator and MRTO Representative	Tourism provider
Community conservation	Te Tahī Moana Whakaoranga	Conservation of pīngao & toheroa
Local business	Waitiki Landing	Provides supplies/accommodation/transport & tourism information

### 3.2 KEY RESERACH FINDINGS

The following results were gathered from respondents during the in-depth interviews and represent the key themes identified under each research objective of this investigation.

### 3.2.1 THEMES RELATING TO RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 1 – MĀORI AND TOURISM INDUSTRY:

TABLE 2: Key Themes – Objective 1

Māori & Tourism Industry		Example Quotes
Theme:	Ninety Mile Beach & commercialisation	"The resources have been seized by the local network & government to be used as commercial resources. It's the commercialisations of a cultural resources, this in itself is not sustainable."
Theme:	Rāhui a traditional conservation measure	"As a child, places of rāhui & tapu on Ninety Mile Beach were common. It's only since the last 30 years that resources have started to be managed from a government level, now they believe they are the guardians of this area & pushed Maori & our traditional ways to the side."
Theme:	Traditional environmental conservation methods	"Nature has its own way of managing its resources, you just have to sit back & understand these things. Our people in the old days would manage their resources based on the season & the natural timing of the environments development. There were certain times during the season to collect certain seafood & kai (food). Each hapu had its own areas to collect from & harvest. Each area was exclusively managed & conserved & the old people knew which time of the season was best to collect certain resources & to leave them alone to replenish."
Theme:	Lack of control by local people to manage tourism plans & strategies	"The government controls us, we should be controlling the government, we should be the ones to inform the government not the other way around."
Theme:	Protecting sites of cultural significance	"A lot of Māori in our district feel like some of these significant sites are not being recognised or treated correctly, which definitely means there is room for improvement."
Theme:	Lack of Māori input in tourism industry development	"There is absolutely no control of the tourism industry in this area. We have no say in how it is managed."

### 3.2.2 THEMES RELATING TO RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 2 – ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND TOURISM INDUSTRY:

TABLE 3: Key Themes – Objective 2

Environmental Sustainability & Tourism Industry		Example Quotes
Theme:	Damage to the natural environment	"There is the issue of vehicles on beaches which is an issue which is gaining more and more prominence up here...this has resulted in the damage of bird nesting areas, dunes and dune vegetation. It's about safety as well. It's probably the most significant issue pertaining to Ninety Mile Beach."
Theme:	Controlling vehicles on Ninety Mile Beach	"Its really hard to control individual vehicles on Ninety Mile Beach let alone buses which regularly drive up & down Ninety Mile beach, right now there is a very convoluted mix of different groups with different responsibilities & interests, so its very difficult to manage."
Theme:	Destruction of Toheroa	"There has been a major decrease in toheroa, whether it is as a direct impact of increased vehicles on the beach or something else. There is no definitive research on what impact this element has on our seafood, we need to limit the number of tourists on this beach, its got to have some negative impact on our beach, shell fish, sand dunes & bird life."
Theme:	Destruction of Seafood supplied	"The quantity of fish on this beach is suffering, we used to have bountiful supply when I was a kid and this may be an impact of the trawlers sweeping the beach. Its impacting on the land & the sea itself, there is no protection of our beach."
Theme:	Increase in pollution & rubbish	Ninety Mile Beach is a national treasure. If it's such a special thing, why aren't we working to protect it better; why do we have to see all this rubbish along the beach?"
Theme:	Lack of facilities & amenities	"Since the first tourist bus arrived on Ninety Mile Beach, about 40 years ago there are still today, no public toilets available on Ninety Mile Beach. Millions of dollars travel up that beach everyday & not one cent has been invested in a simple facility like toilets."
Theme:	Impact of tourism on the environment	"We don't mind tourism in this area but it does have a negative impact to the area in terms of the environment. They don't bring anything back into our community. Educating the tourism operators on how to treat this place appropriately would be a big help."
Theme	Potential for Nature-tourism activities	"I see a lot of potential for nature-tourism activities on Ninety Mile Beach, especially in terms of guided walks & the establishment of tracks for walking & tours."

### 3.2.3 THEMES RELATING TO RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 3 – COMMUNITY AND TOURISM INDUSTRY:

TABLE 4: Key Themes – Objective 3

Community & Tourism Industry		Example Quotes
Theme:	Lack of community consultation	"In terms of partnership between the local community & tourism industry there is little input from the local community to guide the current tourism activities on Ninety Mile Beach. We are just left to deal with the rubbish left behind from the tourist buses & visitors."
Theme:	The problem with community involvement in district planning & the submission process	"It depends on the re-sourcing which is the main issue for iwi & hapu up here, either they may not understand the submission process or they don't have the resources to be able to complete the submission. In this instance it may be helpful to talk to their local iwi authority to seek assistance."
Theme:	Increased strain on local facilities	"The more people & tourism buses which come up Ninety Mile Beach the more damage to the natural environment and this creates a greater strain on the local infrastructure and local people who have to clean up after everyone has gone."
Theme:	Negative impact of tourism on the community	"In terms of tourism in Ninety Mile Beach, I can't see how it has improved our community. They don't get involved in the community or support our community developments; they don't even support our local sports teams."
Theme:	Lack of control by local community	"All they (tourism operators) care about is making money. If they knew the importance of toheroa to the natural environment they wouldn't be driving up and down Ninety Mile Beach"

### 3.2.4 THEMES RELATING TO RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 4 – GOVERNMENT AND TOURISM INDUSTRY:

TABLE 5: Key Themes – Objective 4

Government & Tourism Industry		Example Quotes
Theme:	Lack of strategies & plans at local government level directed from the government	"There is no clear direction from the government on the central issues such as driving on beaches & general beach management specific to this area."
Theme:	Lack of collective decision-making on the management of resources	"There is currently no organised forum which integrates these organisations (hapu/iwi/local community groups/government groups & various tourism operators."
Theme:	Implementation & maintenance of plans	"There are lots of meetings aimed at involving & informing the community on local plans."
Theme:	Community involvement in planning within the district	"What we are trying to do is notify the local hapu that believe there is a culturally significant area to inform us of so it can be included into our plans...there are many areas which have not been identified or filed as a significant area for various reasons."
Theme:	Government consultation	"From a locals perspective the consultation performed by some government organisation is merely tokenism which is meant to tick the boxes but with no real input expected from us."

## **4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

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This section pulls together the themes presented by the in-depth interviews together with the current literature on issues related to the topic of investigation. This discussion is organised in terms of the research objectives identified.

### **4.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE ONE: IDENTIFY THE KEY ISSUES PERTAINING TO PARTNERSHIPS AND COOPERATION WITH MAORI OR TANGATA WHENUA IN TOURISM WITHIN THE NINETY MILE BEACH AREA.**

In relation to objective one, the main themes identified via the in-depth interviews related to three key issues. These included; 1) Traditional conservation methods, 2) Protecting cultural heritage and, 3) Māori disengagement. The following discussion will provide aspects on each of these themes.

#### **4.1.1 TRADITIONAL CONSERVATION METHODS**

The destruction of kaimoana (seafood) reserves and general seafood supplies because of over fishing/collection, pollution and the inappropriate management of natural resources is a major problem in Ninety Mile Beach. This was an example of one of the comments collected from one of the respondents pertaining to this issue:

*“As a child, places of rāhui and tapu on Ninety Mile Beach were common. Its only since the last 30 years that resources have started to be managed from a government level. Now they believe they are the guardians of this area and have pushed Māori and our traditional ways to the side.”*

There were many accounts made to the Waitangi Tribunal regarding the Muriwhenua Fishing Claim, which tell of Māori communities with a reliance on the sea bound by a wealth of laws, customs and skills, and who once enjoyed a supply of seafood so bountiful. This bountiful supply, which was once managed and conserved as a matter of survival now seems redundant. There are numerous accounts of these times of plenty, too often affirmed and corroborated to defy belief (ibid). The

management of these resources officially rests with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fishing (MAF). However, local iwi and hapū (sub-tribe) still consider their role as kaitiaki (guardians) despite their inability to legally enforce traditional conservation measures like rāhui or area(s) of preservation.

#### **4.1.2 PROTECTING CULTURAL HERITAGE**

The issue of protecting culturally significant sites was a key concern for many respondents. Some believed the government's ability to protect identified culturally significant sites was failing. The process involved in registering and protecting a site of cultural significance is complicated and requires time, knowledge and resources which are not readily available to all community members and/or groups. The following quote was an example of the type of comment collected relating to this issue:

*“A lot of Māori in our district feel like some of these significant sites are not being recognised or treated correctly, which definitely means there is room for improvement.”*

Many respondents felt that they had little control over decisions made relating to protecting significant sites on and near Ninety Mile Beach. This feeling of disengagement has created an environment of contempt amongst some in the community towards government agencies, which highlights an area which could be improved.

#### **4.1.3 MĀORI DISENGAGEMENT**

The feeling of disengagement felt by many respondents also related to their experience with the local tourism industry. Many felt they had no control over the planning and implementation of tourism related activities in their district. This is an example of one of the respondents' comments:

*“There is absolutely no control of the tourism industry in this area, we have no say in how it is managed.”*

It was a concern for many respondents that culturally significant sites were not being properly protected and instead utilised for commercial purposes. This feeling of resentment has further contributed to the offence some respondents have towards the tourism activities operating in Ninety Mile Beach. It was also a concern that the majority of government agencies and other stakeholder group representatives who participated in the in-depth interviews had little knowledge on the exact number and nature of tourism activities operating in Ninety Mile Beach. According to the literature investigated and respondents interviewed, there was no evidence that a comprehensive database of tourism operator/activities existed pertaining to Ninety Mile Beach. From this lack of evidence, it may be plausible to assume that the tourism activities operating in Ninety Mile Beach are not monitored appropriately.

#### 4.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE TWO: COLLATE DATA ON THE CURRENT TOURISM VENTURES OPERATING ON NINETY MILE BEACH AND IDENTIFY KEY MODELS OF INDUSTRY BEST PRACTICE IN REGARDS TO MAINTAINING A HEALTHY CO-EXISTENCE WITH THE ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY.

In relation to objective two, there were two key issues identified including 1) The environmental impact of tourism and 2) Tourism activity on Ninety Mile Beach. The following will discuss each of these key issues utilising related literature and key findings from the in-depth interviews.

##### 4.2.1 THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF TOURISM

*“When motorised vehicles arrived in the early 20th century, the beach was used as a road because it was flat. Many farms depended on the beach route, despite the disadvantages of tides, soft sand, and the corrosion of vehicles from the salt. Some of these beach highways became official roads, and were significant public routes. Ninety Mile Beach in Northland still carries tourist buses today”*

(Te Ara, 2008).

The destruction of sand dunes and beach environment caused by vehicles on Ninety Mile Beach was the main issue identified by the majority of people interviewed. The following comment encapsulated this recurring theme identified from in-depth interviews:

*“There is the issue of vehicles on beaches which is an issue which is gaining more and more prominence up here...this results in the damage of bird nesting areas, dunes and dune vegetation. It’s about safety as well. It’s probably the most significant issue pertaining to Ninety Mile Beach.”*

The key government organisation which was deemed most responsible for the management and sustainability of Ninety Miles Beach was identified as the Department of Conservation (DOC) and to a lesser extent the Far North District Council and Northland Regional Council (NRC). Vehicles on the beach contribute to and/or cause the following problems:

- Shellfish bed damage by vehicles;
- Risks to other recreational beach users (swimmers, children, elderly),
- Seabird’s nesting areas disturbed by vehicles,
- Vegetation on dunes is damaged by vehicles, causing erosion,
- Damage caused to other vehicles and people due to misuse or inability of drivers to handle changing beach conditions.

NRC sets regional rules for the use of the tidal section of the beach and has a role for setting policies for managing the wider coastal area. NRC has recently released documents regarding safe driving on the beach, which are part of the wider Coastal Plan (Northland Regional Council, 2008). However, problems arise with the implementation and regulating of these rules. With other government departments stretched to their limit it is difficult to monitor the problem and patrol the area. The findings from the Office for the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment (1997) sought to investigate the management of environmental effects associated with the tourism sector in New Zealand. Over ten years later, it seems the same problems persist in Ninety Mile Beach despite attempts to rectify these issues:

1. Loss of quality of some relatively un-spoilt parts of New Zealand's natural environment.
2. Loss of amenity values from incremental development, which can also affect communities and lifestyles, especially in places where the

proportion of visitors to residents is high.

3. Pressure on infrastructure resulting in significant costs to local communities.

#### **4.2.2 TOURISM ACTIVITY IN NINETY MILE BEACH**

The main tourism activity identified by respondents operating in Ninety Mile Beach was the tour buses. The following comment typified the feedback regarding this topic:

*“When I think of tourism on Ninety Mile Beach, I think of tourist buses cruising up and down.”*

The other tourism operations and activities identified by respondents included;

- Fishing
- Boating
- Dune surfing
- Nature walks
- Camping
- General sight seeing

There was no one government organisation representative or other stakeholder group that could actually identify the full array and number of tourism activities functioning in Ninety Mile Beach. This was a significant finding because it signified a major lack of knowledge on the available research and statistics pertaining to the area. This has highlighted a need for further research to be conducted on the number and nature of tourism activities on Ninety Mile Beach and an assessment on the sustainability of the industry in the future. It is clear that the demand for tourism is increasing in the Far North region. What is not clear is how this growth will be effectively planned for and sustained in the future.

#### 4.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE THREE: PROVIDE FEEDBACK ON LEVELS OF TOLERANCE BY LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND THE INTERRELATIONSHIP WITH THE TOURISM SECTOR AND ENVIRONMENT?

In relation to research objective three, the main themes identified via the in-depth interviews related to two key areas including: 1) Community disengagement and, 2) Tourism impact on the community and environment. The following discussion will provide details on each of these themes.

##### 4.3.1 COMMUNITY DISENGAGEMENT

Respondents all seemed positively aware that local businesses gained financially from associated tourism activities on Ninety Mile Beach. However, the belief of the majority of the respondents was that the positive economic benefits created from local tourism, benefited more those businesses and organisations which are external to the area. Many of the tourism activities taking place in Ninety Mile Beach are operated by businesses from other areas including Kerikeri and Paihia. Therefore, the positive economic benefits of tourism in the area are not directly benefiting the community which has to deal with the negative outcomes, like a higher strain on facilities, roading and the damage to the natural environment and resources. The following comment highlighted a concern many respondents felt in regards to growing tourism numbers. They felt that either these outcomes resulted directly from tourism related activities or it was a result of mismanagement of resources:

*“All they (tourism operators) care about is money. If they knew the importance of toheroa, they wouldn’t be driving up Ninety Mile Beach.”*

This research identified a lack of funding and support available to local businesses. Funding they believe, could help to develop tourism ventures and activities locally which would alternately feed into the local community and economy. The problem is, many of the larger tourism operations which function in the area feed external communities. There are many benefits to building the local economy around the tourism industry and related activities. However, it must be ensured that this activity is sustainable in all aspects. This means the local community must be a key component to making this idea of sustainable tourism a reality. Tourism sustainability is an essential component for the future of New Zealand’s economy;

these are some of the fundamental elements for achieving sustainable tourism (Collier & Harraway, 2006):

- meeting the needs of the host community by ensuring economic benefits from tourism, and a positive social relationship between visitor and host. Tourism cannot be seen by New Zealanders as threatening the local environment or their current identities.
- meeting the needs of current visitors by ensuring that the experience meets their expectations of value for money.
- meeting the needs of future visitors by ensuring that our natural and physical resources are protected and continue to hold their appeal for future generations.
- meeting the needs of the industry by generating acceptable returns on investment, and by ensuring that growth occurs at a level which justifies future investment.

#### **4.3.2 TOURISM IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENT**

The respondents raised issues concerning the management and consultation partnerships with tangata whenua and various local community groups. There were instances where the main government stakeholders identified made regular efforts to consult the community and/or tangata whenua on issues relevant to the area but in most instances these attempts were considered insufficient or superficial. Nevertheless, the existence of such initiatives was seen as a positive move towards enhancing relationships. Most of the respondents who identified themselves as Māori commented on the fact that traditionally Māori employed a vast array of conservation and management strategies which ensured fish and shellfish stocks remained sustainable however, since the management of the area had been taken out of their hands, the sustainability of such resources has suffered. Tourism growth in Ninety Mile Beach has resulted in an increase in pollution and rubbish along with an increased strain on local facilities like toilets and infrastructure. The main organisation which deals with these issues on a daily basis is the Department of Conservation (DOC). DOC's Northland region extends from the Kaipara Harbour in the south to the Three Kings Islands in the north, which is a huge area (Department

of Conservation, 2008). Often there is only one DOC ranger available to manage this area, which is vastly inadequate.

#### 4.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE FOUR: DEVELOP AN INVENTORY OF VARIOUS GOVERNMENT OR PUBLIC SECTOR LEAD POLICIES AIMED AT ACCOMMODATING AND SUSTAINING THE GROWING TOURISM INDUSTRY SPECIFIC TO NINETY MILE BEACH.

In relation to objective one, the following issues were identified, including; 1) Strategies and plans and, 2) Collective management.

##### 4.4.1 STRATEGIES AND PLANS

The strategies and plans aimed at maintaining or improving the beach environment in Ninety Mile Beach according to the majority of respondents are inadequate.

*"There is no clear direction from the government on the central issues such as driving on beaches & general beach management specific to this area."*

When respondents were asked about the possible future direction of policies and plans for the sustainability of Ninety Mile Beach most responses were limited. In most instances, respondents were not aware of the current strategies and plans which existed in relation to sustainability on Ninety Mile Beach and therefore were incapable of making suggestions which related to how any further strategies or plans could be implemented. As a result, many of the respondents were unable to assess the effectiveness of these plans and strategies or suggest improvements. The main focus for most respondents was identifying further issues. For those respondents who were aware of such strategies and plans their main feedback concerned the regular update of plans, encouraging greater community involvement in the establishment, implementation and maintenance of these plans. Involving iwi and hapū in the management or kaitiakitanga (stewardship/guardianship) of Ninety Mile Beach was also a common suggestion.

##### 4.4.2 COLLECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF RESOURCES

In terms of comments representing industry best practice, most respondents in a stakeholder capacity were unaware of instances where organisations involved in the

local tourism industry had actually attempted to forge or enhance community relationships. Some respondents felt these efforts to consult were just attempts by some organisation to tick the box to say they had done all they could to gain input from different community groups, when in reality, it was received as superficial as the following comment describes:

*“From a local perspective the consultation performed by some government organisation is merely tokenism which is meant to tick the boxes but with no real input expected from us.”*

Most respondents were also unaware of the way the local tourism industry had supported the community in ways like supporting local organisations or community groups via sponsorship. The mismanagement of Ninety Mile Beach could potentially have major negative effects on many different stakeholder groups in terms of social, economic, environmental and cultural implications. If Ninety Mile Beach is to be managed, in the most sustainable and effective way, it will be essential to have input and buy in from all key stakeholder groups.

## **5 RECOMMENDATIONS**

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This section makes recommendations based on the findings and discussion presented in the previous two chapters. The purpose and the objectives of each research objective have been synthesised to provide recommendations usable by the contemporary stakeholders mentioned in this report.

### **5.1 RECOMMENDATION ONE: IMPLEMENT MORE RIGID ONBEACH DRIVING REGULATIONS AND POLICIES**

The Northland Regional Council currently produces brochures available to the public which attempt to educate drivers on safe beach and dune driving. These documents are available online and from various council offices and some tourism outlets. Most travellers use the beach in a responsible manner but there continues to be people who abuse the area and have little knowledge about safe on beach driving. The sheer amount of traffic on Ninety Mile Beach is also a major concern. Tourism buses venture up and down Ninety Mile Beach as if it is a motorway and general users mostly have little knowledge of the damage they cause to shellfish like toheroa and the surrounding environment.

### **5.2 RECOMMENDATION TWO: DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT NEW CONSERVATION METHODS SPECIFIC TO NINETY MILE BEACH**

There is a wealth of proven knowledge regarding the sustainability and conservation of Ninety Mile Beach, some of which was evidenced in the accounts provided to the Waitangi Tribunal during the 1988 Muriwhenua Fishing Claim. This knowledge and experience is essential to the maintenance and sustainability of Ninety Mile Beach both as a tourism destination and as a local natural resource. Research is needed to clarify these potential conservation measures and further implement them in a manner which does not impede too harshly on the lifestyles of the local community and/or damage the key drivers for the local tourism industry.

### **5.3 RECOMMENDATION THREE: DEVELOP AN ADEQUATE WASTE MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR FAR NORTH BEACHES**

Ninety Mile Beach is seriously lacking areas to dispose of rubbish and facilities to cater to tourists and the general public, like toilet facilities. The Department of Conservation made a decision not to provide rubbish disposal facilities as they have found in the past that such areas were abused and used as dumping zones for all description of waste including household rubbish. As a result, the rubbish bins were removed and ultimately waste products are left behind in more random locations along the beach. Rubbish washed up on the beach from offshore activities like trawling and fishing activities is also an issue. There are some individuals and groups which make a voluntary effort to retrieve the rubbish off the seashore and dune areas but this is vastly inadequate and surely not the responsibility of a few individuals. Rubbish bins and toilet facilities need to be placed and managed in specific areas along Ninety Mile Beach.

### **5.4 RECOMMENDATION FIVE: CREATE A STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT PLAN**

A stakeholder management plan would entail the following; 1) Identification of all key stakeholder groups and details on what defines them as such, 2) An analysis of each stakeholder group along with the identification of their strengths/weaknesses/opportunities/threats and key needs and values, 3) A communication strategy between the organisation and each group must be formulated either individually or collectively, 4) Once communication and networking is established these groups must have some input or buy-in to the ultimate goals and outcomes of the organisation, 5) Regular reviewing of this process. This is not an easy process to establish but once initiated it can be built upon and improved over time.

In conclusion, there were a number of key issues which were identified during the in-depth interviews. Many of these issues are not new like conservation and improving community engagement. These recurring issues need to be dealt with tactically and strategically with improved community engagement. Stakeholder buy-in and acceptance to tackling the problems at hand starts with involving various

stakeholders at the initial problem identification stage. Government based stakeholder groups are more empowered than others to plan and implement solutions that should not be the burden of community groups or individuals who lack the resources and support. Respondents identified a division between the various government agencies responsible for the good management and sustainability of Ninety Mile Beach. This division or lack of collaboration between various agencies has created gaps in the planning and management of this unique tourism environment, which has a great potential for improvement in terms of sustainable management and tourism growth. By working on implementing or further researching the recommendations provided, a collective strategy aimed at improving the issues at hand is possible.

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