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Reef burial plan raises concern

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Plans to bury human ashes in an underwater reef in the Marlborough Sounds have not been fully revealed to the public, a Karaka Point woman says.

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An advertisement for resource consent application to build several artificial reefs is misleading because it fails to mention that one of the reefs will be a controversial eco-burial site, says Karaka Point resident Loreen Brehaut.

Mrs Brehaut said she was "fairly amazed" that a council advertisement for the application by the Marlborough Reef Trust did not mention the proposal for a burial site at Karaka Point, near Picton.

The site would consist of reef balls mixed with cremated ashes.

The advertisement stated that there would be five reefs, three in the Queen Charlotte Sound and two in Kenepuru Sound "for the purpose of enhancing marine habitat, marine studies and recreational use".

Mrs Brehaut said: "There appeared to be some hidden agenda, so it would simply slip past people."

But Marlborough District Council resource management officer Keith Heather said the burial site was "a component of what is quite a complicated application" and it was impossible to include everything within the advertisement.

Mr Heather has arranged for another advertisement to appear.

Mrs Brehaut also said the Marlborough Reef Trust was not a registered trust, but Mr Heather said that any trust, registered or not, could lodge a resource consent application.

The burial site was a separate issue to simply creating artificial reefs, Mrs Brehaut said.

She said several residents were planning to make submissions on the burial site, as it would raise a lot of issues including how families would access the Karaka Point site, which was at the bottom of a steep, narrow track.

Mrs Brehaut was also concerned that a burial site would require an exclusion zone for seafood gatherers and fishers in a very popular fishing spot or create a boat hazard.

Clive Barker of the Marlborough Reef Trust lodged the resource consent application to build three reefs, including the burial site, in Queen Charlotte Sound using "reef balls", which are domes made of silica sand or ground glass. Mr Barker would also be investigating the option of concrete filled mussel floats for a reef at Koi Point.

The reefs at Koi Point and Karaka Point would be 60m long by 50m wide, while a reef at Kumutoto Point in Kaipapa Bay would be considerably larger, at 600m long by 20m wide.

A further two reefs at Schnapper Point and Island Point in Kenepuru Sound would be made up of mussel shell contained in biodegradable bags to form a 100m circle which is 600mm deep.

Mr Barker said the eco-burial reef would be a good way of paying for the projects, which would cost "hundreds of thousands of dollars".

He came up with the idea for a burial site after people received complaints about scattering ashes off the back of the ferries or over rose gardens.

"I just thought, there's a reserve there, it's a nice place, and when someone wants to know where their great grandad is they can see.

Mr Buckley said scattering ashes in the Marlborough Sounds was very popular.

While some people preferred to have something tangible, like a memorial, it would be hard for those who were not divers to access the site.

Should the eco-burial idea go ahead, Mr Buckley said he would certainly offer the choice to clients.

Department of Conservation Sounds area manager Roy Grose said there had been many suggestions for artificial reefs in the last 15 to 20 years, including sinking car bodies, concrete structures and a navy frigate.

Many ideas had been in response to a decline in blue cod numbers, he said.

Mr Grose said the burial site would involve cultural consideration, among other issues, and DOC would be making a submission on the idea.

Rangitane chief executive Richard Bradley did not know about the plans but expected Maori to be "nervous" about the idea of an eco-burial at Karaka Point.

He said Karaka Point residents and local Iwi would be upset that Mr Barker had not consulted them personally, instead going through the council to do so.

"It's not normal for other people's remains to be scattered around like that, especially in a place of such cultural significance without the agreement (of locals and iwi)."

Tony Orman of Marlborough Recreational Fishers said if the idea had justification and it was good for the eco system then it was worth pursuing.

However, if there was going to be conflict with people's right or ability to fish then that needed to be looked at.

Public submissions on the proposal close at 5pm on March 8.

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