

# THE GUARDIANS OF THE HARBOUR



## The Delicate Balance

**Mangawhai Harbour Restoration Society (MHRS)** safeguards the balance of our "sand and salt" lifestyle. We act as the community's voice and operational lead for our harbour's long-term resilience. Supported by a targeted council rate and donations, MHRS works with Te Uri o Hau, councils, DOC and Mangawhai Matters to **protect Mangawhai Sandspit** and manage the **harbour's living balance**.

**The Holistic View.** A healthy harbour depends on more than just the entrance. MHRS advocates for a catchment-wide approach, recognising that riparian planting, sediment control and controlled urban development are essential to protecting our waters from the hills to the sea.

## The Urgent Reality:

Recent LiDAR surveys reveal the Sandspit has lost 420,000 tonnes of sand. Without intervention, a breach is high-risk within 15 years. This would lead to **uncontrolled inundation** of the harbour and **extensive erosion** of the shoreline. Stabilising Mangawhai Sandspit and ongoing dredging will keep the **"tidal heartbeat"** strong, prevent erosion and keep the channel and entrance open.

## The Community Rescue of Mangawhai Harbour

### The Crisis (1978–1991):

After a **1978 storm** tore a 600-metre breach through the Sandspit and Cyclone Bola struck a final blow, the harbour mouth and channel choked. Tidal flow stopped, turning the lagoon into a "stagnant graveyard" with a dying ecosystem. Meanwhile, the "rogue" breach to the ocean became treacherous and nearly un navigable.

### The Big Dig (Feb 11, 1991):

Driven by institutional inaction, 100+ **"Big Dig Rebels"** and 40 machines staged a historic intervention. In just four days, and without consents, they carved a small **new channel** and temporarily **reopened the harbour entrance**.

### From Intervention to Stability (1991-1996)

Following the rescue, dedicated locals used old dredge machinery to keep the harbour flowing under gruelling conditions. With Council support, they also rebuilt the rock groyne protecting the harbour entrance. In **1995**, formal Resource Consents were granted, enabling comprehensive dredging of the lower channel. This sand was repurposed into a permanent bund wall. On **June 29, 1996**, the rogue breach was officially closed, restoring full tidal flow and establishing a dynamically stable inlet.

### Worldclass Stewardship

The Big Dig rescue led directly to the formation of Mangawhai Harbour Restoration Society. By partnering with **expert coastal and ocean engineers**, MHRS developed a rigorous strategic roadmap. This transformed the initial 1991 rescue into a worldclass programme of environmental restoration and sandspit stabilisation.

## Our 4 Pillars of Guardianship

### Spit Stabilisation

**The Threat:** Erosion has created low points at high risk of a catastrophic breach.

**The Action:** Maintaining the 1996 Bund Wall and using LiDAR data to target stabilisation and sand replenishment in vulnerable zones.

### Strategic Dredging

**The Threat:** 20,000m<sup>3</sup> of sand chokes the channel annually, threatening 24/7 Coastguard and recreational access.

**The Action:** Precise annual dredging to keep the "pulse" of the tide moving – maintaining a navigable channel, while directing erosive energy away from vulnerable shorelines.

### People & Plants

**The Threat:** Bare sand is defenceless against wind and rising seas.

**The Action:** MHRS volunteers have planted 150,000+ natives and installed 5km of sand fencing, to date, to create a living barrier.

### Ecological Balance

**The Threat:** Mangrove monocultures can strangle salt marshes, bury shorebird foraging grounds and prevent recreational use of the harbour.

**The Action:** Consented management of 35+ hectares to prevent encroachment.

### Success!

**Lincoln Street** – Through the careful management of mangroves, a vibrant salt marsh now thrives alongside sandy shores. It provides a home for foraging birds and space for the community, proving that ecological health and recreation can go hand-in-hand.

## Become a Friend of the Harbour

The Mangawhai Spirit is alive and well. Whether you want to get your hands dirty or simply add your name to our mission, there is a place for you in this legacy.

### Volunteer:

Join our "Ground Crew" for planting and sand fencing.

### Stand with the Guardians:

Become a "Friend" to strengthen our community voice and help protect the harbour's future.

Your involvement ensures we have the community mandate, science and machinery required to stay ahead of the tide.

Scan to learn more:



or contact us at [JoinMHRS@gmail.com](mailto:JoinMHRS@gmail.com)