



# Driving on Muriwai Beach

## Public engagement background information

### Recreation at Muriwai beach

Muriwai beach is a popular beach with locals and visitors enjoying a range of recreational activities including swimming, surfing, fishing, dog walking, driving, horse riding, bike riding and enjoying nature.



### Driving on the beach

Muriwai and Kariotahi beaches are the only two places in Auckland where public can drive a vehicle on the beach. There is a long history of driving on Muriwai beach and people come from afar to enjoy the experience.



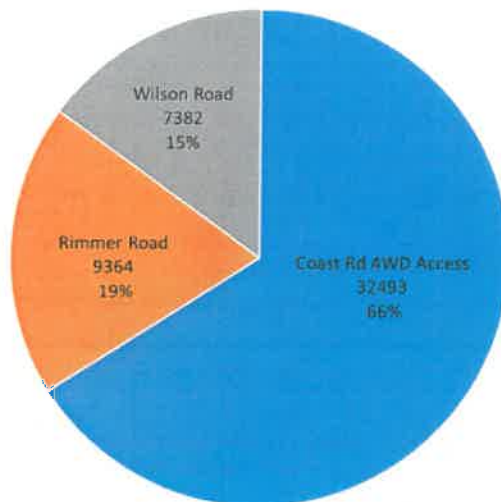
Public can access the beach by vehicle at three locations:

- Coast Road - via Muriwai Regional Park approximately 2 kms up the beach
- Rimmer Road - via an easement managed by the Hancock Forestry and the Department of Conservation, approx. 15 kms up the beach
- Wilson Road - via a paper road controlled by Auckland Transport, approx. 30 kms up the beach



Between 1 October 2020 and 31 January 2021 a total of 24,600 vehicles accessed Muriwai beach via these three access points.

Vehicle Movements on to and off Muriwai Beach by entry point  
1 October 2020 to 31 January 2021



## What are the rules for driving on the beach?

A permit is required to drive on Muriwai beach. Under the law, beaches are legal roads, so all road rules apply including:

- speed limits
- licensing of drivers
- vehicle registration and warrant of fitness
- alcohol use
- seatbelts
- helmets
- driving behaviour.

The speed limit on Muriwai beach from the 4WD access at Coast Road to Okiritoto Stream is 30km/h. From Okiritoto Stream (650m north of Coast Road) to southern extent of New Zealand Defence Force bombing range is 60km/h. Vehicles are prohibited south of the 4WD access and in the Defence Force bombing range

## Regional Parks Management Plan (2010)

The Regional Parks Management Plan (2010) identifies vehicles accessing the beach through the regional park. Specific actions over the 10-year life of the plan focus on:

- managing the impacts of erosion on the park
- managing appropriate pedestrian, vehicle and horse access to the beach.

Auckland council is currently undertaking its 10-year review of the regional parks management plan that covers all regional parks, and sought the community's suggestions for the plan in September and October 2020. The community's suggestions are now being used to inform the preparation of a draft plan. Once the draft plan is prepared and approved for release, it will be presented for public comment.

Recent consultation on the Regional Parks Management Plan included submissions from 98 individuals and seven organisations providing comments on Muriwai Regional Park specifically. Feedback themes included:

- people enjoy the rugged nature and isolation of Muriwai
- park users value the opportunity to ride horse and motorbikes and drive vehicles on the beach especially because there are few other places to do this in the region
- an issue raised was the tension between vehicle drivers on the beach and other users. Many submitters commented motorised two and four wheeled vehicles on the beach cause damage to the dunes, plants and wildlife.
- a large portion of comments from horse riders reported conflicts on Muriwai beach with speeding motorbikes and with 4WD vehicles.
- Some locals commented the beach was not safe or enjoyable
- some 4WD owners and a bike riders also commented on tensions between themselves and horse riders and requested that room be made for everyone.
- most submitters agreed vehicle use on the beach was a problem which needed to be addressed.

The submissions also made suggestions for improvements including:

- limiting or controlling the number of vehicles on the beach
- speed control
- separating the vehicle and horse entrances to the beach
- providing horse only and vehicle only zones on the beach

- providing four-wheel drive and dirt bike tracks elsewhere to reduce the number of vehicles on the beach

## Recent closures

There have been several closures to vehicle access points since late 2019:

1. An overnight closure of Coast Road 4WD access during Guy Fawkes week in 2019.
2. An overnight closure of Coast Road 4WD access and Rimmer Road on 5 February 2020 in support of a prohibited fire season.
3. Coast Road 4WD access, Rimmer Road and Wilson Road were closed during the Covid-19 Level 4 lock down in early 2020.
4. An overnight closure of Coast Road 4WD access during Guy Fawkes week in 2020.
5. Coast Road 4WD access, Rimmer Road and Wilson Road from 23 December to 10 January (inclusive).

## Ecology

The sand dunes at Muriwai are home to the rare and important Muriwai gecko. Please see the following news article for more information:

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/environment/123706495/muriwai-gecko-unique-species-hanging-on-on-aucklands-doorstep>



Photo credit Dylan van Winkel

An ecological assessment of the Muriwai Regional Park and beach area was completed in November 2020:

*Biodiversity Values of Muriwai Regional Park Muriwai Regional Park has outstanding ecosystem and biodiversity values recognised within the 5 Mile Strip, comprising a mosaic of critically threatened and endangered species and ecosystems. It is classified as a Biodiversity Focus Area (BFA) and prioritised for threat management.*

*The BFA extends along the sand dunes for approximately 6.5km north from the southern side of Okiritoto Stream and covers 197 hectares. It comprises a mosaic of ecosystems including, active sand dune ecosystems of Spinifex-pīngao grassland/sedgeland (DN2), Oioi-knobby clubrush sedgeland (DN5), and forest ecosystems including native forest Tōtara, kānuka, broadleaved forest (WF5), and exotic-dominated tree land TL.3.*

*Sand dune ecosystems are a national priority for protection and both ecosystem types found here are regionally threatened with threat rankings of Endangered (DN2) and Critically Endangered (DN5).*

Very little native forest on stabilised sand dunes remains in Auckland because of clearance for farming and urban development, consequently this ecosystem type, (WF5), is regionally threatened with a threat ranking of Critically Endangered. Within the WF5 ecosystem is an area of Pohutukawa forest which is a rare occurrence on sand within the Auckland region.

The tree land (TL.3) is not classified as a threatened ecosystem but it does have threatened plants scattered throughout.

There are 12 threatened and at-risk species within the Muriwai Regional Park and a species of carnivorous beetle which is of interest. The 5 Mile biodiversity focus area is recognised as a key site in the Auckland region to protect three threatened and at-risk species, the Muriwai gecko, pingao, and sand coprosma. The Muriwai gecko is endemic to the site and is classified as 'critically threatened' at a national and regional scale. The pingao and sand coprosma are important for binding the sand and help to prevent loss of sand inland, an important function of the coastal near shore marine and terrestrial ecosystem.

All vegetation in this sequence of ecosystems, from the foreshore dunes to the stabilising young sandy soils with native forests, is important in buffering inland sites from large storm events and will become increasingly valuable with climate change and sea level rise.

Threats identified for the ecosystem and species include, deer, possums, rabbits, rats, stoats, weeds, climate change, fire, myrtle rust and vehicles. Pest plant and animal control, and prevention of vehicle damage are the priority management activities for the 5 Mile BFA. Damage from vehicles is the most significant, visible, and immediate threat to the ecosystem and species currently, due to the scale of encroachment.

The direct impact from vehicles is confined to the dune ecosystems (DN2, DN5) where the fragile vegetation is easily damaged and results in open tracks with no vegetation. Large scale loss of the sand coprosma has occurred due to vehicle damage. Lizards occur throughout the dunes and it is likely that individuals have been killed directly by vehicles. A secondary effect to ecosystems and species is the migration of sand inland with the loss of the binding vegetation. Migrating sand can bury the developing forests of the more stable sites. Migrated sand is also lost to the foreshore ecosystem. Another secondary effect of vehicle damage is an increase of weeds that rabbits and browsers prefer thereby increasing the pressures from these species as they utilise the weedy tracks.

### Threatened Species List

Common name	Scientific Name	Threat classification	
		National	Regional
White-fronted tern	<i>Sterna striata</i>	At Risk - Declining	At risk - Declining
Muriwai gecko	<i>Woodworthia aff. maculata</i> 'Muriwai'	Threatened - Critical	Threatened - Critical
Tatahi skink (Western shore skink)	<i>Oligosoma smithi</i>	At Risk - Declining	Threatened - Endangered
Corokia	<i>Corokia cotoneaster</i>	Not Threatened	At risk - Sparse
Sand coprosma	<i>Coprosma acerosa</i>	At Risk - Declining	At risk - Serious Decline
Western kanuka	<i>Kunzea amathicola</i>	Threatened - Vulnerable	not assessed
Pingao	<i>Ficinia spiralis</i>	At Risk - Declining	At Risk - Serious Decline
Myrsine divaricata	Weeping matipo	Not Threatened	Threatened - Endangered
Inanga	<i>Galaxias maculatus</i>	At Risk - Declining	At Risk Declining
Grey mullet	<i>Mugil cephalus</i>	Not Threatened	At Risk - Naturally Uncommon
Giant kokopu	<i>Galaxias argenteus</i>	At Risk Declining	Introduced and Naturalised
Tcherca	<i>Paphys ventricosa</i>	no lists for shellfish	no lists for shellfish
Carnivorous carabid beetle	<i>Bruella antarctica</i>	not checked	not checked

Photo imagery shows a significant increase in the impact of vehicle activity in the back dune areas:



## Fire risk

Fires are prohibited at Muriwai beach, however there is an ongoing history of illegally lit fires on the beach, in the back-dunes and adjacent forest. Between 2015 and 2020 there were 145 recorded fire events. The fine-leaved dune vegetation and prevailing wind means fire presents a major threat to the dune system and Woodhill Forest.



## Vehicle wrecks on the beach

Complaints have been received by council about the behaviour of people driving vehicles on the beach. This includes accessing the back-dune, failure to stick to speed limits, driving in a manner that is dangerous to other beach users, vehicle crashes and damaged vehicles being left on the beach.

Vehicle wrecks are not uncommon and cause significant hazards for other beach users.



Thank you for reading through this summary and considering the future of driving on Muriwai beach.

We look forward to receiving your feedback via the online survey.