



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Passage between Astrolabe Reef exclusion zone and Motiti Island

A Harbourmaster direction was put into effect on 9 May 2025, prohibiting vessels greater than 500 gross tonnes from transiting the following exclusion zone:

Motiti Island: A circle of 2.0 nautical miles centred on position 37 36.430 South 176 25.135 East.

The exclusion zone overlaps with the Astrolabe Reef Exclusion Zone and effectively stops large ships transiting between the existing exclusion zone and Motiti Island.

The current Harbourmaster direction will expire on 1 November 2025 and whilst a short-term extension is possible, it is not a permanent solution to the identified safety issue.

What is an exclusion zone?

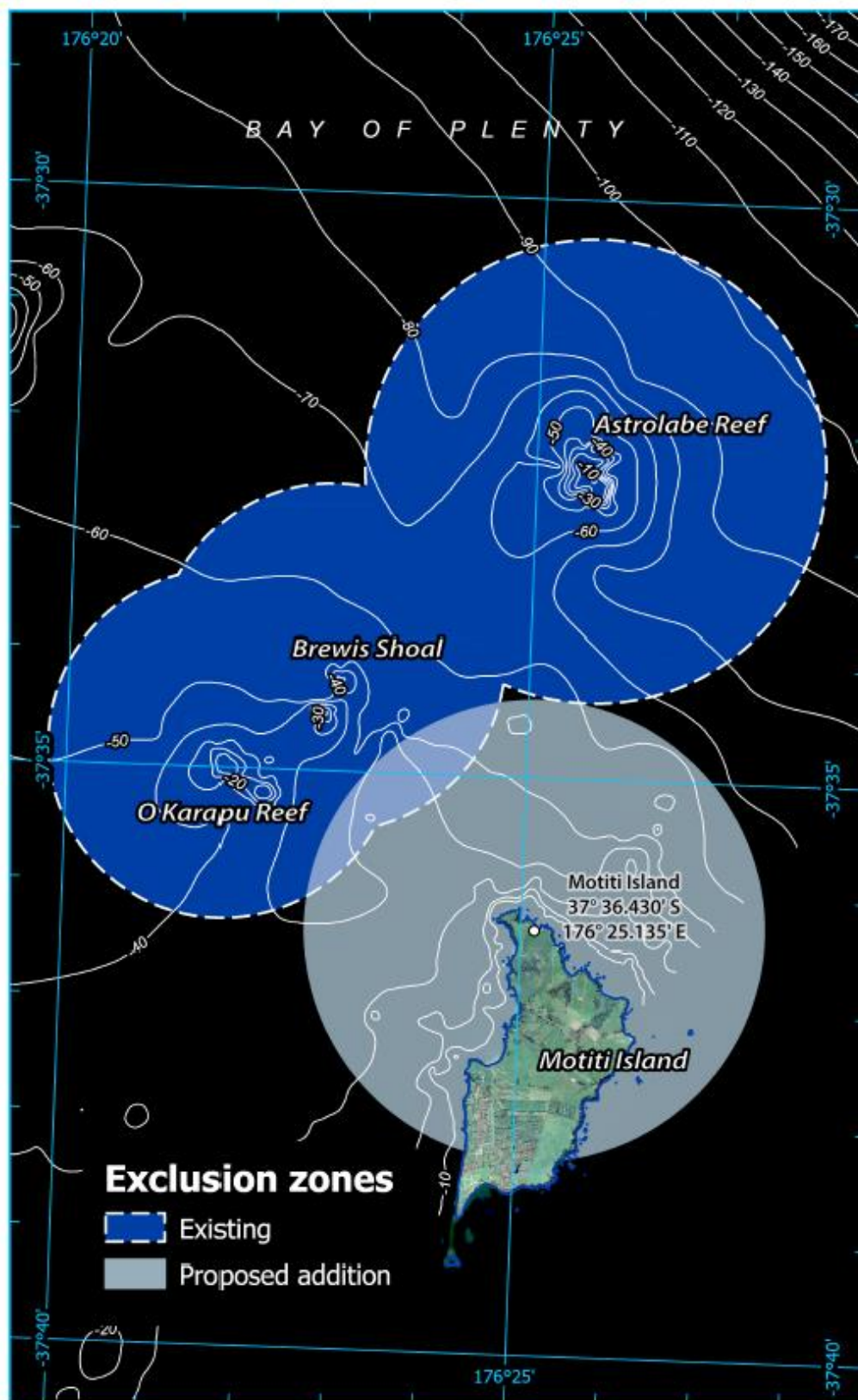
An exclusion zone prohibits vessels from transiting through an area and can be established for maritime safety only. Section 33F of the Maritime Transport Act 1994 (MTA) allows Harbourmasters to issue directions to ensure maritime safety, which can include establishing exclusion zones.

How is the exclusion zone different from the rules of the Motiti Protection Area?

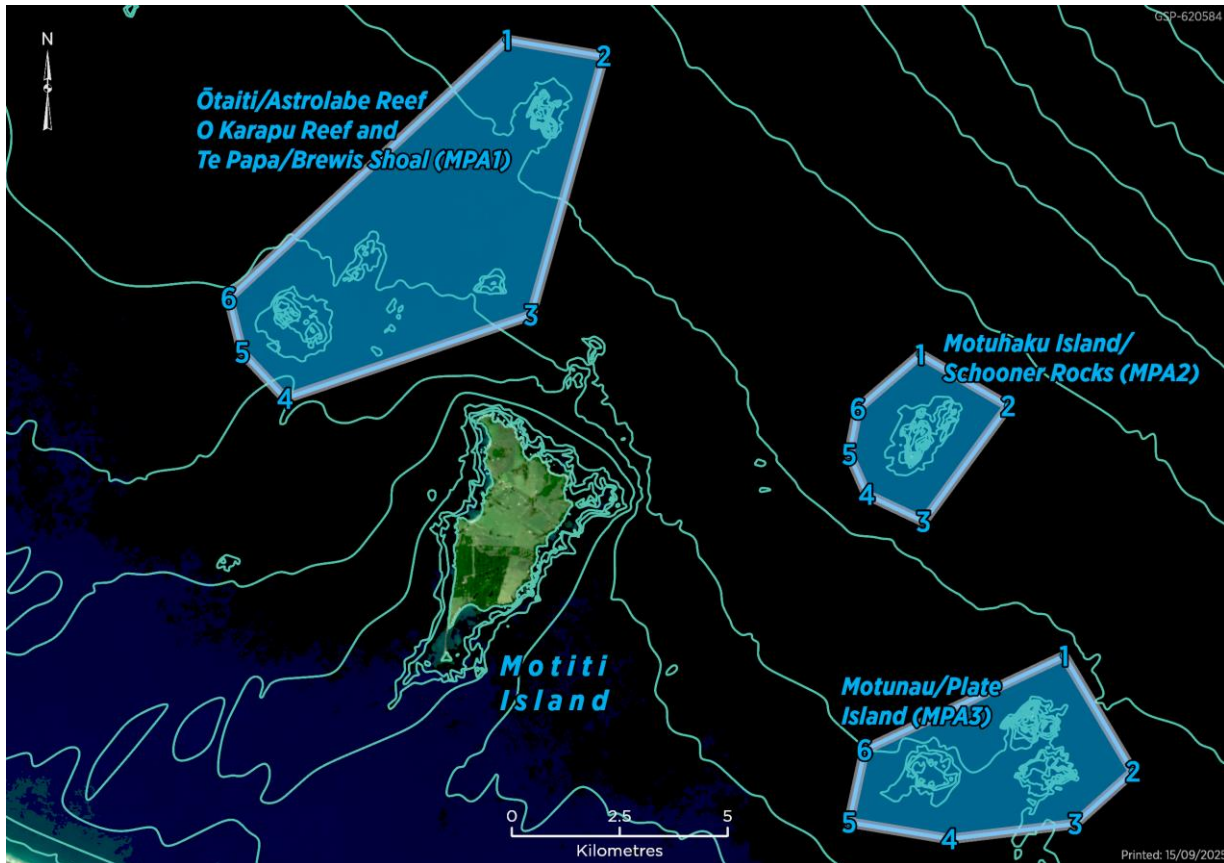
The Motiti Protection Area (MPA) was created following an Environment Court decision in 2020, which directed the Regional Council to implement new rules within its Regional Coastal Environment Plan, to protect the three offshore reef systems near Motiti Island, due to their significant marine biodiversity, landscape and cultural values. The key rules are that you cannot take marine life from the three areas that make up the Motiti Natural Environment Management Area (i.e. MPA1 = Otaiti/Astrolabe Reef, O Karapu Reef and Te Papa/Brewis Shoal; MPA2 = Motuhaku Island/Schooner Rocks; and MPA3 = Motunau/Plate Island), and you can only anchor in these areas, subject to following guidelines designed to protect the reefs (see the Regional Council website for further information).

In contrast, the driver for the proposed Motiti Exclusion Zone is maritime safety. By preventing large vessels (over 500 gross tonnes) from transiting between Motiti Island and the existing exclusion zone surrounding Astrolabe Reef, Brewis Shoal and O Karapu Reef, the Regional Council's Maritime Team aims to prevent the risk of a ship running aground.

Where is the new exclusion zone in relation to the existing Motiti Protection Area?



Map 1 – Proposed Motiti Exclusion Zone (overlapping with the existing exclusion zone surrounding Astrolabe Reef, O Karapu Reef and Brewis Shoal)



Map 2 – Motiti Protection Areas

Why is there a need for an exclusion zone in this area?

Ships seeking to reduce travel time can transit between Motiti Island and the Astrolabe Reef Exclusion Zone – causing them to pass dangerously close to the reefs and the island itself.

As the manoeuvrability of large ships is constrained due to their size, momentum and draft, they risk collision or running aground should they transit through this treacherous area. While rare, the impact of running aground can be catastrophic in terms of environmental, social and economic costs. The MV Rena is a real and tangible example of this.

Why don't you just keep the existing Harbourmaster direction in place indefinitely?

Harbourmaster directions are required to have an end date as per Maritime New Zealand regulations. This means that the Harbourmaster direction is only a temporary measure intended to address the problem in the short term, while we find a permanent solution to this safety issue.

Who will the exclusion impact?

The exclusion will only relate to large ships over 500 gross tonnes. The area will remain open to all other vessels.

Can I anchor / fish in the new exclusion zone if I want to?

Yes, providing that your ship is less than 500 gross tonnes and you are not located within Motiti Protection Area 1 (MPA1) surrounding Astrolabe Reef, O Karapu Reef and Brewis Shoal.

How will the exclusion zone be notified and monitored?

Land Information New Zealand (LINZ) will be requested to issue a 'Notice to Mariners' and update the New Zealand Nautical Almanac, which details shipping routes around the New Zealand Coast). Information will also be provided on the Regional Council website and in the 'Boating in the Bay' guide.

What will be the repercussions for any ships that ignore the exclusion zone?

A Breach of Bylaw and subsequent infringement will likely be issued, and the infringement cost would be \$1000.

How and when can I feedback my views?

You can provide written feedback via our Participate platform from 24 October 2025 to 11 January 2026. You also have the option of presenting directly to Council in February 2026. If you have any questions, you can contact the Harbourmaster Team by email (navsafety@boprc.govt.nz).

Why are you looking to introduce an exclusion zone in this area now when you have just updated the Navigation Safety Bylaw in 2024?

This safety issue was brought to the attention of the Hearings Committee towards the end of the hearings process, and therefore, it was too late for it to be publicly consulted on during the last Navigation Safety Bylaw review.