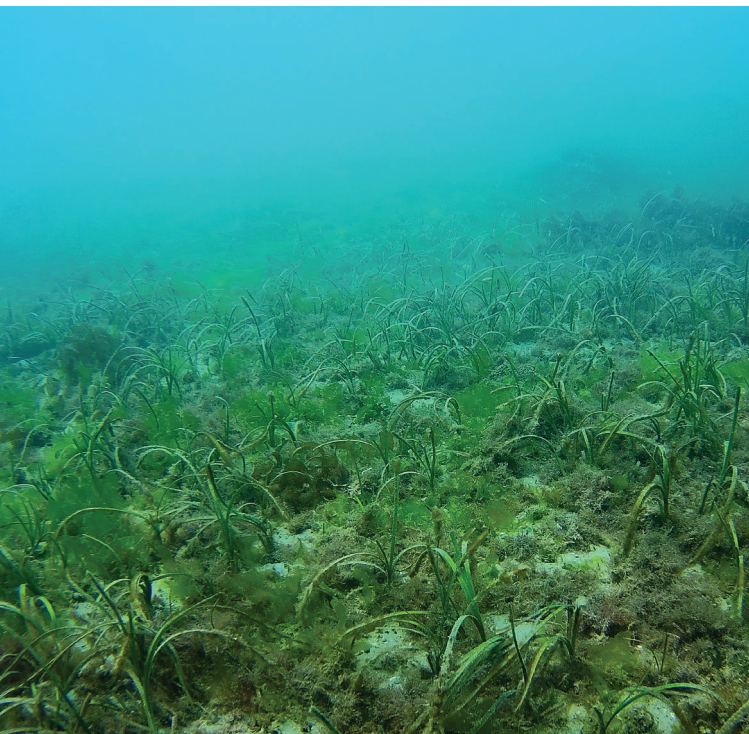




MARLBOROUGH
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Keep off the seagrass!

Help us to protect the treasured ocean meadows of the Marlborough Sounds.



marlborough.govt.nz

Have you noticed the humble seagrass/rimurehia around our region?

Sadly, this taonga species has disappeared from many parts of Marlborough and we need to look after what is left. For example, Motuweka (Havelock) Estuary has seen a 95% decline in seagrass/rimurehia which shows how susceptible this taonga species is to degradation from environmental pressures.

Aotearoa New Zealand has only one species of seagrass, *Zostera muelleri*.



Umungata Bay

What is seagrass?

Seagrass/rimurehia is a marine flowering plant that doesn't get as much attention as more familiar ecosystems like coral reefs or rainforests.

However, it's hard to overstate its importance in our ecosystem. Acting as a biodiversity hotspot and providing many ecosystem functions, seagrass/rimurehia is critically important to a healthy moana.

Did you know that seagrass/rimurehia captures carbon at a rate 35 times faster than tropical rainforests, and accounts for up to 10% of the ocean's total carbon burial? Because of this it's one of our most important natural solutions to the climate change crisis.

Where is seagrass found?

Seagrass/rimurehia can be found on intertidal flats and some subtidal areas throughout Marlborough.



Why is seagrass so important?

This small but mighty plant can create extensive meadows that:

- provide nursery habitats for crabs, snails, cockles and juvenile fish, which in turn provides food for all kinds of shore foraging birds
- trap fine sediment and reduce particle loads in the water, improving water clarity and stabilising the seafloor
- take carbon from the ocean/moana to build its leaves and root system and releases oxygen in return
- act as a source of blue carbon (carbon dioxide absorbed from the atmosphere and stored in the ocean), as seagrass dies and becomes buried in the sediment

Seagrass/rimurehia is a positive indicator of a healthy estuary and provides multiple benefits to estuary and intertidal ecosystems. Unfortunately, it's one of the first species to be affected by both climate change impacts and human induced stressors and is a sign/tohu of an environment under duress.

What can damage seagrass?

- Driving over seagrass beds when launching your boat
- Anchoring and dredging
- Sedimentation and run-off
- Extreme weather events
- Discharge from land to the ocean
- Trampling and crushing
- Sea temperature rise

How can you help?

When you are launching your boat, think about launching in an area with no seagrass/rimurehia present to avoid damage from vehicle tracks.

Be mindful of where you are anchoring or dredging as this can leave scars in the seagrass beds which can also hinder the movement of marine animals living amongst the seagrass.

It's important to prevent runoff from land developments into our estuaries. Fertiliser run-off typically contains lots of nitrogen which promotes rapid blooms of algae. These blooms deplete oxygen in the water and block sunlight which seagrass/rimurehia needs to survive.

Efforts to slow down erosion and stabilise our coastlines is critical.

Because seagrass/rimurehia can be found in sheltered areas with low water movement, sedimentation and run-off or debris from land activities and storms can smother it. It also blocks the sunlight needed for seagrass to photosynthesize.

Don't walk or drive on seagrass – please keep off.



Keep an eye out for flowering seagrass/rimurehia. If you have seen some, Council's Coastal Science team would love to know.



Flowering usually occurs in spring and summer. Up close the flowers have a different shape and colour than the blades and are thicker and fuller. Flowering shoots in general are lighter in colour than the blades.

For more information on seagrass/rimurehia, contact our Coastal Science team on coastal@marlborough.govt.nz

Remember

Keep off the seagrass!