

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342521675>

Urlich & Thrush 2020 Extraordinary opportunity to protect NZ's seas Stuff Science 29 June 2020

Presentation · June 2020

CITATIONS

0

READS

11

2 authors:



Steve Urlich

Lincoln University New Zealand

53 PUBLICATIONS 147 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)



Simon F. Thrush

University of Auckland

362 PUBLICATIONS 15,312 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



INTERCOAST Project IC16_NZ - The Effects of Biotic Interactions on Intertidal Sediment Erodibility [View project](#)



Reconstructing past ecosystem change in the Marlborough Sounds [View project](#)

Extraordinary opportunity to protect NZ's seas

Steve Ulrich Simon Thrush · 05:00, Jun 29 2020



SIMON THRUSH/SUPPLIED

We should stop dredging our complex seafloors.

OPINION: "Where the green waves crash, and the whirlpools spin, anchor me ... in the middle of your deep blue sea."

The Muttonbirds classic Kiwi love song also vividly conjures up the energy, immensity and serenity of the marine world.

The ocean was once thought to be too big to fail, but now scientists are alerting us to its perilous state and that it's too important to ignore.

Our big blue backyard is in trouble and it needs our help.

Just as this understanding is surfacing, so too is awareness that our survival depends on the ocean's health.

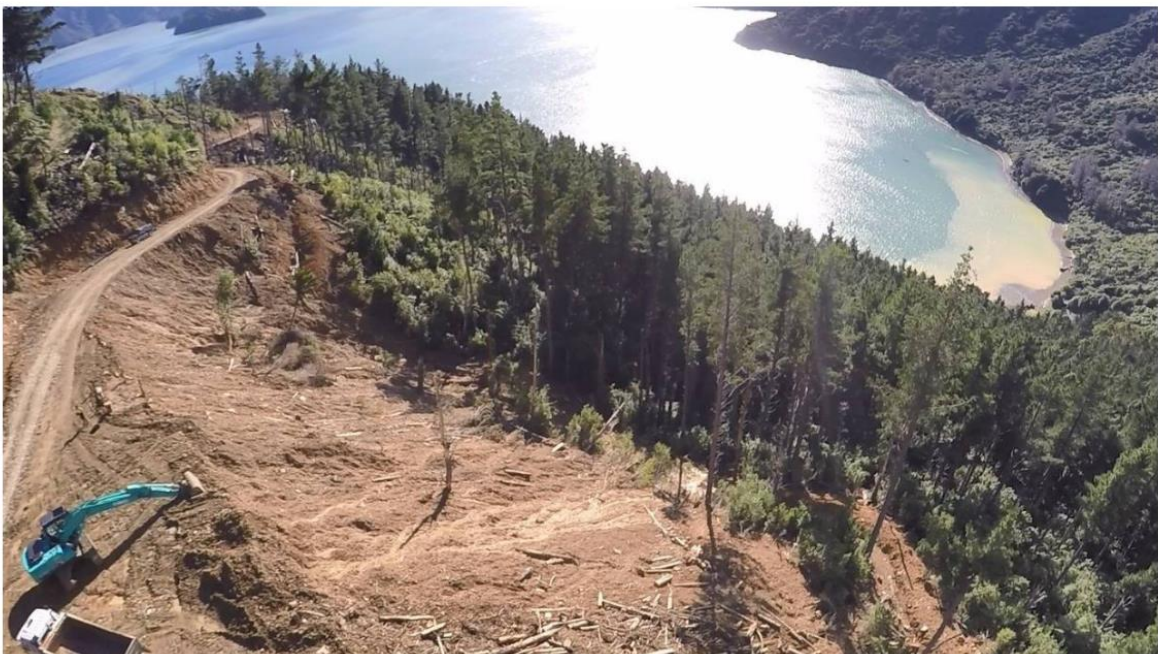
The need to transform how we interact with nature has upended us like an unexpected whirlpool.

Now billions are being spent to try to return us to where we were before the virus. That is natural – a comfort in what is familiar, a yearning for the past.

But this is the same system that took us off course, and which will navigate us blindly to the next vortex.

And yet, there is an extraordinary opportunity before us.

Never before in our lifetimes have we had the opportunity to shift our behaviours, the resources to do so, and the social and political will and possibility to change.



MARLBOROUGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

Topsoil is being deposited into our waters after forestry operations. This too should stop.

Visionary leaders in our economy, particularly those that stamp a large environmental footprint on the oceans, have this rare opportunity to partner with Government.

Capital is the key ingredient missing to justly transition businesses, and the communities that depend on them, away from environmentally devastating practices.

Each year, over hundreds of thousands of kilometres, heavy net chains and steel doors are dragged over the seabed.

Elsewhere, topsoil is deposited into our estuaries and inshore waters from runoff after forest clearfelling on steep, erosion-prone lands.

Both these practices are coming at a significant cost to the resilience of our marine ecosystems.

The damage to marine habitats from frequent and intense disturbances disrupts and alters ecological functions that weakens the ocean's capacity to support us.

We are losing shellfish beds, ancient black corals, and a myriad of old-growth ecosystems that host a biodiverse array of species and interactions.

The behaviours causing this have been locked in by a system wired to the path of the least resistance. This is the same system that a sea of public money is being spent to restore.

A sea change is needed – a new social contract. One that recognises that our institutions have both enabled and become co-dependent, and that this needs to change.

We suggest a just transition away from seabed disturbance involves a significant public contribution to retire erosion-prone steep lands, and shift to more benign and artisanal fishing practices.

A just transition involves time, support, and new organisational behaviours, and perhaps structures.

A just transition involves a new value set, away from assumed rights to degrade the ocean's ecology in the pursuit of profit.

We can look to Te Ao Māori for guidance to protect and restore Tangaroa's mauri, by harvesting from the land and sea in an ecologically responsible and regenerative way.

We can look to the Government, which has yet to allocate any substantial funding in the 2020 Budget, for the health of our moana.

** Dr Steve Ulrich lectures in environmental management at Lincoln University. Professor Simon Thrush is Director of Marine Sciences at the University of Auckland.*
