



Busy days quell Whangamata marina's stormy past

By NICOLA BRENNAN - Waikato Times Last updated 05:00 09/01/2010

The verdict is in - Whangamata's new marina is a hit and not only with boat owners.

Constant streams of holiday makers have been walking around the 210 berths having a nosey at the wide range of boats and yachts calling the new marina their home.

"We've had heaps of public inquiries," said marina manager John Gillooly.

"The public reaction has been wonderful."

The marina was officially opened in October after 17 years of planning, battling and building.

The development had been plagued by controversy. The Hauraki Maori Trust Board argued it would destroy an area traditionally used for shellfish gathering.

Surfers raised concerns that the surf breaks would be spoiled once a channel was cut into the harbour sand-bar.

But those wandering around the marina, and on boats docked at berths, had nothing but positive comments about it.

Whangamata's Dave Mercer used to keep his boat Antibes moored in the harbour.

"There's no contest between the two. The marina is far better," said Mr Mercer, who was originally from Te Awamutu.

"It's more secure here. It's also a great social area."

He said visitors docking their boats had been very impressed with the facilities.

"They've done very well."

Bill Marshall, formerly of Tauranga, also had his boat Ubique permanently docked at the marina.

"It's much easier to get to the boat here than it was when it was moored in the harbour."

It was also less time consuming and safer, he said.

"It would take me three quarters of an hour to get out to the boat on the dinghy when it was in the harbour. I also fell out of the dinghy a couple of times."

Luxury yachts, some worth over \$2 million, were also making use of the facility.

"It's very sheltered here, so they don't have to worry so much about their boats getting damaged in storms."

Mr Gillooly said it had been "hectic" since just before Christmas.

"We've had a few teething problems, but we're working them out. It's been a sharp learning curve for us."

About 100 of the 209 berths had permanent moorings – about 30 others were available for transient

boaties.

"A lot of people from Tauranga are stopping on their way up to Whitianga or the Mercury Islands."

Several boats worth over \$1 million had docked at the marina, as well as a couple worth over \$2 million.

People from Tairua and Pauanui were also bringing their boats down for maintenance at the hard stand.

"I can see a whole new secondary industry developing here," said Whangamata Marina Society president Ross Stewart.

The trailer boat storage area had also been popular, with 18 boats using the facility which has a 30-boat capacity.

"So that's great. It means that if you live here you can store your boat in a secure facility, with a wash-down area."

It was also good for boaties living over the hill, who could now avoid the frustrating task of towing their boats over the twisting roads.