

A Litterless Orangihina

New Zealand is a green and beautiful country, with more than its fair share of snowy mountains, lush bush, native trees, streams, beaches and precious wildlife. New Zealanders pride themselves on our native greenery and the creatures that live within those habitats, but we aren't doing enough to look after what we have. Our country is packed with incredible natural features to enjoy, but also to protect. Imagine a vast ocean filled up with amazing varieties of marine life basking in the cool waters and the dark depths of our seas. People like to imagine these sorts of beautiful scenes when picturing the ocean, but there are immense aspects of it humans don't realise exist. What we'd like to see in our seas isn't a realistic expectation. Sea floors and surfaces are littered with junk, tyres, cans, wrappings and the water is full of plastic. Dull and lifeless, the diversity is being killed off and so are the colours our waterways once had. The sea's elegant natural colours are fading on our account. The oceans are becoming dirtier and dirtier, losing their crystal clearness and the life that used to rove in them.

Our goal is to protect Orangihina and its waterways from the damage and waste we are creating. Orangihina is a diverse ecosystem on the Te Atatu Peninsula and the second largest remaining natural wetland. It consists of salt marshes, fresh water streams, native plants, bush, beach, huge amounts of mangroves, a view of Waitemata harbour, but most important of all, amazing animals in their natural habitats. Some of these can be found nowhere else in New Zealand. One of the most important things we've got in Orangihina are our exceptional creatures. Bar-tailed godwits come all the way to Orangihina once a year before flying off half-way across the world and their habitats are important to maintain in order to encourage them to return. Orangihina is a stunning ecosystem right here in our backyard, near enough to our school, under our kaitiakitanga. Our beaches and streams are most at risk with the amount of waste ending up in them, and though we have groups of volunteers dedicating themselves to cleaning up our shores, oceans, lakes and everything in between, the efforts still aren't nearly enough when more waste is finding its way back to these places faster than we can clean them out. This means Orangihina is at risk of becoming damaged further from our waste. Now is our time to act; to protect our precious Orangihina and the multitude of creatures that are sustained by its wealth and health. What we have in our waters now is also what we risk losing in the years to come, and we will, unless we do something about it.

New Zealand is the 10th largest consumer of waste in the world and approximately 93 percent of that litter would end up in the sea. About 75 percent of what Sustainable Coastlines found on beaches was single-use plastic, but along with that there were bottle caps, lids, polystyrene packaging and plastic bags, all the most common finds. The litter that ends up on our beaches isn't just a problem for the flora and fauna that live there but the people too, our safety and our culture. Data shows that on beaches nationwide there are on average 420 pieces of litter per 1000 square metres, and that doesn't even include the microplastics. Researchers estimate about eight million tonnes of plastic waste alone ends up in the ocean every year, including millions of disposable plastic bags. Systems are put in place to stop litter from entering our seas, such as storm water ponds. Some housing areas include storm water pipes, which take water from gutters and send it into a nearby pond, where the water will sit still and dirt and litter have the chance to drop from the water. But while more and more rubbish is being manufactured and littered in our streets, what point is the clean up if we can't stop the problem?

The source of our litter problems lie in human behaviour. Kaitiakitanga is one of Te Atatu Intermediate's school values, one of my school values. It means to guard and protect, and is linked to our environment and our nature. Dropping litter is harmful, inconsiderate and does not reflect kaitiakitanga. As part of the UN's 17 goals, we are focusing on life below water (Goal 14) ,and to help, our school would like to take on

a10 a day challenge, when students, and members of the community take on the challenge of picking up ten pieces of rubbish a day. The more stakeholders we can get involved, the more we can help tackle the problem of rubbish in our waterways- or anywhere for that matter. Orangahina is of high importance in our community and we'd like to protect it. Stop littering. Help reduce rubbish, and be a part of the solution. For the sake of the marine creatures, our environment and the people- help us create a litterless Orangahina.

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