

Marine Industry Survey: Whangārei 2024



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1. INTRODUCTION

This report details the survey and interactive map that was presented as a volunteer project for the Black Ball Yacht Club at the Whangarei Maritime Festival. It presents the findings of the survey and mapping project. Also, how funding this work would make valuable improvements possible. The Black Ball Yacht Club requested the mapping project because it is their mission to support people in making careers in the marine industry. This initial project supported their vision by collecting and presenting information to inform the public and business community of the range of goods and services available, employment opportunities, the economic structure of the sector, and the geography of these factors. There is a sense in the Whangarei marine community that there is a lack of formal knowledge regarding their sector. This notion is supported by M.E. Consulting as they claim that there is a lack of data that shines light on the regional differences of this sector (Yeoman et al., 2019). The marine economy in this report is defined as economic activity that requires access to the marine environment to add value. This notably excludes other kinds of value, like cultural and environmental value.

2. KEY FINDINGS

Of 105 businesses identified, a total of 53 survey responses were gathered. Most respondents identified as being "almost entirely in the marine sector"¹, reflecting the fact that the collected sample represents the marine sector. The data suggests that there are three marine clusters in the Whangarei District: The largest around the Whangarei Town Basin Marina and down Port Road, the next largest around Marsden Cove Marina, and the smallest being around Tutukaka Marina. There was a spatial trend that showed that respondents who said that they were 'almost entirely in the marine sector' were concentrated near the shore or riverside. The marine industry in the Whangarei District is mostly made up of small to mid-sized enterprises, with large-scale operations also being present.

The fabrication, maintenance and repair category is the most popular response category for the question regarding service categorisation. This sub-sector is concentrated in and around the Whangarei Town Basin Marina and Port Road areas. This portrays the sector's focus on vessel maintenance and support services rather than tourism or leisure. The number of surveyed businesses/organisations that offer traineeships is in the slight minority (about 47%). The vast majority of businesses offering traineeships answered as being 'almost entirely engaged in the marine sector' and mostly in the fabrication, maintenance and repair category.

3. SECTOR OVERVIEW

3.1. New Zealand's Marine Economy

The marine industry as a whole has been identified as a growing sector. In the relevant literature, analysis of the marine environment is primarily done on a national scale. The most notable example of a regional lens on the marine sector in New Zealand was done by M.E. Consulting (Yeoman et al., 2019). They have mapped different sectors of the marine economy. A useful result of their work is a table that shows the contribution of the marine sector to a region's economy on a per capita basis in 2008 and 2017².

¹ See Table 1.

² Look at Page 47 in Measuring New Zealands Blue Economy (Yeoman, et.al., 2019), for a table comparing economic data regarding the marine sector between the years 2008 and 2017.

The marine sector, as of 2019, New Zealand has 38 marinas, a majority of which are near the major cities on the East Coast of the North Island (Yeoman et al., 2019). The marine fabrication, refit and repair sector is primarily built up around these hot spots. Notable examples are Auckland, Tauranga, Nelson, and Whangarei, which have even made investments into large travel lifts to make more work on commercial vessels and superyachts a possibility (Yeoman et al., 2019).

There has been a range of reports published by different institutions that provide oversight of New Zealand's marine industries. These reports vary based on their data sources and how they draw borders around who is and isn't part of the marine industry or 'blue economy'. Stats New Zealand released a comprehensive report on the marine economy in 2016 based on figures from 2007-2013. They concluded that the marine economy contributed \$4.0 billion NZD directly to New Zealand's economy and another \$3.7 billion NZD indirectly for a total of \$7.7 billion (3.5 percent of GDP)(New Zealand's Marine Economy: 2007-13, 2016). There were 102,400 jobs reported across the marine sector, 47 percent in shipping and 46 percent in fisheries and aquaculture (New Zealand's Marine Economy: 2007-13, 2016). M.E. Consulting concluded in 2019 that the blue economy is responsible for 3% of New Zealand's GDP, 3.3% of national employment, and \$7.4bn directly related to maritime activity (Yeoman et al., 2019). In 2024, Maritime NZ reported that the marine economy contributed \$7bn to the New Zealand economy or 1.2% of total GDP, and employed 40,000 people (Maritime New Zealand - Annual Report, 2024). Westpac also published a report in 2025 stating that the marine economy contributes *at least* \$10bn in value added to the New Zealand economy, and that they predict that the sector's value added will rise to \$14bn by 2035 (Clark, 2025).

3.2. Whangarei's marine economy

The Whangarei marine sector benefits from being situated on the North East Coast of New Zealand³, its supply of dry-docking infrastructure, and the skill and passion of its marine workforce. Whangarei is conveniently situated between the Bay of Islands and Auckland, two major destinations for international and domestic yachting, recreational fishing, and marine tourism. The Bay of Islands is renowned for its natural beauty, its network of marine services and infrastructure⁴. Auckland is affectionately known as the 'City of Sails', is New Zealand's most populous city, and a world hotspot for sailing⁵. Whangarei is in the northern section of this coastline, has a sheltered harbour, and plenty of space for dry-docking. Whangarei has the fortune to draw from New Zealand's wealth of marine tradespeople, which consists of a mix between those who are self-trained because of their passion, and another group who have gone through more formal training programmes.

³ Look on pages 4, 5, & 8 in Measuring New Zealands Blue Economy (Yeoman, et.al., 2019), for three maps which point out important features of New Zealand's maritime sector, you will find that there is a concentration along the north east coast of the north Island.

⁴ An example is Opua marina in the Bay of Islands, which doubles as New Zealand's busiest port of entry for international yachts needing to clear through customs.

⁵ Auckland is, for instance, home to the Royal New Zealand Yacht Squadron, and therefore the America's Cup, which is indicative of New Zealand's Maritime tradition and depth of skills. Another example is that the famous Sail GP boats are built in Warkworth, a town between Auckland and Whangarei.

There is a sense in Whangarei's marine sector that it is growing. There is, however, a deficiency regarding region-specific growth statistics in the marine sector. The sense of growth stems largely from an increase in international boats coming to New Zealand from the Pacific islands to avoid the monsoon season, and to have their boats repaired, serviced, and fitted with new equipment. This growth is also observable in Whangarei, as there has been an increase in marina berths along the Hatea River, notably at Port Nikau and Dockland *5*, and also the Okara marina that is being built near the centre of the city.

4. METHODOLOGY & METHODS

4.1. Methodology

The process began by drafting the survey design with the Black Ball Yacht Club to ensure the research design aligned with their interests. The areas of interest that we came up with were: the range of goods and services available, employment opportunities, and the geography of these factors within the Whangarei District region. This choice was made based on the plan to present the map in an interactive format at the Whangarei Maritime Festival. The classification system was created by taking inspiration from two classification schemes for the marine economy.

Table 1. This table presents four classification schemes. The first two being classification schemes used in other studies. The next two are the initial classification scheme used in the survey, and then the final scheme that was used in the mapping and statistics after accounting for businesses that did not identify with the other classifications.

Sector Classifications	<u>Stats NZ</u>	<u>M.E. Consulting</u>	Sector Classifications	<u>Initial</u>	<u>Final</u>
Shipping	1		Fabrication, Maintenance and Repair	1	1
Fisheries and aquaculture	1	1	Marine Equipment Supply	1	1
Marine services	1		Boatyards	1	1
Marine tourism and recreation	1	1	Boat building	1	1
Offshore minerals and Oil extraction	1	\checkmark	Marinas/Ports	1	1
Government and defence	1	\checkmark	Watersports	1	1
Marine Infrastructure and shipping		✓	Marine research'	1	1
Waste Management.		✓	Search and Rescue / Education		1
			Watersports / Clubs		1
			Boat Sales		1
			Yachting Agent / Services		1

Other Classification Schemes

Classification Schemes in the survey

The classification scheme used by stats New Zealand (Stats NZ) follows the standard set by the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification (ANZSIC) 2006 (Clark, 2025). The classification scheme by M.E. Consulting is a modified version of the ANZSIC classification. The

initial classification scheme used in this report was a further departure from the ANZSIC industrial standard. A large reason as to why this was done is that these classifications were made to be sent out to gather survey data, rather than (as per the other studies) using economic data collected by Stats NZ. By modifying the classifications to be more specific to sectors of the marine economy in Whangarei. We could be more confident in our respondents in finding a sector that they saw reflected their business/organisation. For instance, the ANZSIC framework includes businesses in what is named in this survey as the marine 'fabrication, maintenance and repair', in the category of 'shipping'. It was determined was not suitable for getting meaningful responses in a survey. Another reason for this departure from the ANZSIC framework was the determination that the classification scheme used in this survey would be more useful regarding communicating findings to the public, as the ANZSIC framework is more opaque.

Relevant companies were identified using a combination of marine industry directories and Google searches. An important criterion was that the business needed to have a physical address, so that the survey results could be mapped. Some small businesses that operate out of mobile workshops or boats were excluded from this map because of this. In terms of mapping, it was decided to draw polygons around the property that the business operates on⁶.

4.2. Question design

The questions were designed for the means of being able to collect data that highlights the range of goods and services available, employment opportunities, and so that this information could be presented as a map. The following is a list of the final questions, and some elaboration on why they were chosen. The first question is multiple-choice and asks how much of a company's business is directly involved in the maritime industry. The question was "Which option best describes your business/organisation" with answer options ranging from almost entirely, mostly, sometimes, and none of the above. This question was designed to be useful in parsing out which findings were more and less relevant to the marine industry, because it was concluded that many relevant companies were not entirely focused on the marine industry. The second question is multiple-choice with an open last option, it asks which of the listed service categories the business/organisation falls under⁷. The purpose of this question is to link the results to the results of other findings, i.e. to see if different companies in different sectors have more traineeships, more employees, higher revenue, etc. Otherwise, it is for the means of being able to map and visualise the different parts of the marine industry. The third question is an open question asking the respondent how they would briefly describe their business/organisation to the public. This question was designed to be presented in the interactive map. The fourth question is open and asks the respondent to list the goods and services their business/organisation provides. This question is made to complement the results of question three. The fifth question asks how many people there are working for their business/organisation. A limitation of this question is that there is no information about whether they are full-time, part-time, how long they have been working there, etc. This simpler question was chosen as it was thought to boost the response count. The sixth question is a yes or no question, and asks if their branch/organisation offers traineeships. This question is for discerning how many businesses, of which kind, are offering traineeships.

The seventh question was a multiple-choice question that asked which annual revenue category best describes their branch/organisation. It was decided that the categories should be broad, so that the question would not seem too intrusive and thus boost response rates.

⁶ See Appendix entry B1 & B2.

⁷ See table 1 on page 6.

4.3. Methods

Technical tests were conducted to determine whether the aim of the project was possible with free software. QGIS was chosen as a GIS platform due to its similarity to other industry-standard software. SurveyMonkey was chosen since it could run a basic survey, but some features were stuck behind a paywall. QGIS was used to present the map at the Whangarei Maritime Festival, This report uses QGIS with point data instead of polygons, the online map uses the free version of another service called MapHub. The mapping used addresses found online of the relevant businesses, property parcel data from LINZ, and a combination of Google Earth's satellite images, pictures available online, and consultation with industry insiders to map the location and extent of the relevant businesses' property. The survey was sent out using a mail merge; a few waves of these emails were required.

After a few days of waiting for responses, in-person interviews were later conducted to boost the response count. In-person interviews were conducted in the central Whangarei and the Port Road area. This limitation in in-person surveying was due to time and resource constraints. Next, the data had to be tidied up to create categories for the Choropleth maps (colour-coded maps). Many did not think that they fell under any of the categories, so some re-categorisation was in order. The resultant data was turned into graphs and tables using Stata. The map was also made interactive by making choropleth maps for in person users at the Whangarei Maritime festival⁸. 'Pop-ups' that would appear when the user clicks on a business were added with all of the survey data and contact information for all of the businesses/organisations that responded. For the rest of the businesses where some of the information could be discerned using desk research, the 'pop-ups' were populated with additional information. The information gathered through desk research was not used for producing graphs; only the survey data was used.

5. Results

Of 105 businesses identified, 53 responses were gathered, representing over one thousand employees. The following industry overview and employment overview will present maps and graphs to present the results of the mapping and the survey. Something to be aware of when interpreting this data is that the results are skewed by one company that reported having 600 employees and is in the fabrication, maintenance, and repair sector and as sometimes engaging in the marine sector. This means that this company makes up roughly fifty percent of the 1174 employees reported in this survey.

⁸ This was not possible to reproduce using the free version of MapHub for the web-version.

5.1. Industry Insights



Figure 1. This figure is a map of businesses in Whangarei that responded to the survey, classified by how they responded to a question regarding their engagement in the marine industry.

There are three apparent clusters of those reporting to be almost entirely engaging in the Marine industry in the Whangarei District. Anyone familiar with the district will not be surprised to see that the greatest cluster is on the riverside of the Hatea (the area inside the red square). This Cluster runs from the area around the Town Basin Marina (the north-west sector of the map in the red square), and then on the western side of the downstream of the river, or locally known as Port Road (as seen in the red square on the map). The next cluster is slightly inland from Marsden Cove Marina (As Seen in the Green Square). The last cluster is further in the North-East of the map, around Tutukaka Marina.



Figure 2. Proportion of Businesses surveyed that engage almost entirely, mostly, or sometimes in the marine sector.

Most respondents identify as being "almost entirely in the marine sector", reflecting the fact that the data is representative of the marine community in the Whangarei District.



Figure 3. This chart presents the responses of the respondents regarding their revenue and how engaged in the marine industry that they are.

Responses to the revenue categories vary widely from less than \$500,000 NZD up to over \$150,000,000 NZD, showing a spread of business scales but also the presence of high-value operations. There is a concentration of businesses in the \$500,000 NZD - \$5,000,000 NZD category. The majority of which engage almost entirely in the marine sector.

N

Whangarei Marine Services by Category

Key

Marine Service Category

- Fabrication, maintenance and Repair
- Equipment and supplies
- Boatbuilding
- Boatyards
- Marinas/Ports
- Other
- Watersports/ Clubs
- Boat sales
- Yachting Agent/Service

LINZ NZ Aerial Imagery Joel Petersson, 2025



Figure 4. This figure is a map of businesses in Whangarei that responded to the survey, classified based on their response regarding what service category of their business.

0

0.5

1 km



Figure 5. Number of businesses self-identifying with the marine sectors outlined in the survey

The map presented in Figure 4, in corroboration with the data presented in Figure 5, shows how heavily represented the fabrication, maintenance and repair category is in the Whangarei District. Figure 5 also shows how their presence is particularly concentrated in and around the Whangarei Town Basin Marina, Port Road areas.

5.2. Employment Insights



Figure 6. This figure is a map of businesses in Whangarei that responded to the survey, classified based on their response regarding how many employees they have.

Based on the survey data, 73.6 percent of the industry is made up of small to mid-sized enterprises (SMES), with 67.9 being micro and small businesses. The most notable cluster of employment in the district is in and around the Town Basin Marina (the north west sector of the map in the red square), and then on the western side of the southern end of the river, the end of Port Road (as seen in the red square on the map). The area in and around the Town Basin leans towards smaller-sized workforces, whilst the area around Port Road is a concentration of some of the largest workforces engaging in the marine sector for the region.



Figure 7. Distribution of business size based on reported number of employees



Figure 8. This figure is a histogram that displays the survey data regarding reported employees in terms of their service category.

The data displayed in figure eight shows a clear concentration of employment in 'fabrication, maintenance and repair'. It is useful to note that there is one business in the fabrication, maintenance and repair section that reported to have 600 employees that sometimes engages in the marine sector. Otherwise, boatbuilding, boatyards, equipment and supplies are all strong sources of employment for the marine sector.



Figure 9. This figure is a map of businesses in Whangarei that responded to the survey, classified based on whether they reported having traineeships.



Figure 10. This Chart displays the proportion of responses regarding whether the respondent offers traineeships.



Figure 11. Share of Businesses offering apprenticeships by Sector (excludes two survey respondents that skipped the question).

Figures 9, 10, and 11 show that the number of surveyed businesses/organisations that offer traineeships is in the slight minority (about 47%). However, it shows that of those that offer traineeships, the vast majority of them were reporting to be almost entirely engaged in the marine sector. There is no discernible geography for this variable, other than it follows the geography of businesses that report to be almost entirely engaged in the marine sector. This could be indicative of successful traineeship programmes and/or demand for more skilled workers in the marine sector.

6. Discussion

Of 105 businesses identified, a total of 53 survey responses were gathered. Most respondents identified as being "almost entirely in the marine sector"⁹, reflecting the fact that the collected sample represents the marine sector. The data shows three marine clusters in the Whangarei District. Each is centred around spaces where vessels can be moored, docked, or taken up onto a dry dock. These clusters are; around the Whangarei Town Basin Marina and continue down Port Road (the area inside the red squares on the maps), another around Marsden Cove Marina (as seen in the green squares on the maps), and one more around Tutukaka Marina (in the far north east of the maps). The greatest cluster is on the riverside of the Hatea, with a spatial trend that displays a concentration of respondents nearer to the river that responded as being 'almost entirely in the marine sector'. This is likely due to a proximity benefit for being near your customers and business partners. This question was successful in portraying the basic geography of the marine sector.

Some insights can be gathered by interpreting Figure thee, which summarises the responses in regards to revenue. Responses to the revenue categories vary widely from less than \$500,000 NZD and even over \$150,000,000 NZD, with a concentration of businesses in the \$500,000-\$5,000,000 category. Based on the survey data, 73.6 percent of the industry is made up of small to mid-sized enterprises (SMES), with 67.9 being micro and small businesses. With these findings in mind, we should be conscious of the low response rate to this question, likely due to an unwillingness to report financial data to an unofficial entity.

The map of employment figures shown in Figures six, seven and eight are somewhat more insightful than the revenue data, due to a higher response rate to the question. The most notable cluster of employment in the district is in and around the Town Basin Marina (the North West sector in the red square of figure six), and on the southern end of the river, or Port Road (as seen in the red square on figure six). The area in and around the Town Basin leans towards smaller-sized workforces, whilst the area around Port Road is a concentration of some of the largest workforces engaging in the marine sector for the region. The data is still lacking due to little insights into the nature of said employment, no technical spatial analysis is being conducted.

The data presented in Figures five, eight and eleven shows how the heavily represented fabrication, maintenance and repair category is concentrated in and around the Whangarei Town Basin Marina and Port Road areas. This portrays the sector's focus on vessel maintenance and support services rather than tourism or leisure. The numerous purple dots representing this category also help visualise the abundance of businesses in this sector. There is a concentration of employment in 'fabrication, maintenance and repair'. Of note is Culhams Engineering, which responded with an answer of having over 600 employees. This undoubtedly skews the results. It could be the case that this figure also represents workers from the wider company, since they have other sites on New Zealand's North Island. Their main office and production facility are, however, in Whangarei. This uncertainty has shown that the question design for question 5 could have been improved by only asking how many people work for your company in the Whangarei District.

⁹ See Table 1.

Figures nine, ten, and eleven show that the number of surveyed businesses/organisations that offer traineeships is in the slight minority (about 47%). If you cross-compare these findings with the data regarding employee counts, the data also shows that businesses offering traineeships tend to have slightly higher average employee counts. It also shows that the vast majority of businesses offering traineeships also answered as being almost entirely engaged in the marine sector. In Figure eleven there appears again to be a concentration in the fabrication, maintenance and repair category in terms of businesses offering traineeships. Although the percentage of businesses offering traineeships in this sector is 50 percent. Overall, the findings are indicative of demand for trained workers, and/or an existing presence of traineeship pathways in this sector¹⁰. In future studies, other questions can be asked to increase the resolution of the data, such as the number of trainees or how many traineeships they advertise for. This would provide data for insightful cross-comparisons.

7. Recommendations

Four major insights have been attained by conducting this survey: the structuring of questions needs refining, the ANZSIC framework should be used in future studies that aim to facilitate inter-regional comparisons, funding for future projects would improve the quality of the surveying and presentation of findings via access to tools that are stuck behind paywalls, and how the response rate can be improved.

Regarding questions, some problems were encountered by not being specific enough about what was being asked, and by lacking depth in some lines of questioning. One example was the question about whether businesses offer traineeships. A limitation to the question asked was that it was a binary question, only asking whether they had traineeships or not. In future studies, other questions can be asked to increase the resolution of the data. For instance, asking about how many traineeships they have advertised over a given period, how many they have filled, and if they are a company that does not have trainees, if they are open to taking on any. This sort of questioning would go a long way in terms of understanding the job market for trainees, and would help in projects that aim to connect people with businesses/organisations that are looking to employ trainees. This example demonstrates how survey questions can be taken further, however, there is always a balance that needs to be struck between the amount of questions, how intrusive they may seem and the amount of expected responses.

Regarding the ANZSIC framework, it would facilitate the use of other databases that are already set up to align with the framework, it would make comparisons with other studies that use this industrial standard possible, and it would improve the scope of the study. Major industrial databases that have data on industries such as the marine industry in New Zealand and Australia use the ANZSIC framework, and tax data from businesses by Stats NZ uses this framework. This would allow for comparisons between studies, spatial analysis, and would help combat issues like low response rates and self-selection bias in the survey data. Lastly, basing future work on the ANZSIC framework would allow for increasing the scope of the study, including other important sectors such as the marine component of the oil, gas and mineral industries.

Regarding funding, a way that this survey and mapping project was held back was due to premium survey and web-tool features being behind paywalls. Examples of premium survey features are tools where respondents can add features to a map to portray their geography and attach pictures. This would aid in providing more information that can be presented to the audience, and to analyse the geography of businesses. Another example of features behind paywalls is the premium features on the web tool MapHub. Some examples of desirable features are a search bar, embedded videos, and more layers to implement choropleth maps. The interactive map could also be presented using other paid software packages, such as ESRI web portals. Otherwise, access to GIS and survey tools from ESRI would have helped save time and improve the quality of data presentation. This is because ESRI

¹⁰ MAST (Marine & Specialised Technologies) is a notable actor in the marine trades training field.

has a comprehensive software package with GIS, surveying, and web map portals that would have improved the quality of the survey and the presentation of the map and findings.

Lastly, the response rate for this survey was considered a success, but more data would have provided a more comprehensive overview of the sector. The main factor in having fewer responses was the amount of time and resources that were allocated to collecting data. Giving respondents more time to respond to the email with the embedded survey, or a few days allocated to in-person interviews, would go a long way towards improving the response rate. Another improvement on the response rate can be achieved by collaborating with recognised groups in the marine industry.

8. Conclusion

This report detailed the survey and interactive map that was presented as a volunteer project for the Black Ball Yacht Club in Whangarei to improve industry insights. It provides an overview of the spatial structure of service availability and employment in the Whangarei District's marine sector. It also points out avenues for further study. This can help to fill the gap in formal knowledge regarding their sector, and perhaps act as a stepping stone for further study. There were four main areas of improvement for future research: a more specific and detailed survey would improve the quality of the findings, the ANZSIC framework should be used in future, funding for future projects would improve the quality of surveying and presentation, and that more time and collaboration with recognised industry groups would improve the response rate.

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10. Appendix

Appendix Contents

Appendix A: Survey Questions

Appendix B: Complementary Maps

A1: Survey Questionnaire

This survey is only seven questions long, and the information will be used to promote the Whangarei marine industry. Our goal is to show what services we as a region can offer customers, what opportunities there are for employment, and where there is potential for investment in our region. It will first be presented at the Whangarei Maritime Festival as an interactive map for the public.

1. Which Option Best Describes your Organisation

- This business/organisation engages almost entirely in the marine sector.
- This business/organisation engages mostly in the marine sector.
- This business/organisation sometimes engages in the marine sector.
- None of the above

2. Which of the following services does your organisation provide?

- 🔘 Fabrication, maintenance and and Repair
- O Marine Equipment Supply
- Boatyards
- Boatbuilding
- O Marinas/Ports
- Watersports
- O Marine Research
- ◯ Seafood Industry
- Other (please specify)

3. How would you briefly describe your busniess/organisation to the public?



4. Please list services/products do you provide?





6. Does your branch/organisation offer traineeships?

Yes

No

7. Which annual revenue category best describes your branch/organisation?

- Less than \$500,000 NZD p.a.
- \$500,000 to \$5,000,000 NZD p.a.
- \$5,000,000 to \$15,000,000 NZD p.a.
- \$15,000,000 to \$50,000,000 NZD p.a.
- \$50,000,000 to \$150,000,000 NZD p.a.
- more than \$150,000,000 NZD p.a.
- 🔘 Not Applicable or would not like to answer



B1: A still of A zoomed-out view of the interactive map in MapHub

B2: A zoomed-in view of the Interactive map on MapHub

