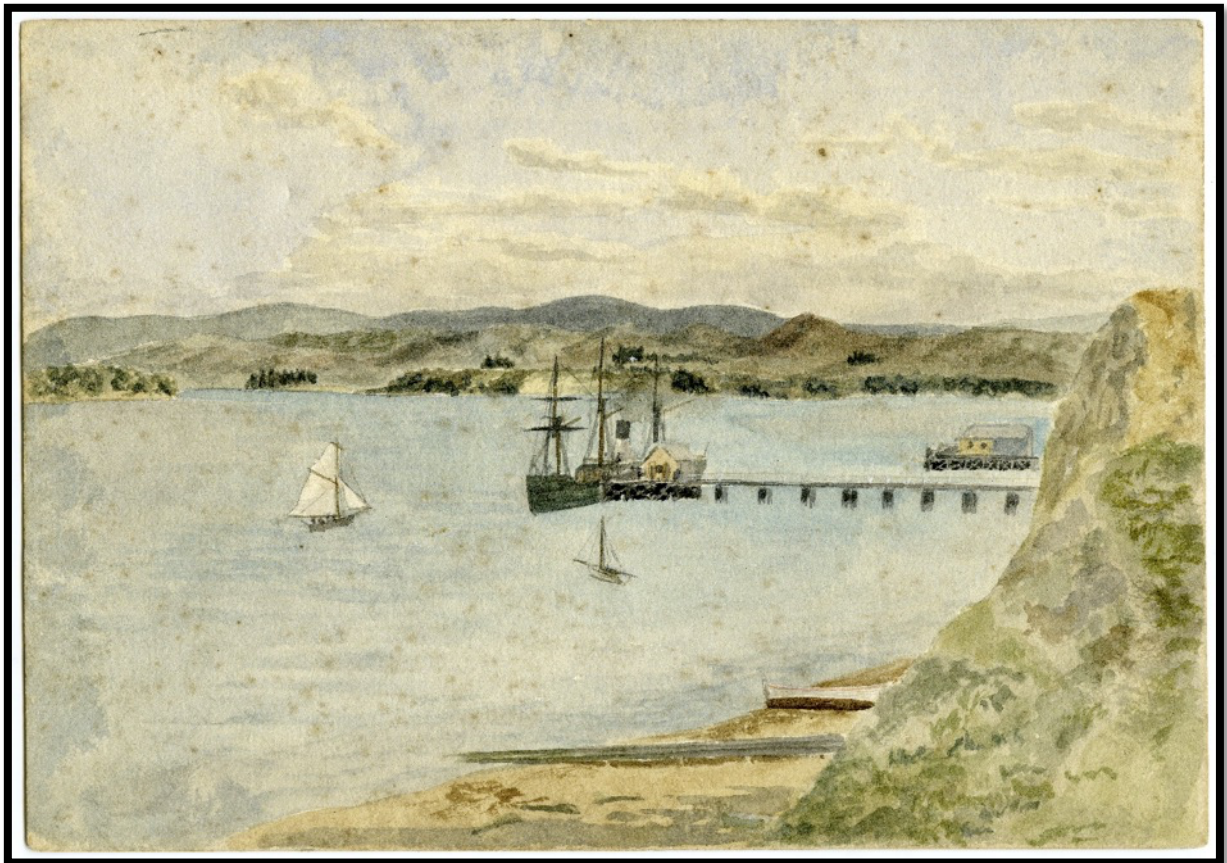


A History of the Port of Tauranga



Prepared for Port of Tauranga Limited
Prepared by Nicola Lemberg on behalf of Heritage Consultancy Services

31 August 2023

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Image on cover page: Watercolour sketch of Tauranga town wharf (Victoria wharf) by G. Arnold Ward, c. 1889. Tauranga City Libraries, Art 21-045.

Executive Summary

This report has been commissioned by the Port of Tauranga Limited (POTL). It provides a history of the Port of Tauranga, including its development before and after the establishment of POTL in 1988, with a particular focus on the extent to which the port authority has used and altered Te Awanui (Tauranga Harbour).

This report is concerned with the post-colonial development of Te Awanui. The harbour was used throughout the nineteenth century by Europeans, despite the lack of shipping infrastructure. The Port of Tauranga was officially established in 1873 and many construction projects through the later nineteenth century and into the twentieth century were undertaken, creating the foundations – literally and figuratively – for later growth. Wharves were built (and demolished), railway lines were laid, and land was reclaimed for commercial use.

The Port expanded on a large scale from 1950, growing on both the Tauranga and Mount Maunganui sides of Te Awanui. The Mount Wharf was extended several times from 1953, alongside construction of manufacturing and storage facilities. Ongoing dredging activity has also deepened and widened the main shipping channels of Te Awanui, allowing the Port to accommodate larger and larger ships. Some of these dredgings were used to reclaim land near Tauranga, at a location known as Sulphur Point. Activity at Sulphur Point advanced in the 1970s and 1980s, with the wharf officially opening in 1992. Further developments at Sulphur Point in the 1990s ensured the opening of the Tauranga Container Terminal in 1998; another expansion in 2011 reflected the Port's rapid growth.

In 2023, the Port of Tauranga covers 113.4 hectares at Mount Maunganui and 74.7 hectares at Sulphur Point. The Port entity describes itself as 'New Zealand's largest, fastest-growing and most efficient port'.¹

¹ Port of Tauranga – About Us <https://www.port-tauranga.co.nz/about-port-of-tauranga/>

Research

A range of sources have been consulted to compile this report:

- Online databases such as *PapersPast* and the National Library of New Zealand;
- Tauranga Public Library, including their online portal Pae Korokī;
- University of Waikato Library and Hamilton Public Library, for supplementary secondary material;
- POTL on-site archive;
- *Bay of Plenty Times*, consulted mainly through newspaper articles collated into scrapbooks available at the POTL archive.

The author also recognizes the previous work of Neil G. Hansen, specifically his *History of Tauranga Harbour and Port* (1997) and *Ten Busy Years* (2000); this report stands on the shoulders of these histories.

Scope of Report

This report focuses on providing a precis of the Port's development in general terms. In order to achieve this, the author has highlighted significant twentieth century developments that have provided the foundation for the modern Port. Furthermore, much primary and secondary material related to the Port and its development details financial aspects, such as profits, cargo prices, and costs to expand or maintain Port facilities. Due to the parameters of this report, this type of information has been excluded unless relevant to the Port's activities within Te Awanui or along the coast. This has resulted in a report that relies heavily upon maps and photographs to present its narrative.

Acknowledgements

Access to the POTL on-site archive was kindly coordinated by Lance Wood of POTL. The author also extends gratitude to Rowan Johnstone of POTL for constructive comments on a draft of this report. Research assistance was provided by David Beattie.

A History of the Port of Tauranga

Introduction

Te Awanui (Tauranga Harbour) has been a significant place within the Bay of Plenty region since human settlement in the area began. Tauranga Moana, the ‘landing place’, embodies centuries of Māori use and occupation. As a tidal estuary covering approximately 200 square kilometres, the harbour has long been a strategic asset offering sustenance and shelter. Today Te Awanui, with entrances to the north and south of Matakana Island, is the focus for numerous settlements, the largest of which is the city of Tauranga.²

Te Awanui also accommodates the largest port in New Zealand, located near Mount Maunganui (Mauao) at the south-eastern end. As of 2023, Port of Tauranga Limited records their land ownership as 113.4 hectares at Mount Maunganui and 74.7 hectares at Sulphur Point. This includes land currently used for wharf activities and the surrounding land used or leased by industries supporting the Port.³



Figure 1: Map of Tauranga Harbour, from *The State of Tauranga Harbour's Environment* (Whakatane: Environment B.O.P., 1999), p. 3.

² Statistics New Zealand recorded the resident population of Tauranga as 136,000 in March 2018. Projections at this time also estimated population growth in the area would continue. As of May 2023, information from the 2023 Census has not been made available. See: Tauranga City Statistical Information Report 2021 <https://www.tauranga.govt.nz/Portals/0/data/council/reports/statistical-information-report-2021.pdf>

³ Port of Tauranga – FAQ <https://www.port-tauranga.co.nz/community/faq/>



Figure 2: Port of Tauranga, indicating the relative locations of Tauranga and Mount Maunganui, looking northwards towards Mauao, in Justin Pyvis and Malcolm Tull, 'Institutions and port performance: A case study of the Port of Tauranga, New Zealand', *International Journal of Maritime History*, 29.2, p. 280.

Early history

During the post-colonial era, Tauranga has consistently relied on coastal shipping and thus required port facilities. The modern port was developed from the 1950s, but many smaller wharves and jetties have served as transfer points for cargo and passengers since the later nineteenth century.

The first known use of Te Awanui by Europeans was in either 1826 or 1828 when Church Missionary Society ships landed, intending to establish a Mission Station in Tauranga. From 1840, use of the harbour increased as European settlers poured into New Zealand. There was no port infrastructure in place at this time:

ships had to anchor in the channel and discharge cargo and people by small boats, or by unloading cargo at low tide with ox carts operating between the beach and the trading vessels.⁴

The first survey of Te Awanui was undertaken in 1853, by Captain Drury of the *H.M.S. Pandora*. It is recorded that Drury's work was so accurate and thorough that a later survey completed in 1902 simply reinforced the findings of the original, despite improvements in cartographic technology in the intervening 50 years.⁵

By early 1864, the *New Zealand Herald* was reporting on a range of ships entering and departing from the 'Port of Tauranga'.⁶ By September of that year, a notice was placed in the *New Zealand Gazette*, providing instructions for sailing vessels entering Te Awanui; this was followed by the appointment of a Pilot, who fixed leading buoys and marks to designate the navigable harbour channel. Although generally considered a 'safe' harbour, due to Matakana Island providing a barrier against the Pacific Ocean, entry to Te Awanui could be treacherous due to tidal conditions that created strong currents in the narrow openings.⁷

⁴ Neil Hansen, *A History of Tauranga Harbour and Port*, p. 11.

⁵ *Tauranga: Port Information* (Tauranga: Bay of Plenty Harbour Board, 1970), p. 1.

⁶ *New Zealand Herald*, 7 March 1864, p. 3.

⁷ Phillip R. Moore, *Tauranga Harbour* (Lower Hutt: Institute of Geological and Nuclear Sciences, 1994), n.p.

In September 1873, the Port of Tauranga was officially established by order of the Governor-General of New Zealand. This order determined that the wharf or jetty at the end of Wharf Street, which had been constructed in 1871, would become the 'legal landing place' of the Port of Tauranga for customs purposes. This wharf soon became known as the Town Wharf; in 1877 a second wharf was also built, the Victoria Wharf. From 1881, a weekly shipping schedule connected goods and passengers from Tauranga with Whakatane, Opotiki, and Auckland.⁸



Figure 3: View of Tauranga Harbour and The Strand from Taumatakahawai Pā (Monmouth Redoubt), looking southward, c. 1875. Town Wharf is visible at centre left. Tauranga City Libraries, Photo 99-1188.

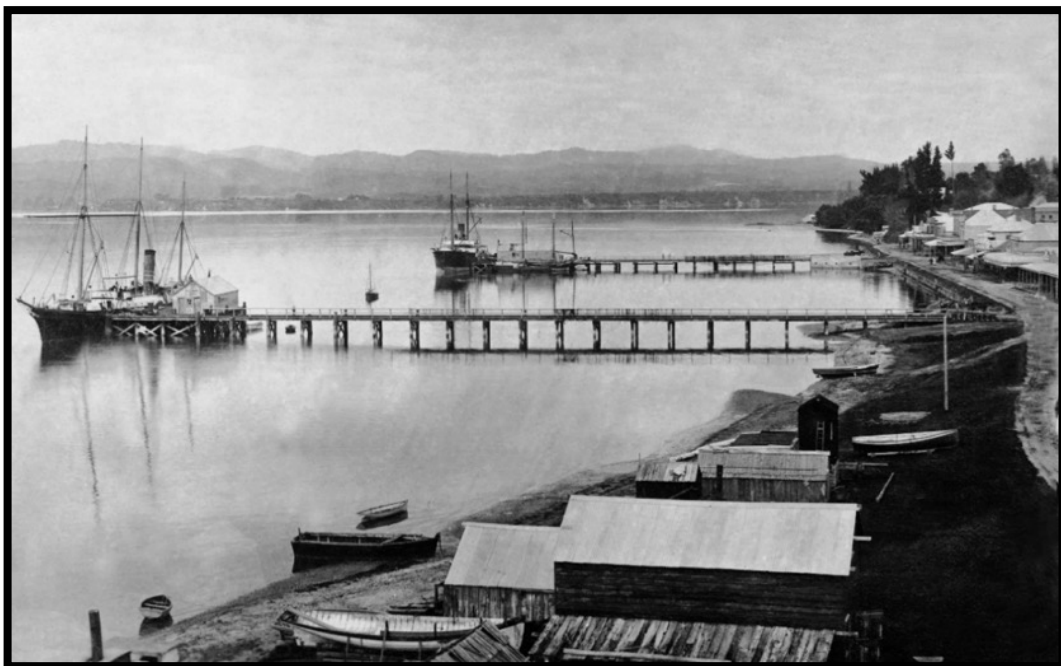


Figure 4: Tauranga Harbour from Monmouth Redoubt, looking southward, early 1900s. Both Town Wharf and Victoria Wharf are visible; the latter behind the former. Tauranga City Libraries, Photo 99-061.

⁸ *Bay of Plenty Expands* (Auckland: Breckell & Nicholls, 1965), p. 9.

The Tauranga County Council (formed 1876) and the Tauranga Borough Council (formed 1882) shared administrative responsibilities for the Town Wharf, the Victoria Wharf, and other parts of the harbour and coastline until 1912, when the Tauranga Harbour Board was established. In 1915, the Tauranga Foreshore Vesting and Endowment Act was passed which gave the Tauranga Harbour Board authority over the whole of the foreshore of Te Awanui.

In terms of recreational developments in the harbour, a 20-foot-long stone jetty was built by volunteers on the Pilot Bay side, near Mount Maunganui, in 1888. The jetty served as a landing point for those who wished to picnic at the foot of Mauao.⁹ The number of visitors to this part of Te Awanui consequently increased and in 1898 a track to climb to the summit of Mauao was opened.¹⁰ Figure 5 is a view of the jetty from the south side of Te Awanui with Pilot Bay in the background. As a result of archaeological intervention in 1989, the jetty was restored and remains intact today (see Figure 6). Bay of Plenty Regional Council and the Port of Tauranga jointly funded the restoration project.¹¹



Figure 5: Print, Photographic, Old Stone Wharf, Mount Maunganui, in Tauranga Heritage Collection, 0202/08.

⁹ Print, Photographic, Old Stone Wharf, Mount Maunganui

<https://view.taurangaheritagecollection.co.nz/objects/24825/print-photographic-old-stone-wharf-mount-maunganui>

¹⁰ Christopher F. Swart, *Mauao: Mount Maunganui, New Zealand* (Tauranga: self-published, 2000), p. 14.

¹¹ Print, Photographic, Old Stone Wharf, Mount Maunganui

<https://view.taurangaheritagecollection.co.nz/objects/24825/print-photographic-old-stone-wharf-mount-maunganui>



Figure 6: Historic stone jetty, Dr A. McEwan, 17 April 2017.

By 1894, the stone jetty was considered no longer fit for purpose, and a larger wharf was constructed slightly west of the original jetty in 1895. This new wharf was also located closer to the start of the Mauao summit track.



Figure 7: Pilot Bay Stone Jetty, Mount Maunganui, c. 1920s, Tauranga City Libraries, Photo 11-029.



Figure 8: Wharf on Mauao, looking southwards; c. 1940s or 1950s. Tauranga City Libraries, Photo 03-012.

Further developments in the 1910s saw a trading wharf built at Pilot Bay. Mount Maunganui became a key location for the construction of the East Coast railways in the early twentieth century. As a result, a Public Works workshop and camp were built, with a 'horseshoe' or D-shaped wharf servicing the large ships bringing timber and steel. Figure 7 shows the horseshoe wharf with Mauao in the background.



Figure 9: Waikorire (Pilot Bay), Mount Maunganui c. 1910s. Tauranga City Libraries, Photo 11-001.

By 1905, Hamilton and Waihi had been connected by rail. Previous proposals to build rail lines between Tauranga and the Waikato, and Tauranga and Rotorua, had been well-supported but the governments of the time would not fund such projects. Finally, in 1912, work began on a Waihi-Tauranga connection. Construction of the East Coast Main Trunk Line initially progressed well but was hindered by the outbreak of war. The first trains ran from Mount Maunganui to Te Puke in 1913. A rail bridge across the southern end of Te Awanui was started in March 1914 but this project was not completed until 1924 due to a shortage of steel during and after World War One.

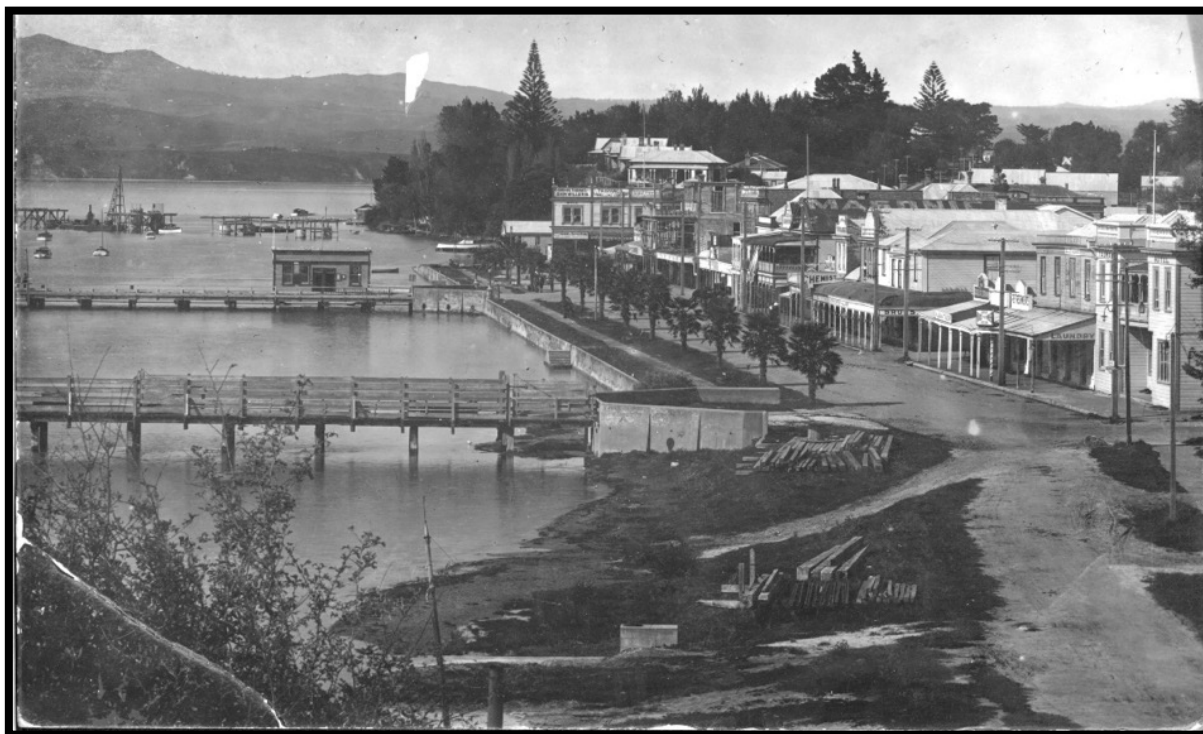


Figure 10: Tauranga Harbour and The Strand from Monmouth Redoubt, looking southward, c. 1918. The railway bridge under construction is visible beyond the two wharves. Tauranga City Libraries, Photo 99-1295.

From the 1920s to the 1940s

The railway bridge connected Matapihi Peninsula to The Strand in the southern end of Te Awanui. Its construction marked a significant moment in the development of Tauranga's port, and represented a new era of trade which was underpinned by road and rail links to the harbour's hinterland. Steamer-passenger services between Tauranga and Auckland were also abandoned as a result of this new railway connection.¹² The Victoria Wharf was dismantled in 1924 and the Town Wharf eventually became known as Coronation Pier.

¹² *Bay of Plenty Expands* (Auckland: Breckell & Nicholls, 1965), pp. 9-10.



Figure 11: Tauranga Harbour and The Strand from Monmouth Redoubt, looking southward, c. 1939. Only the Town Wharf remains. Tauranga City Libraries, Photo 02-346.

On the Mount Maunganui side, Pilot Bay had remained largely undeveloped through the early twentieth century. Figure 12 shows a view from the top of Mauao in 1922, looking south towards the horseshoe wharf. In 1924, a new railway wharf was to be built on the Tauranga side of Te Awanui, and by 1932 the now derelict wharf at Mount Maunganui had been demolished.

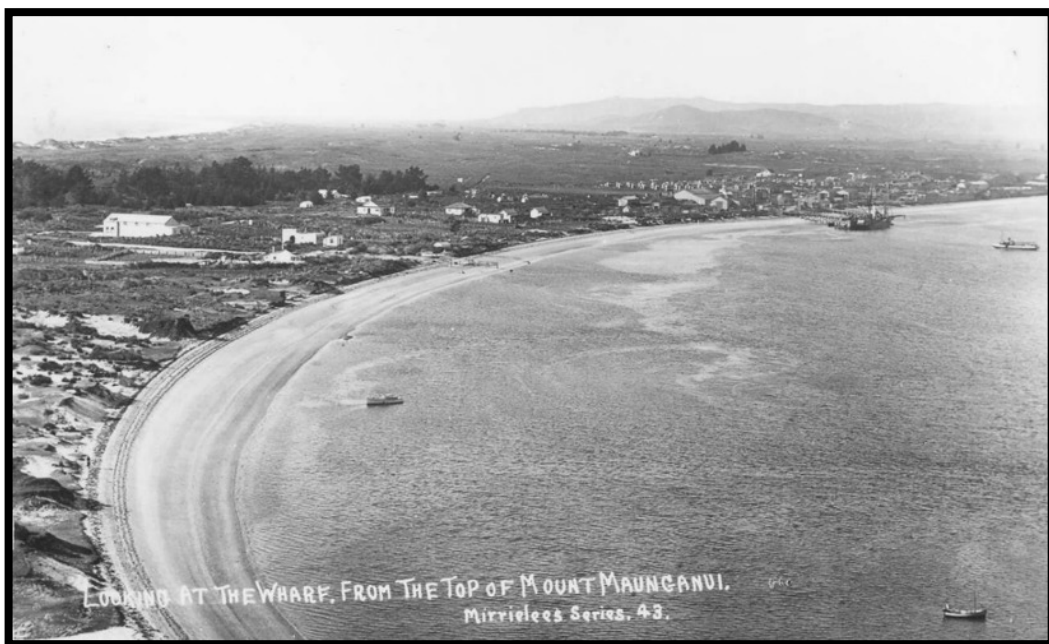


Figure 12: Pilot Bay, looking southward, 1922. From <https://www.port-tauranga.co.nz/about-port-of-tauranga/history/>



Figure 13: Mount Maunganui Wharf, 1922. Tauranga City Libraries, Photo 13-702.

The new railway wharf was located adjacent to Dive Crescent and was completed in 1927. Facilities at this site included a 97.5 metre long wharf shed with a veranda along the western side to allow for goods to be loaded and unloaded in all weather conditions. This shed was extended by 25 metres in 1959. The Railway Wharf was used almost exclusively for coastal shipping until 1948, when it began loading timber and paper products for export to Australia.¹³

Dive Crescent itself was located on reclaimed tidal land. This reclamation work began in 1920 and used fill from the railway construction at Waikareao Estuary. The ownership of this reclaimed land was not legalised by the Tauranga Harbour Board and the Public Works Department at the time, and only finalised in 2021 following an agreement in 2011.¹⁴ The Strand would also undergo further reclamation in the 1960s and 1970s.

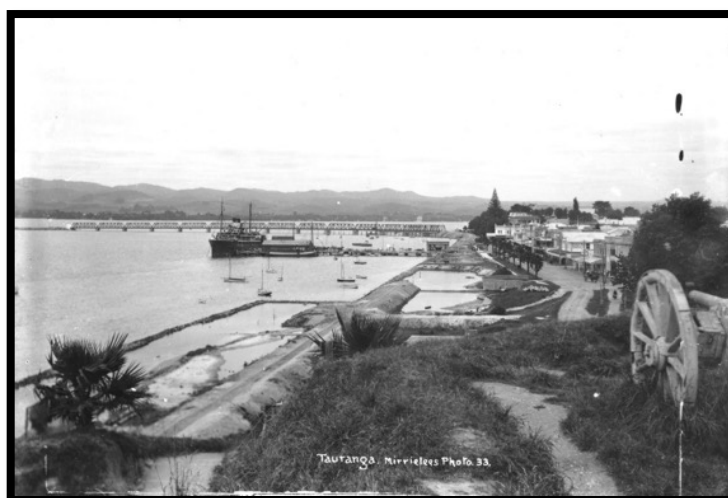


Figure 14: Tauranga Harbour and The Strand from Monmouth Redoubt, looking southward, c. 1922. Reclamation of land in progress. Tauranga City Libraries, Photo 99-1187.

¹³ *Port History to Modern Day*, 2020, p. 3.

¹⁴ 'Tauranga City Council and Ōtamataha Trust to split ownership of Dive Crescent reclaimed land', *Bay of Plenty Times*, 29 March 2021.

Salisbury Wharf, at the northern end of Pilot Bay, was proposed in 1932 and built in early 1934.¹⁵ This wharf was mostly utilized by Faulkner's ferry company, transporting people from Tauranga to Mount Maunganui. John Daniel Faulkner had established a local ferry service by December 1909, advertising a twice daily service to the Mount in the *Bay of Plenty Times*.¹⁶ By 1910, Faulkner had two ships plying this route. In 1917, to cope with demand as a result of the Public Works workshop and camp built at Mount Maunganui, he purchased a steam ferry, the *Ruru*. Faulkner's sons Robert and George, and George's son Charlie, also worked within the business. Passengers were originally transported to the Mount Wharf and Salisbury Wharf, but from 1951 service was only offered to the latter.



Figure 16: Mauao and Salisbury Wharf; c. 1930s. Tauranga City Libraries, Photo 01-377.

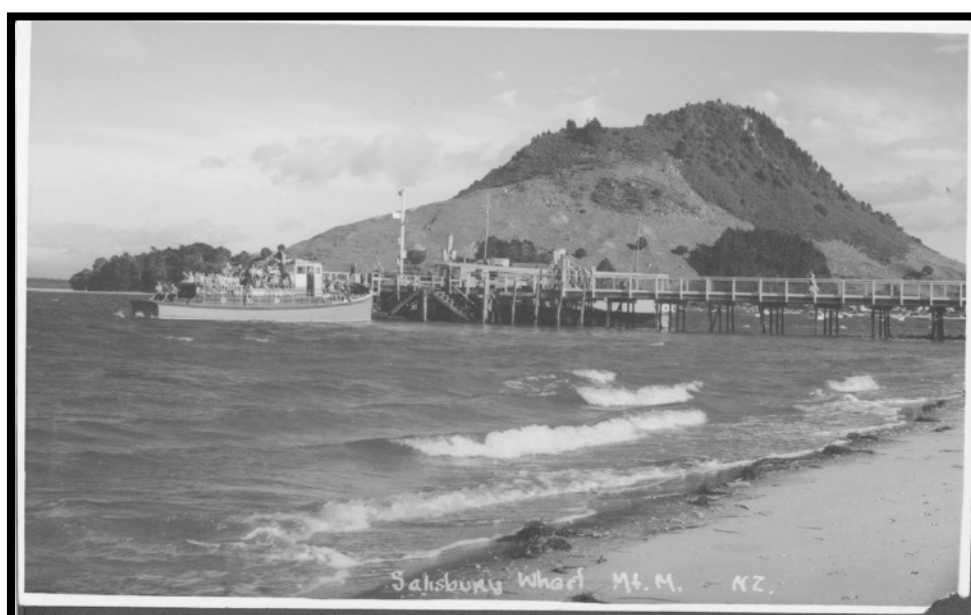


Figure 17: Salisbury Wharf and Faulkner's ferry *Reremoana*; c.1950. Tauranga City Libraries, Photo 99-024x.

¹⁵ 'Wharf at Tauranga: Mt Maunganui Proposal', *New Zealand Herald*, 5 October 1932, p. 15; 'Harbour Board: Sheep Traffic Through Port', *Bay of Plenty Times*, 13 February 1934, p. 3.

¹⁶ Max Avery, 'Tauranga-Mount Maunganui ferry service'
<https://paekoroki.tauranga.govt.nz/nodes/view/70524> .

Salisbury Wharf was rebuilt later in the twentieth century and remains today a popular fishing spot. The wharf is a stone's throw from the Port of Tauranga Limited's current administrative offices.

Faulkner's ferries continued providing a link across Te Awanui into the 1950s. During World War Two, the Aerodrome Jetty was built adjacent to the later site of the fertiliser works to provide access between Tauranga township and the Air Force Training Centre; the Faulkner family were instrumental in providing this connection.¹⁷ The opening of new road and rail links in the late 1950s reduced the demand for ferry services and the Faulkner fleet was gradually sold off.

Post-World War Two developments

International port facilities were developed at Te Awanui from 1950, primarily to expedite the export of wood from pine forests planted in the 1920s near Rotorua and the Volcanic Plateau.¹⁸ A Committee of Inquiry, established by the Government in 1950, had investigated the possibility of developing a port at several locations in the Bay of Plenty, including Whakatane and Mount Maunganui. The committee identified that existing port facilities at Tauranga were inadequate due to the expectation that the timber export industry would in turn encourage other industries, including the expansion of farming in the area.¹⁹ However, unlike proposals for a breakwater in Whakatane, the work needed for the Tauranga site was deemed to be financially reasonable.²⁰



Figure 18: Panorama aerial view of Mount Maunganui from Mauao before the port was established; c. 1945. Tauranga City Libraries.

¹⁷ Max Avery, 'Tauranga-Mount Maunganui ferry service'

<https://paekoroki.tauranga.govt.nz/nodes/view/70524>

¹⁸ Evelyn Stokes, *A History of Tauranga County* (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1980), p. 350.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 356.

²⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 356-357.

Until the 1950s, the main goods traded through the Port of Tauranga were cement, flour, grain, iron, potatoes, and sugar.²¹ During the 1950s, port developments ‘follow[ed] the great Murupara pulp and paper project’.²² The Tasman Pulp and Paper Mill had been established at Kawerau in 1953 and began production of newsprint, chemical pulp and timber in 1955. The Government contract to sell logs to the mill also included provisions regarding rail connections between the mill at Kawerau, forests at Murupara, and the Port.²³ Trade diversified further throughout the twentieth century with the Port also handling imported oil and fertiliser raw materials. By 1988, exports included dairy products, kiwifruit, steel, and livestock, and imports included vehicles, grain, salt, and textiles.²⁴



Figure 19: Logs at Port Tauranga, c. 1960s. Tauranga City Libraries, Photo 06-417.

A timeline of notable first cargoes include:

- 1957: oil (Norway)
- 1957 logs (Japan)
- 1958: phosphate (Nauru)
- 1958: wheat
- 1968: butter
- 1972: wood chips (Japan)
- 1973: salt (Australia)
- 1974: molasses (Australia)
- 1975: maize
- 1982: kiwifruit (Japan)

²¹ Neil Hansen, *A History of Tauranga Harbour and Port*, p. 137.

²² Evelyn Stokes, *A History of Tauranga County* (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1980), p. 359.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Neil Hansen, *A History of Tauranga Harbour and Port*, p. 138.

Facilities necessary for the storage and handling of these different types of goods have been constructed incrementally over decades of Port development.

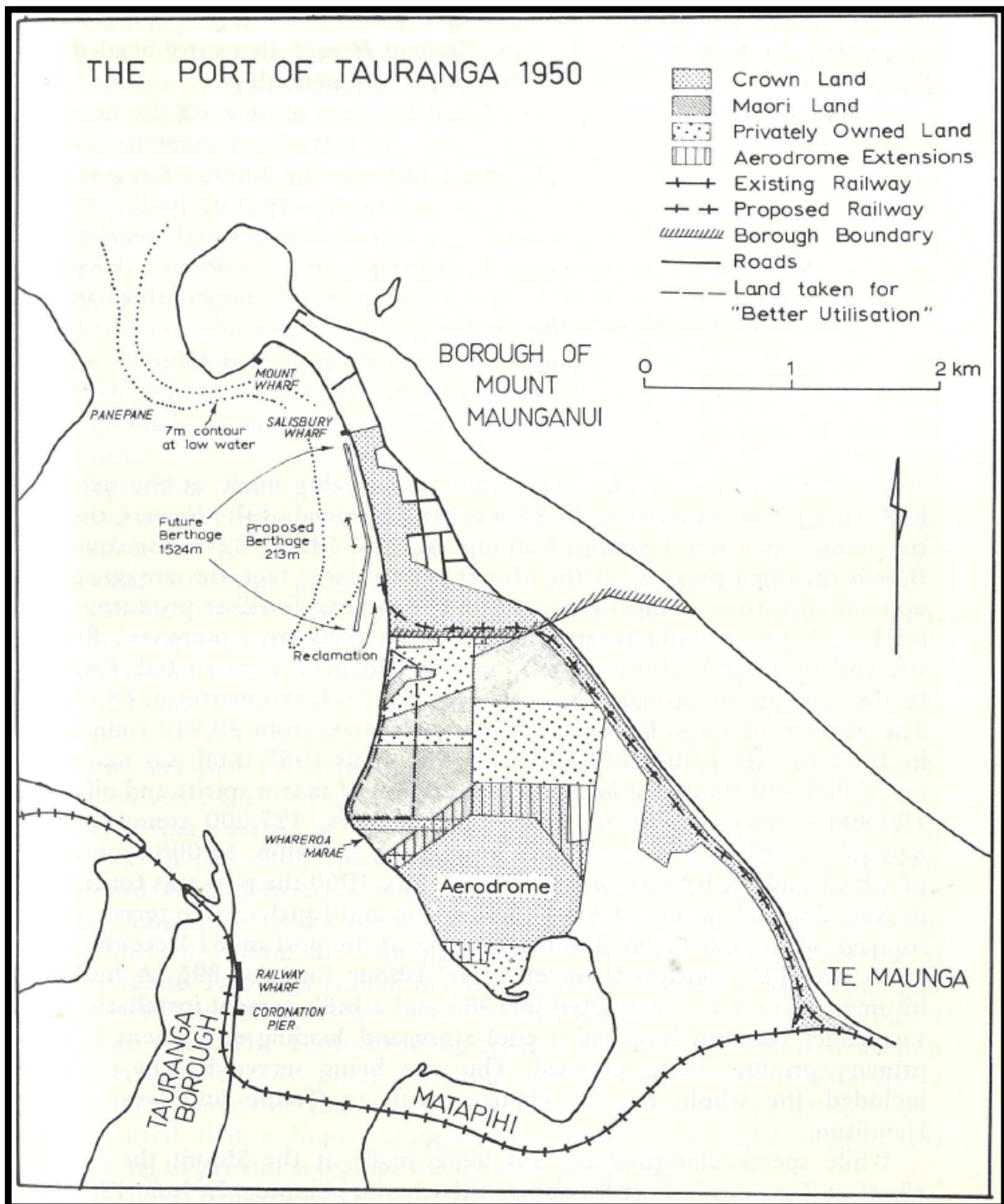


Figure 20: Port of Tauranga 1950, in Evelyn Stokes, *A History of Tauranga County* (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1980), p. 361.

Note the location of previously mentioned wharves in Figure 20: Coronation Pier and Railway Wharf in the south, Salisbury Wharf and Mount Wharf in the north. The railway bridge between Tauranga city and Matapihi Peninsula is also present in the south.

1950 is considered to be a 'turning point' in the history of the Port of Tauranga, as it was in this year that decisions were made that provided the foundation for the Port to become one of the main import and export ports in New Zealand – if not *the* main port.²⁵ As a result, the history of the Port of Tauranga from 1950 to the present day is best described as a narrative of two key port locations: the Mount Maunganui Wharves and Sulphur Point.

Mount Maunganui Wharf

Work on the Mount Maunganui Wharf began in June 1953.²⁶ The Ministry of Works called tenders for the first 373 metres of wharf in April but then, on finding the lowest tender more expensive than expected, carried out the work itself. This wharf was completed in 1956; other developments quickly followed.

Dredging work was also undertaken alongside the construction of coastal wharf infrastructure, with the loaned dredge *Eileen Ward* increasing the entrance depth between Mauao and Matakana Island from seven to eight metres. In 1955, the dredge also deepened the harbour adjacent to the newly built wharf, removing 150,000 cubic metres. The *Kere Iti* worked from 1953 until the 1980s, dredging near the Mount Maunganui Wharves, using the spoil to reclaim land behind the main construction area of the wharves (see Figure 20: reclamation area behind proposed wharf is marked).²⁷

In 2013, the Port of Tauranga Limited listed the following key developments in the construction of the Mount Maunganui Wharves:

- The construction of a 600 tonne slipway and jetty, which was in use by 1971
- Installation of a multi-purpose gantry crane in 1979
- A bulk cement/tanker berth was operational by 1980
- Large storage sheds were constructed, including 8000 square metres for grain storage in 2007
- By 2013, the harbour draught had been increased from 7.31 metres to 13 metres at high tide and 11.7 metres at low tide
- The main wharf had also been lengthened from 373 metres to 2060 metres²⁸



Figure 21: Construction of the first 373 metres of wharf; 1953.
From <https://www.port-tauranga.co.nz/about-port-of-tauranga/history/>

²⁵ Neil Hansen, *A History of Tauranga Harbour and Port*, p. 77.

²⁶ Evelyn Stokes, *A History of Tauranga County* (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1980), p. 359.

²⁷ Neil Hansen, *A History of Tauranga Harbour and Port*, p. 130. The *Kere Iti* also dredged material that was used in the Sulphur Point reclamation.

²⁸ *Port History to Modern Day*, 2013, p. 10.



Figure 22: Aerial View of development of port at Mount Maunganui, 1954. Tauranga City Libraries Photo 99-179.



Figure 23: Aerial View of development of port at Mount Maunganui, 1954. Tauranga City Libraries Photo 99-180.



Figure 24: Aerial View of development of port at Mount Maunganui, 1954. Tauranga City Libraries Photo 99-181.

The first ship to dock at the new wharf was the M.V. Korowai, which berthed in December 1954.

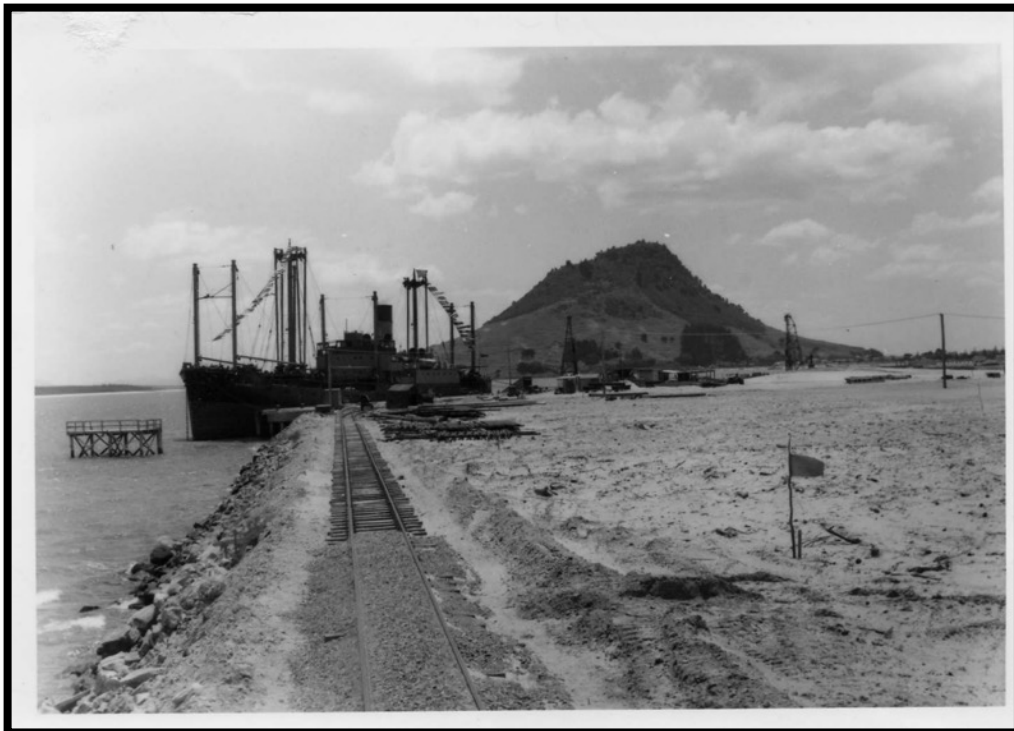


Figure 25: First official vessel: Korowai; 1954. From <https://www.port-tauranga.co.nz/about-port-of-tauranga/history/>

The *New Zealand Herald* described port developments in April 1957: ‘large factories are going up in all directions as oil companies, flour concerns, fertilizer producers, brick and pipe manufacturers and milling interests erect premises’.²⁹ The first oil tanker arrived at the Mount Maunganui Wharf in 1957, utilizing the new bulk oil storage terminal.³⁰

The first extension of the Mount Wharf was completed in 1960, increasing the berthage from 373 to 427 metres. Five construction stages expanded this to 1280 metres by 1966.³¹ Extensions to the wharf were made between 1956 and 1966 as the Port’s commercial activities also expanded.³² For example, 366 metres of wharf had been constructed in 1963 and 1964 to manage Japanese logging vessels unable to trade with Russian Pacific ports during winter in the northern hemisphere.³³ By 1978, the wharf boasted 1843 metres of berthage.³⁴

The first tugboat commissioned for the Port of Tauranga was the *Mount Maunganui* in 1960. A second tug, *Rotorua*, was operational in 1968 followed by *Kaimai* in 1977, *Te Matua* in 1992, *Sir Robert* in 1999, and *Tai Pari* and *Tai Timu* in 2015. Before the purchase of the *Mount Maunganui*, ships would navigate entry to Te Awanui on their own, but as vessels became larger it became obvious to the Harbour Board that a tug was necessary.

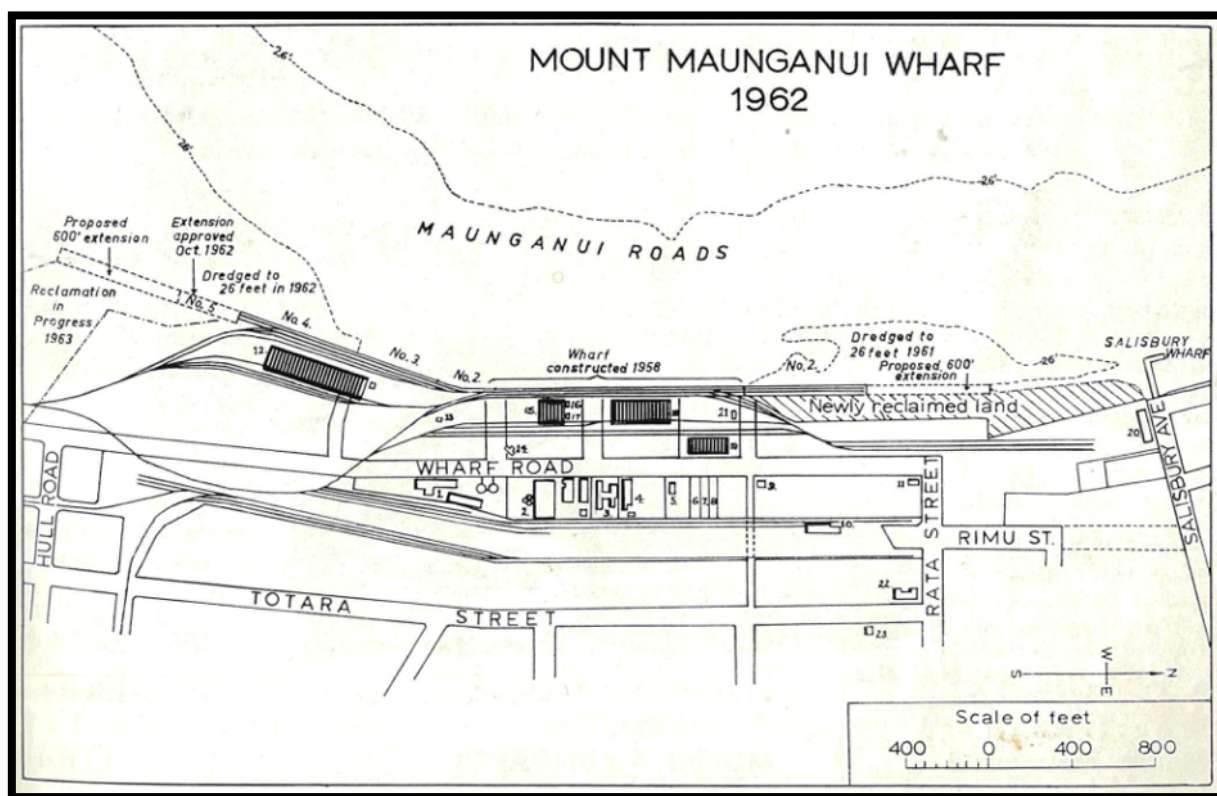


Figure 26: Mount Maunganui Wharf 1962, in *Bay of Plenty Expands* (Auckland: Breckell & Nicholls, 1965), p. 11.

²⁹ Evelyn Stokes, *A History of Tauranga County*, p. 362.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*; Neil Hansen, *A History of Tauranga Harbour and Port*, p. 93.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 77.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

³⁴ *Port History to Modern Day*, 2020, p. 10; Neil Hansen, *A History of Tauranga Harbour and Port*, p. 93.

Figure 23 shows the seabed dredging and land reclamation undertaken by the *Kere Iti* at the north end of the wharf, near Salisbury Wharf, and the 'in progress' work at the south end, near Hull Road.



Figure 27: Pilot Bay; 1965. From <https://www.port-tauranga.co.nz/about-port-of-tauranga/history/>
Compare with Figure 12.



Figure 28: The Port of Tauranga, Bay of Plenty Times, 16 May 1967. Tauranga City Libraries Photo gca-16005.

In 1968, an 8,500 tonne capacity cool store was completed, to store dairy products such as butter and cheese. This is visible in the foreground of Figure 29 below. In December of the same year, the first export of butter left the Port on the *Suevic*.

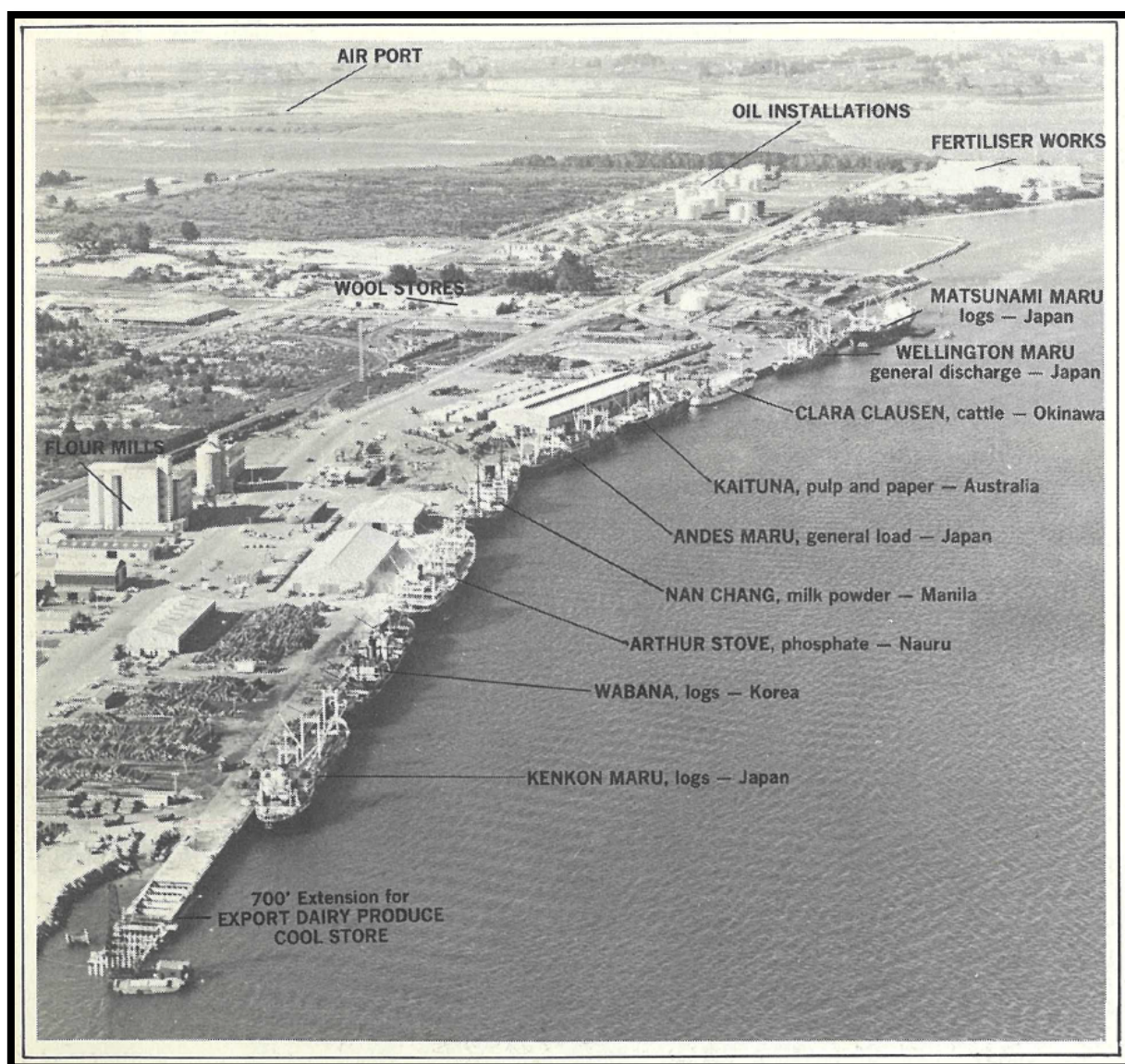


Figure 29: Modern Quay Side Wharves, in Port of Tauranga: Gateway to central North Island, New Zealand (Tauranga Harbour Board: Mount Maunganui, 1968).

A promotional pamphlet published by the Tauranga Harbour Board in 1968 explains that construction on the Mount Maunganui wharves had been essentially constant since the mid-1950s:

The port berthage comprises quayside wharves providing 4,900 feet of berthage and embodies the most modern design and engineering advancements.... Construction of these quayside wharves has been continuous since the first wharf was completed in 1955 in order to accommodate the increasing demand for berthage.³⁵

³⁵ *Port of Tauranga: Gateway to central North Island, New Zealand* (Tauranga Harbour Board: Mount Maunganui, 1968).

Alongside the purchase of tugboats to aid with navigation in Te Awanui, the Cutter Channel was dredged in the late 1960s. Te Awanui is naturally relatively shallow, and before completion of this dredging work ships would need to undertake two sharp turns to gain access to Pilot Bay.³⁶ The *W D 53* worked 24 hours a day, six days a week for months, removing 1.34 million cubic metres of material from the harbour floor and dumping this spoil a mile north of Rabbit Island.³⁷ The *Geopotes V* continued dredging work in 1971, further deepening and widening the main entrance channel.



Figure 30: Dredging pipeline for Mount Maunganui wharf extension; 1967. Tauranga City Libraries, photo gca-14671.

³⁶ Neil Hansen, *A History of Tauranga Harbour and Port*, p. 131.

³⁷ *Ibid.*



Figure 31: Dredging at Mount Maunganui; 1967. Tauranga City Libraries, photo gca-14825.

The Tauranga Harbour Board also purchased the *Teremoana* in 1970 to undertake dredging work. The *Teremoana* kept pace with developments at the Mount Maunganui wharf, deepening the seabed alongside the wharf extensions. Dredgings were piped to an area north of Sulphur Point, where an 80-hectare reclamation project was planned.³⁸

Throughout the history of the Port of Tauranga, many land reclamation and seabed dredging projects have been undertaken. In 1873, the *Bay of Plenty Times* recorded the excitement surrounding the ‘mere suggestion’ of land reclamation in Te Awanui.³⁹ Since then, around 1500 hectares of former tidal land has been reclaimed, drained, or modified for agricultural use or for industrial and port developments.⁴⁰ Large-scale dredging occurred from 1968 to 1978, and again in 1991 to 1992, to deepen and widen shipping channels and to reclaim land at Sulphur Point. Since 1992, maintenance

³⁸ Evelyn Stokes, *A History of Tauranga County* (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1980), p. 368.

³⁹ *Bay of Plenty Times*, 2 August 1873, p. 2.

⁴⁰ *The State of Tauranga Harbour's Environment* (Whakatane: Environment B.O.P., 1999), p. 7.

dredging has been regularly required to maintain adequate channel depths.⁴¹ Dredging has also been necessary to allow the Port to service larger ships. For example, in 2010 POTL obtained consent under the Resource Management Act 1991 to dredge up to 15 million cubic metres of material from the foreshore and seabed of Te Awanui, in order to accept vessels with increased draught and length.⁴² As a result, shipping channels within Te Awanui were deepened from 12.9 metres to 14.5 metres in 2015 through 2016.⁴³ A further application to dredge the access channel in the Stella Passage is currently before the Environment Court in 2023.⁴⁴



Figure 32: Port of Tauranga, looking northwards; c. 1970 or 1971. Tauranga City Libraries, Photo 99-241.

In August 1970, the Tauranga Harbour Board, which had been in control of the administration of the Port since 1912, changed its name to the Bay of Plenty Harbour Board. This change was made in order to be more representative of the hinterland serviced by the Port. Board members had previously been elected by constituencies local to Tauranga, while the new Board would also include members from Rotorua, Whakatane, Putaruru, Tokoroa, and Matamata.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Jim Sinner, Dana Clark, et al, *Health of Te Awanui Tauranga Harbour* (Manaaki Taha Moana Research Team: Palmerston North, 2011), p. 25.

⁴² *Decision and recommendations of the hearing panel of Bay of Plenty Regional Council (Environment Bay of Plenty) and the Minister of Conservation*, 2010, p. 13 <https://www.boprc.govt.nz/media/28883/Consents-100603-PortofTgaDecision.pdf>

⁴³ Port of Tauranga – Dredging to commence at Tauranga <https://www.port-tauranga.co.nz/news/dredging-to-commence-at-tauranga/>

⁴⁴ *Application 2020-29 – Port of Tauranga Limited for Ports of Tauranga Stella Passage Wharves and Dredging Project*, 2021 https://environment.govt.nz/assets/what-government-is-doing/fast-track/Port-of-Tauranga/29.23-stage_2_joint_briefing.pdf

⁴⁵ *Port History to Modern Day*, 2013, pp. 4-5.

A slipway was completed in 1972 to allow for easy maintenance and repair of the Harbour Board's tug fleet. It was initially designed for ships up to 400 tonnes but, as demand increased, it was modified to allow for vessels up to 600 tonnes.⁴⁶ A smaller slipway had existed previously at Sulphur Point, with a capacity of up to 150 tonnes, on land leased by the Harbour Board to a private company.

By 1974, new cool stores, other storage facilities including oil, log assembly areas, and fertiliser works had also been constructed.⁴⁷

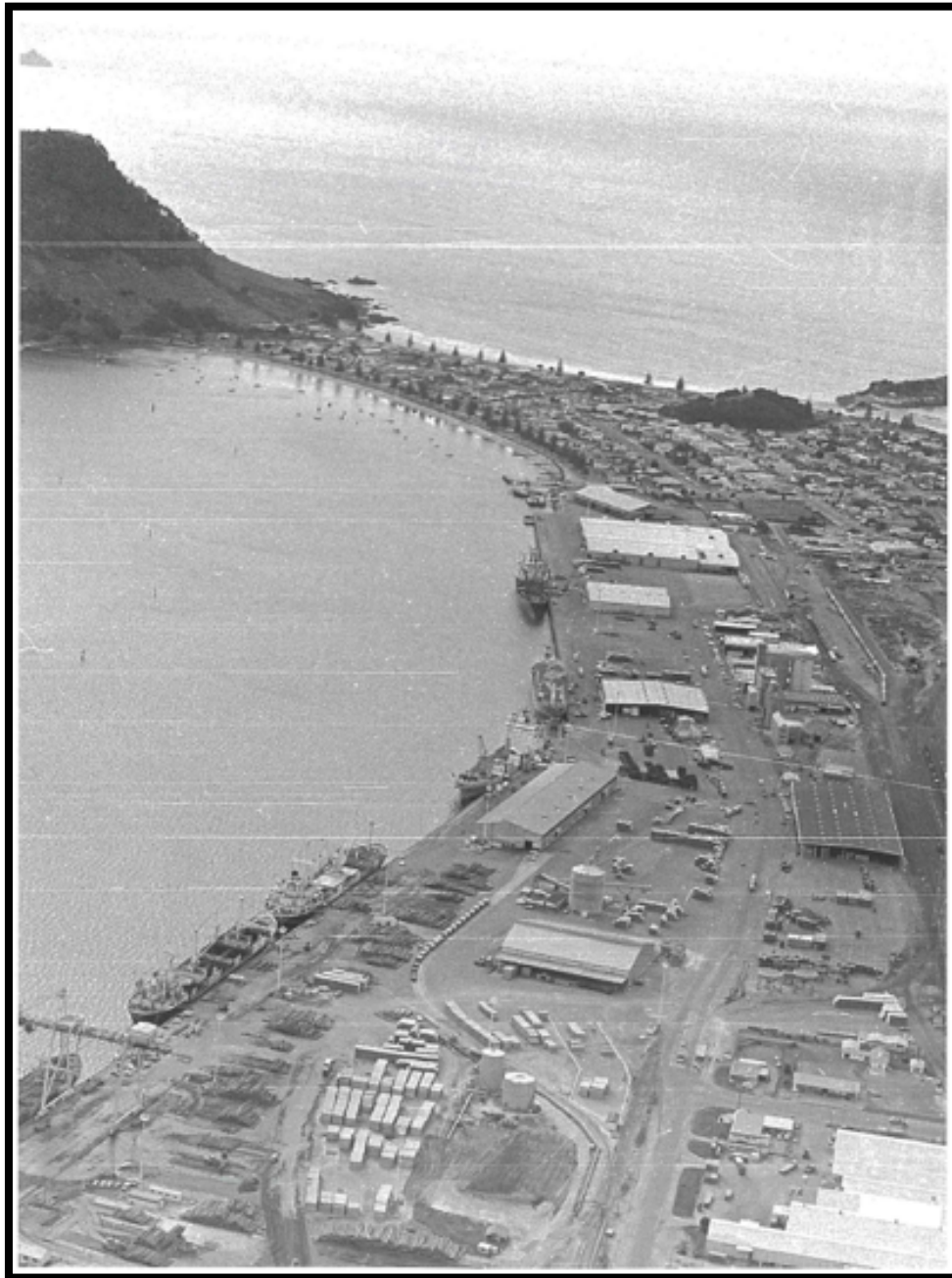


Figure 33: Mount Maunganui, December 1980, in *Be a Part of the Times: A photographic collection* (Bay of Plenty Times: Tauranga, 2011), p. 12.

⁴⁶ Neil Hansen, *A History of Tauranga Harbour and Port*, p. 108.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 70.

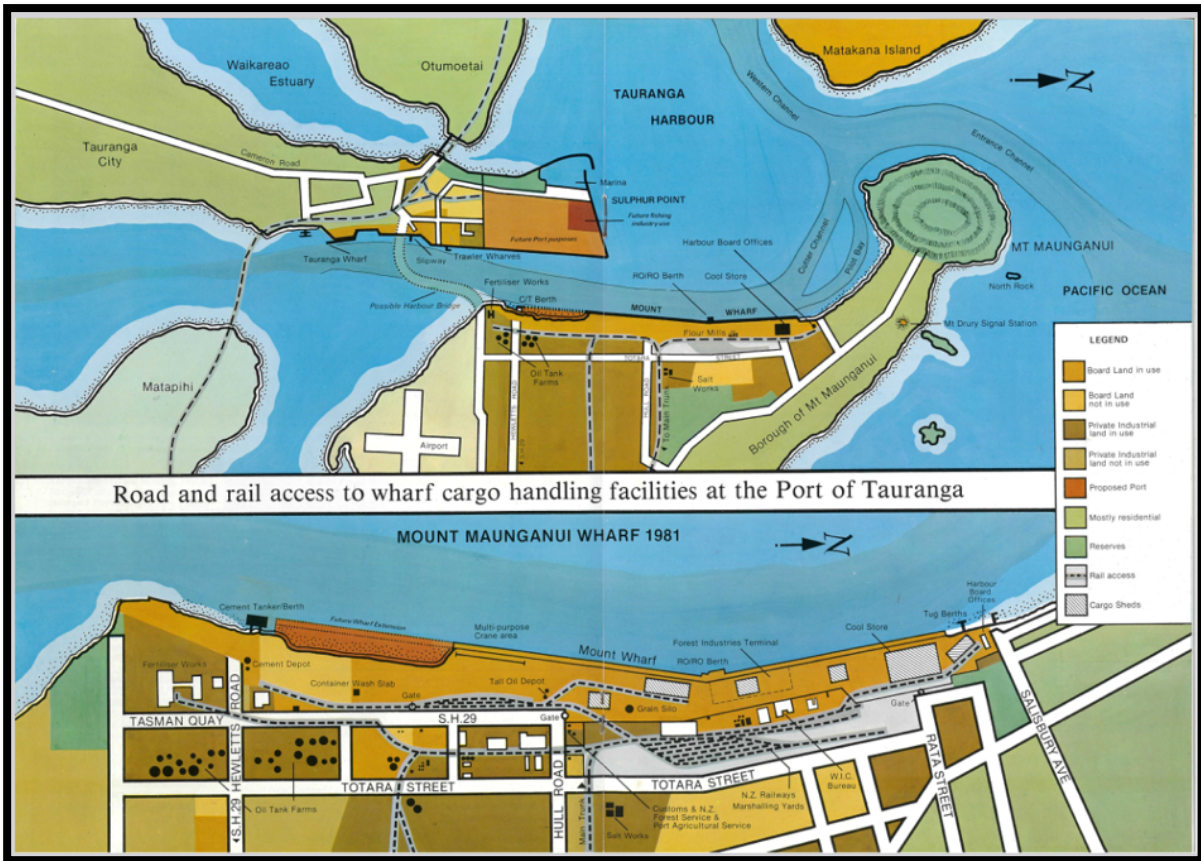


Figure 34: Road and rail access to wharf cargo handling facilities at the Port of Tauranga, in Bay of Plenty Harbour Board, *Port of Tauranga Annual Report 1980/81*.

In 1986, a specific wharf for tugs and pilot boats was built near Salisbury Wharf, labelled as ‘tug berth’ in Figure 34 above. A new loading facility had already been constructed to the south and a multipurpose crane had been operating there since 1980.⁴⁸

By 1993, the Mount Maunganui wharf was 2,060 metres long and consisted of 12 berths, including a tanker berth. 60 hectares of land adjacent to the port was used for cargo storage and handling.⁴⁹

As at 2023, Port of Tauranga Limited has 2055 metres of continuous berth face at Mount Maunganui, with several ‘bunker points’ where ships can refuel while simultaneously loading or unloading cargo. Cargo sheds run adjacent to the wharf on 90 hectares of land. A tanker berth dedicated to dangerous goods is located at the south end of the Mount Maunganui wharf (labelled L in Figure 35 below).⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Neil Hansen, *A History of Tauranga Harbour and Port*, p. 72.

⁴⁹ Mark I.A. Smith and Watten R. Hughes, *Port of Tauranga: 1993 Economic Impact Study* (Department of Economics, University of Waikato: Hamilton, 1993), p. 14.

⁵⁰ Port of Tauranga – Our Facilities <https://www.port-tauranga.co.nz/facilities/our-facilities/>

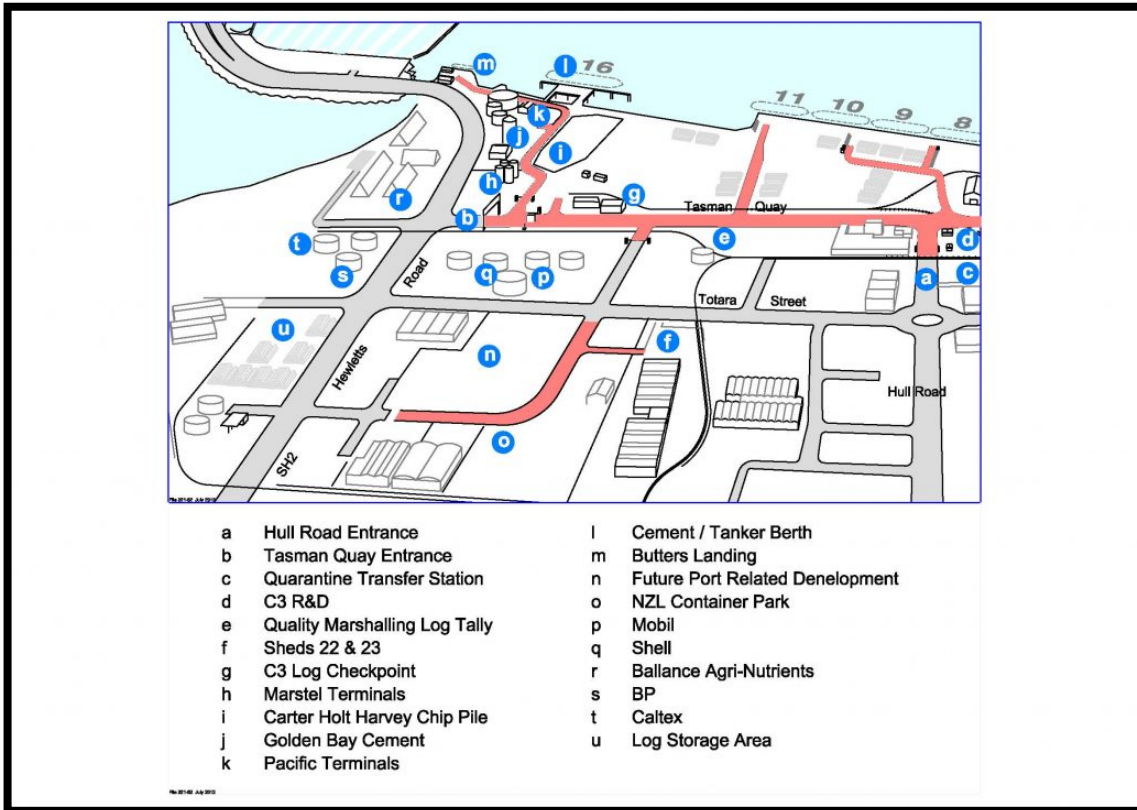


Figure 35: Port Map, Mount Maunganui South; 2023. From <https://www.port-tauranga.co.nz/facilities/our-facilities/port-maps/>

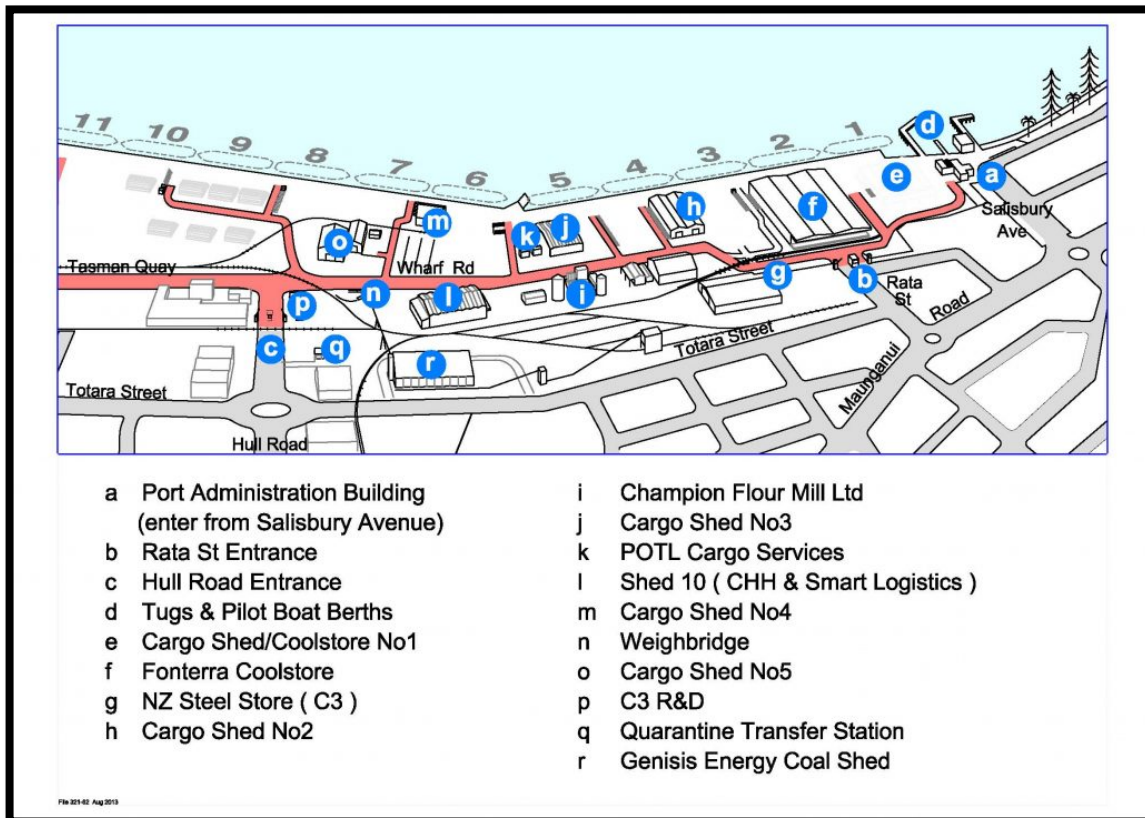


Figure 36: Port Map, Mount Maunganui North; 2023. From <https://www.port-tauranga.co.nz/facilities/our-facilities/port-maps/>

The Port of Tauranga has recently initiated applications to extend the Mount Maunganui Wharf by 315 metres north and 388 metres south of the tanker berth, including provision for a bunker barge berth, citing this project as an ‘urgent national priority’.⁵¹ This project also involves a 1.77-hectare land reclamation project. The requests, along with related extensions at Sulphur Point, are currently in process with the Environment Court.

Sulphur Point

A sandy spit located immediately to the north of Tauranga city, Sulphur Point was named for the sulphur mill located there to process sulphur from White Island. The works were in operation sporadically from 1888 to 1928.⁵² This spit was also locally referred to as ‘Shooter’s Point’ due to the presence of a rifle range, where the Tauranga Gun Club first formed in 1877.

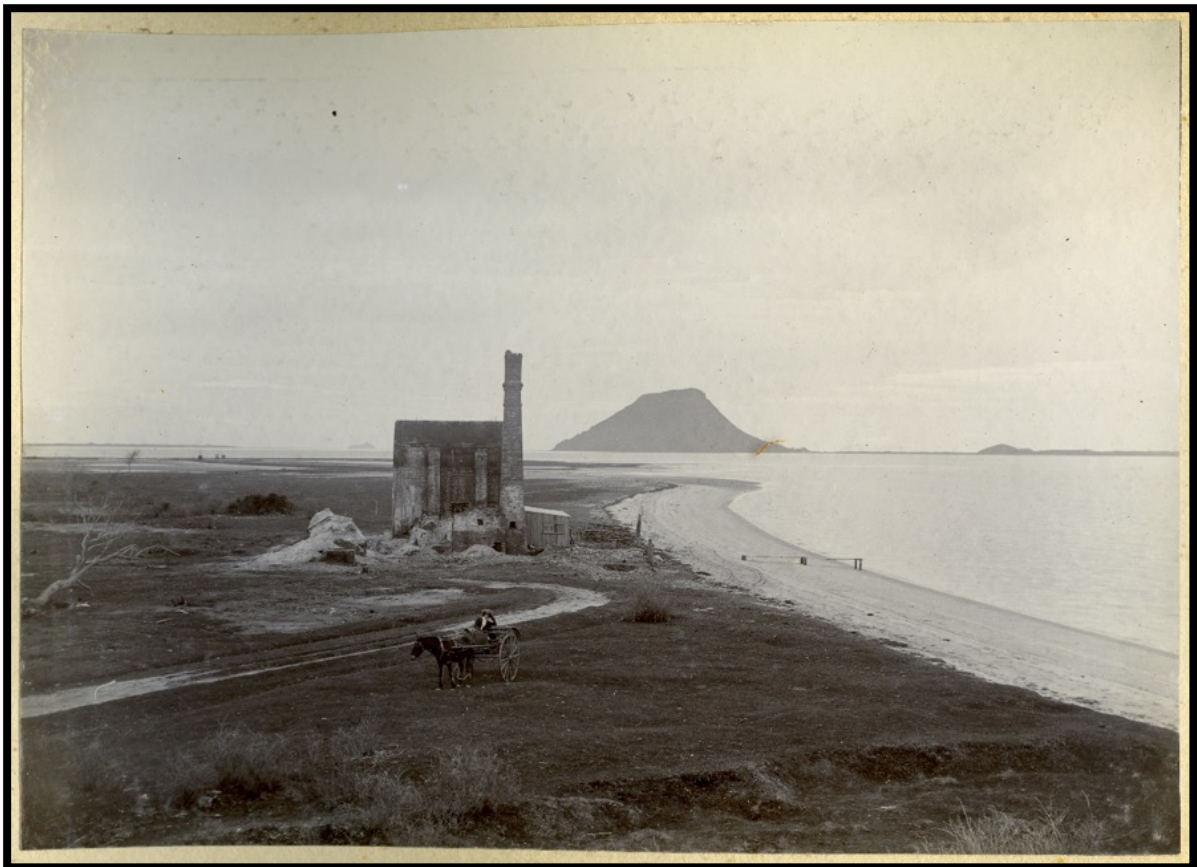


Figure 37: Old Sulphur mill at Sulphur Point, Tauranga; c.1901-1903. Tauranga City Libraries, Ams 483/01/01/51.

⁵¹ Sandra Conchie, ‘\$88m port extension an “urgent national priority” Environment Court told’, *Bay of Plenty Times*, 27 February 2023 <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/bay-of-plenty-times/news/environment-court-hearing-over-multimillion-dollar-wharf-extension-plans-for-port-of-tauranga-under-way/4HHZLNHQ5BHI7HBG6DB2ETOLF4/>

⁵² Ants Roberts, 'Fertiliser industry - What is fertiliser?', *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/photograph/15840/sulphur-point>



Figure 38: Sulphur Point, Tauranga; c. 1923. Tauranga City Libraries, Photo 04-613.

While construction projects were continually undertaken on the Mount Maunganui wharf from the 1950s, the Tauranga wharf continued to operate, mostly processing provincial and inter-island cargo.⁵³ By 1955, shipping companies lamented 'the inadequate port facilities at Tauranga'.⁵⁴

Reclamation at Sulphur Point began in 1967, when dredgings from other harbour works were deposited there. During 1968, a 1,524 metre wall was constructed at Sulphur Point to increase sea floor erosion and maintain the water depth necessary for boats to access the wharves.⁵⁵ The Harbour Board initially had no clear plans for development of the area, but over time considered using the reclaimed land for industries or storage space. However, in its 1979 Annual Report, the intention to develop Sulphur Point was made clear:

Sooner or later shipping and trade expansion will outstrip the capacity of facilities at Mount Maunganui and the Board's planning is for an integrated port, industrial, and recreational scheme of development for Sulphur Point to ensure adequate provision is made for the future needs of the Port.⁵⁶

By 1990, about 90 hectares had been reclaimed. In total approximately 800,000 cubic metres of sand was pumped ashore by *Kotuku* to complete the Sulphur Point Reclamation.⁵⁷

⁵³ Evelyn Stokes, *A History of Tauranga County*, pp. 362-363.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 363.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 368.

⁵⁶ Bay of Plenty Harbour Board Annual Report, for the year ending September 30, 1979, n.p.

⁵⁷ Heron Construction Co. Ltd., 'Port of Tauranga Sulphur Point Wharf Construction', <https://www.heronconstruction.co.nz/Case+Studies/Port+of+Tauranga+Sulphur+Point+Wharf+Construction.html>



Figure 39: Sulphur Point land reclamation; 1969. From <https://www.port-tauranga.co.nz/about-port-of-tauranga/history/>



Figure 40: Sulphur Point land reclamation; 1969. From <https://www.port-tauranga.co.nz/about-port-of-tauranga/history/>

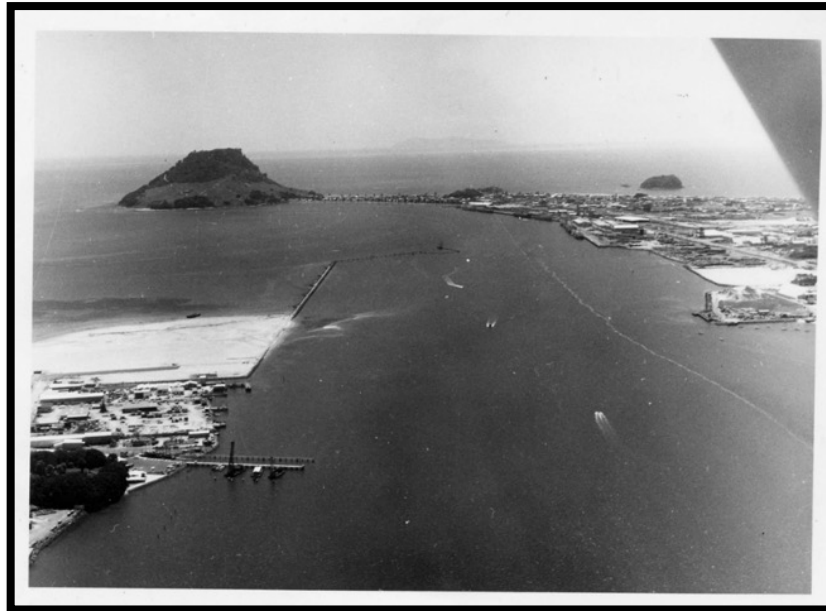


Figure 41: Sulphur Point land reclamation; 1974. From <https://www.port-tauranga.co.nz/about-port-of-tauranga/history/>

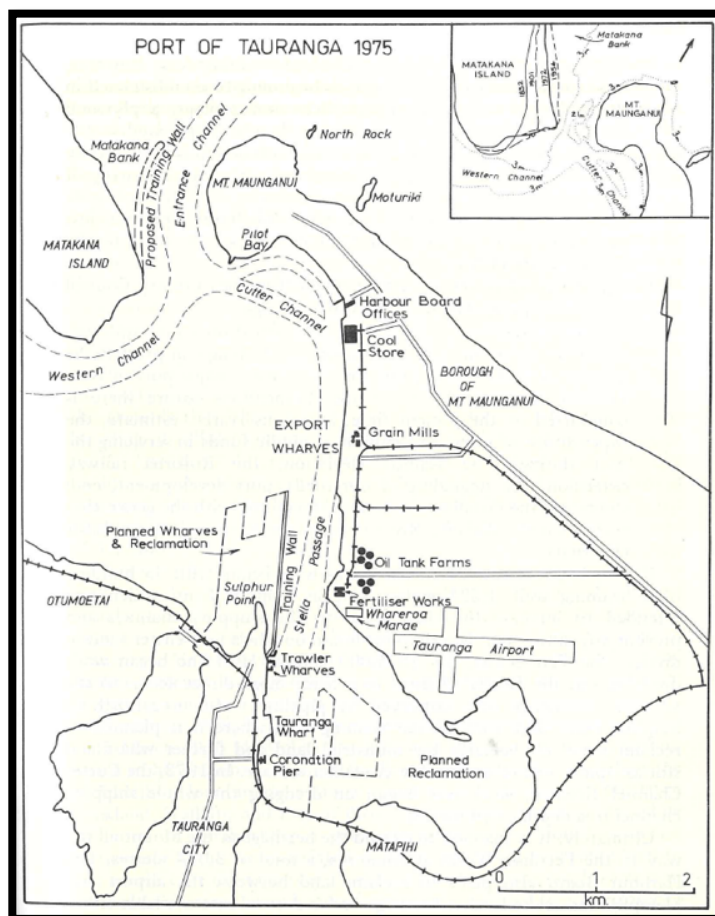


Figure 42: Port of Tauranga 1975, in Evelyn Stokes, *A History of Tauranga County* (Palmerston North: Dunmore, 1980), p. 367. Compare with Figure 20.

The training wall visible in Figure 40 is labelled in the map above (Figure 42). The Cutter Channel is also marked.

In 1975, the Bay of Plenty Harbour Board recognised the importance of cargo containerization and its impact on the future of worldwide shipping.⁵⁸ By now the Mount Maunganui Wharf had already processed some shipping containers in the late 1960s. The Harbour Board approached the Ports Authority – following legislated procedures of the time for port developments – who declined the application for a loan to construct a container terminal at the Port of Tauranga. The Ports Authority claimed that New Zealand had no need for a fifth berth for containers, citing the facilities at Auckland as suitable. The Bay of Plenty Harbour Board appealed the decision, but it was upheld.⁵⁹

In response, the Harbour Board published a pamphlet titled *Port of Tauranga: The True Facts on its Container Case* which attempted to refute claims made by the then Minister of Transport that

it seems unlikely that a container port would become a significant regional resource....
It is likely that for many years such a facility would result in higher transport costs, and unproductive competition between ports for container trade.⁶⁰

At a public meeting held to discuss the subject in 1976, the Harbour Board's Chairman, Mr K. S. Calder, is on the record as stating, '[t]his Board will continue to fight for what we feel is a vitally important development.'⁶¹ A 1977 pamphlet titled *Port Information* expressly stated the Strategic Port Plan Aims as including the establishment of container cargo services as soon as possible.⁶²

Consequently, the Bay of Plenty Harbour Board applied again to the Ports Authority in 1977, this time emphasising the purchase of a multi-purpose crane that could process a range of cargo including containers. Once again, this request was rejected, and once again, an appeal was mounted. In December 1977, the Port Authority's decision was overturned and the Harbour Board was granted permission to purchase the crane. The crane was installed and operational in 1979.⁶³

Thus began the Port of Tauranga's diversification into container shipping, following a bureaucratic battle that was fought and won with timely foresight. In the 1987 financial year container movements increased 6% to 33,000, and, in 1988, over 35,000 containers had been handled by the Port in the previous 12 months.⁶⁴

Throughout its history, the Port of Tauranga has undergone several changes on an organizational or governance level. The most recent of these occurred in 1988. The Port Companies Act 1988 established port companies at each New Zealand port, shifting management responsibilities from local harbour boards and the centralized New Zealand Ports Authority.⁶⁵ As a result, the Bay of Plenty Harbour Board was replaced by the Port of Tauranga Limited. This meant that large scale developments towards the establishment of a container port at Tauranga could be undertaken at Sulphur Point in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

⁵⁸ Neil Hansen, *A History of Tauranga Harbour and Port*, p. 105.

⁵⁹ Evelyn Stokes, *A History of Tauranga County*, p. 369.

⁶⁰ Colin McLachlan, quoted in Evelyn Stokes, *A History of Tauranga County*, p. 370.

⁶¹ Neil Hansen, *A History of Tauranga Harbour and Port*, p. 106.

⁶² Bay of Plenty Harbour Board, Port of Tauranga, *Port Information*, p. 9.

⁶³ Port of Tauranga Annual Report, for the year ending September 30, 1978, n.p.

⁶⁴ Port of Tauranga, Bay of Plenty Harbour Board Annual Report, 1987, p. 2; Port of Tauranga, Bay of Plenty Harbour Board Annual Report, 1988, p. 4.

⁶⁵ Mark I.A. Smith and Watten R. Hughes, *Port of Tauranga: 1993 Economic Impact Study* (Department of Economics, University of Waikato: Hamilton, 1993), p. 14.



Figure 43: Sulphur Point developments; c. 1990/1991, in *The Port of Tauranga: Port of the future* (The Port: Tauranga, 1991), p. 3.

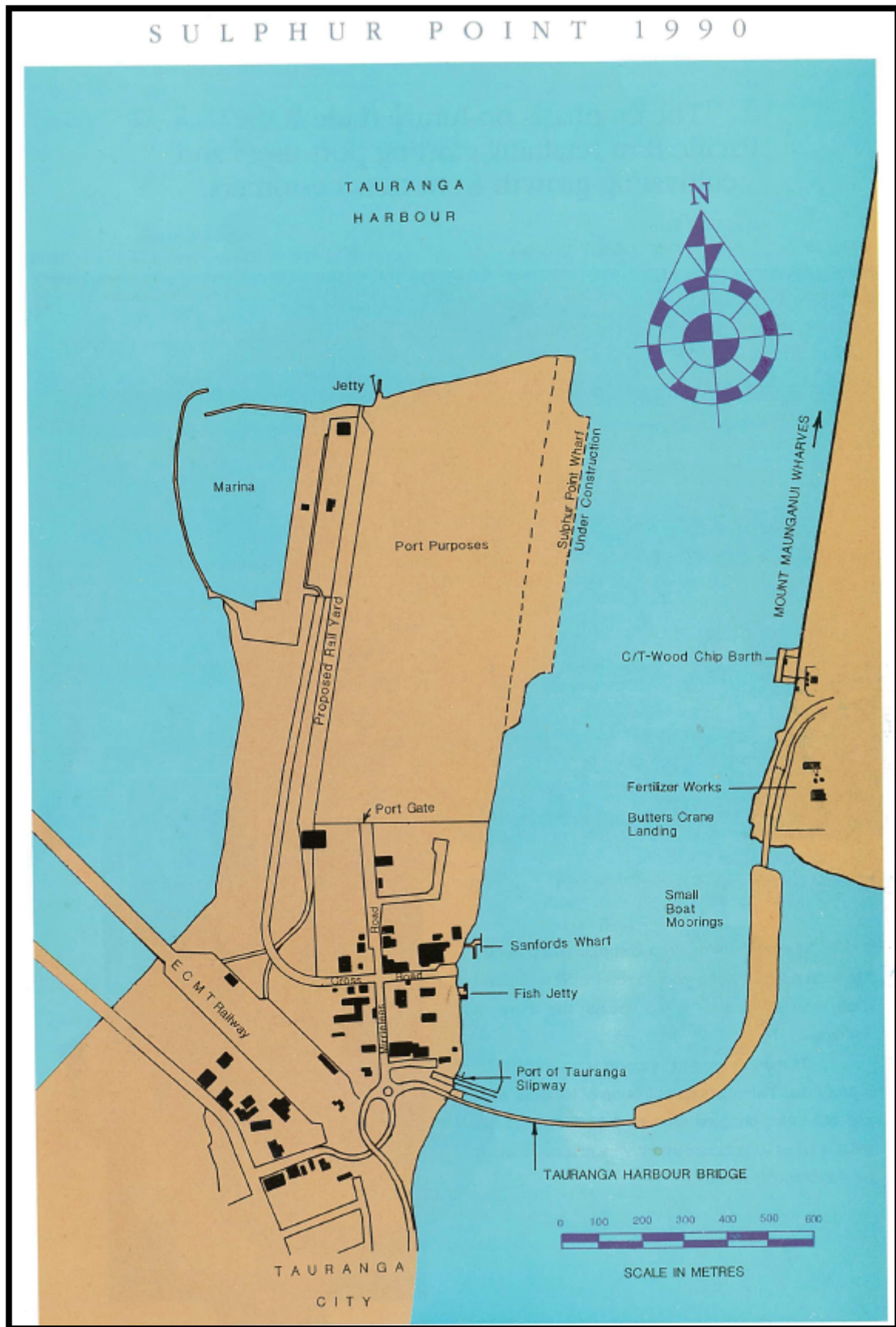


Figure 44: Sulphur Point 1990, in *The Port of Tauranga: Port of the future* (The Port: Tauranga, 1991), p. 9.

The wharf at Sulphur Point was opened in 1992, but developments did not stop there. In 1993, for example, a third cargo shed was built, and, in 1997, a 3,000 tonne capacity cool store was constructed. By 1996 Sulphur Point boasted a 600-metre long wharf with two container cranes and 27 hectares for cargo storage and handling, all located on 95 hectares of reclaimed land. The Tauranga Container Terminal was officially opened at Sulphur Point in July 1998, with a volume of 57,000 TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent units) processed in that year.

By its ten-year anniversary in 2007, container throughput at Sulphur Point had increased to 400,000 TEUs.⁶⁶ Container volumes continued to grow, and a large-scale development of Sulphur Point was deemed necessary in 2011 when TEUs reached over 590,000 a year.⁶⁷ This expansion included a 170-metre extension to the north end of the container terminal, increased container storage on 0.4 hectares of newly reclaimed land, shipping channel dredging, and the purchase of a sixth gantry crane.⁶⁸ The wharf extension was completed in 2013 and three more gantry cranes were commissioned in 2014 and 2015.⁶⁹

The largest container ship to ever visit New Zealand waters, the *Maersk Antares*, called at the Port of Tauranga in March 2017.⁷⁰ This highlights the Port's modern-day position at the forefront of New Zealand's sea freight operations and particularly its dominance in container shipping.



Figure 45: Tauranga Container Terminal, Sulphur Point; 2021. From <https://www.port-tauranga.co.nz/operations/tauranga-container-terminal/>

⁶⁶ *Port History to Modern Day*, 2020, p. 18.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 19.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 20, 21.

⁷⁰ Port of Tauranga – FAQ <https://www.port-tauranga.co.nz/community/faq/>

In 2023, Sulphur Point remains the home of the Tauranga Container Terminal, processing 1.18 million TEUs.⁷¹ This facility has over 700 metres of wharf, serviced by eight container cranes. There is a total of 25,000 square metres of covered storage available on 38 hectares of paved space, including a cool store with a capacity of 9000 tonnes (labelled E in Figure 46 below).⁷²

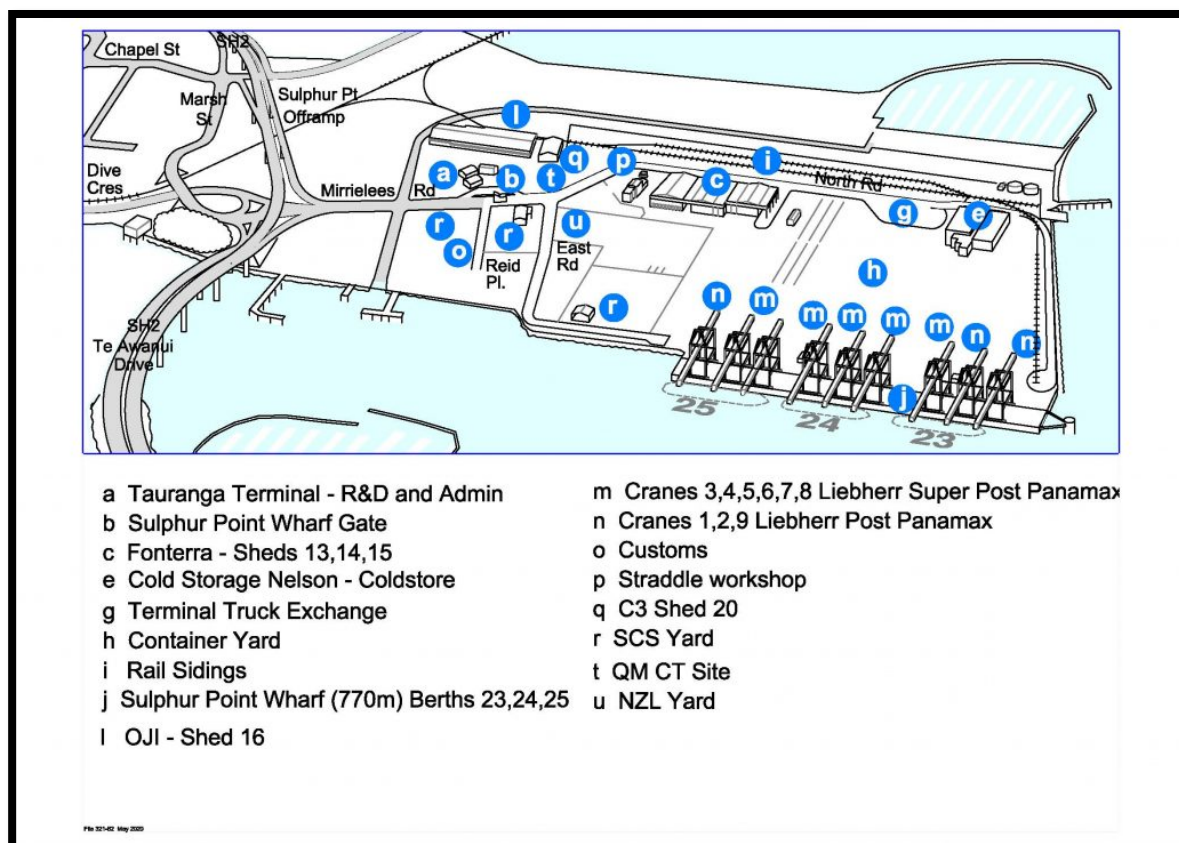


Figure 46: Port Map, Sulphur Point; 2023. From <https://www.port-tauranga.co.nz/facilities/our-facilities/port-maps/>

The Port of Tauranga Limited has recently applied to the Environment Court for consent to extend the wharf at Sulphur Point by 385 metres and to reclaim another 1.8 hectares of land.⁷³ Stage one of this work is expected to cost \$88 million; Environment Court hearings are ongoing in 2023.

The Tauranga Harbour Bridge

The development of Sulphur Point in the late 1980s was supported by existing road and rail links, as well as improvements such as widening on Mirrielees Road and a motorway near the Waikareao Estuary.⁷⁴ One of the key road projects was the Tauranga Harbour Bridge. The construction of this

⁷¹ Port of Tauranga – Port of Tauranga improves financial performance as cargo volumes slow <https://www.port-tauranga.co.nz/news/port-of-tauranga-improves-financial-performance-as-cargo-volumes-slow/>

⁷² Port of Tauranga – Our Facilities <https://www.port-tauranga.co.nz/facilities/our-facilities/>

⁷³ Bay of Plenty Times, 27 February 2023, <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/bay-of-plenty-times/news/environment-court-hearing-over-multimillion-dollar-wharf-extension-plans-for-port-of-tauranga-under-way/4HHZLNHQ5BHI7HBG6DB2ETOLF4/>

⁷⁴ *The Port of Tauranga: Port of the future* (The Port: Tauranga, 1991), p. 8.

bridge was vital to developments at Sulphur Point, with the bridge opening enabling the Port of Tauranga Limited to proceed with construction of two berths on the reclaimed land.⁷⁵

A trans-harbour road bridge had almost become a reality in the 1910s when the Matapihi railway bridge was erected. The Public Works Department had agreed to construct a dual rail and road bridge for an additional £5000, but the Tauranga County Council and Borough Council did not view the investment as justified.⁷⁶ The idea of a bridge was discussed again briefly at various points throughout the mid-twentieth century but never gained much traction.

In 1972, the Tauranga City Council and the Mount Maunganui Borough Council set up a joint committee with former Tauranga mayor Mr R. A. Owens as chairman. This committee was focused on the design, finance, and construction of a trans-harbour road bridge.⁷⁷ In 1985, the Bay of Plenty Harbour Board gained membership on the committee and the project truly began to take shape; construction began in 1986.



Figure 47: Aerial shot of new harbour bridge with port in background, in *Port of Tauranga, Bay of Plenty Harbour Board Annual Report, 1988*, p. 6.

The 480-metre long bridge was constructed on shore and then cantilevered into place. It was completed two months ahead of schedule, officially opening in 1988. The bridge was tolled until 2001,

⁷⁵ Port of Tauranga Limited, *Port of Tauranga 1989 Annual Report*, p. 9.

⁷⁶ Neil Hansen, *A History of Tauranga Harbour and Port*, p. 194.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

to recoup its \$25 million cost.⁷⁸ By the time tolls were discontinued over \$90 million had been collected.⁷⁹ The Bay of Plenty Harbour Board retained part ownership of the bridge until legislative changes establishing the Port of Tauranga Limited also required passing over their holdings to the Tauranga District Council.⁸⁰

A second bridge spanning Te Awanui was built in the mid-2000s, opening in 2009. This new bridge runs alongside the original, extending it by three lanes.

Conclusion

Since the mid-nineteenth century, the Port of Tauranga has developed from a harbour with no infrastructure, to the biggest international port in New Zealand, handling one third of the country's shipped cargo including 40% of New Zealand's exports and processing just under half of all shipping containers.⁸¹ The Port grew gradually, starting from singular jetties and wharves constructed where and when needed, transforming into an internationally linked hub of cargo and logistics that dominates the edges of Te Awanui.

Neil Hansen aptly summarized the growth of the Port through the twentieth century in *A History of Tauranga Harbour and Port*, which he researched and wrote as a passion project in his retirement, having worked as an engineer with various iterations of Tauranga local government for many decades.

... and it grew, and it grew, and it grew, up to the 1990s, by which time the Port of Tauranga became a major export and import harbour in New Zealand dealing with the world at large.

Throughout this hundred year period, shipping operators gradually resulted in a demand for facilities that were needed to allow it to happen. These included navigation aids, deeper channels, pilotage and tug boats, dredges and dredging, turning basins and channels, and wharves with the equipment to handle and store cargo with the ancillary administrative involvement in customs, immigration, stevedoring etc. It also required the development of an economic and efficient means of transport of the goods to and from the port by road and railway systems.⁸²

Hansen died in 2002 and so did not get to see the Port develop into the early twenty-first century and outside of Te Awanui. Currently, POTL is co-developing a 30-hectare inland port at Ruakura in Hamilton, in partnership with Tainui Group Holdings.

⁷⁸ Engineering New Zealand, 'Tauranga Harbour and Port Development', <https://www.engineeringnz.org/programmes/heritage/heritage-records/tauranga-harbour-and-port-development/>

⁷⁹ Rosaleen MacBrayne, 'Last hours of bridge tolls for Tauranga', 21 July 2001, <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/last-hours-of-bridge-tolls-for-tauranga/4GHUMUNWEKHPHOLGXHBBGMO35E/>

⁸⁰ *Port History to Modern Day*, 2013, p. 5.

⁸¹ Port of Tauranga – About Us <https://www.port-tauranga.co.nz/about-port-of-tauranga/>

⁸² Neil Hansen, *A History of Tauranga Harbour and Port*, p. 113.

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