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**Media Release**

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## **International Cruisers Still Coming**

Opuā in the Bay of Islands has maintained its status as New Zealand's leading port of first arrival.

New Zealand Customs Service clearance figures released recently show that for the 2009 calendar year over 420 vessels cleared border services at the Opuā Marina. This is an increase on the previous year when 417 vessels used Opuā as their port of entry to New Zealand.

Opuā's ongoing popularity with the international blue water cruising fleet has been attributed to both its geographic location and upgraded and convenient quarantine facilities and temporary berthing capable of handling up to 20 incoming vessels at a time.

Customs Manager Northern Ports – Simon Williamson says each year NZ Customs Service processes hundreds of small craft that migrate down to New Zealand over the summer period. Opuā in the Bay of Islands is the primary destination. Customs works closely with the Marina operators in ensuring that the processing function is carried out as efficiently as possible.

Far North Holdings Ltd Chairman Tony Norman says the port of entry facilities at Opuā are particularly well positioned for vessels sailing out of South Pacific destinations such as Fiji and Tonga.

"We had been concerned at the impact the downturn in the global economy may have had on the blue water cruising fleet and whether boaties would continue to cruise down to New Zealand. It is pleasing to see Opuā has maintained and even improved its preferred port of entry role.

"These decisions have a big impact on the local economy particularly those businesses involved in the marine service industry," he says.

Port Opuā provides entry to New Zealand free of any charge other than those required by border services. Another plus is the fact the Bay of Islands is one of New Zealand's most popular visitor destinations.

"Having the Bay of Islands as the welcome concourse for international cruisers can only be positive as it provides them with a great first impression of New Zealand and its maritime environment," Mr Norman says.

Destination Northland General Manager Brian Roberts says it's critical for both Northland and the New Zealand visitor industry that the first point of entry into the country is a positive experience.

"The cruising yachts tend to stay considerably longer and spend more than the average international visitor who arrive and depart by air. Recent surveys show each yacht spends

on average around \$36,000 while in the Bay of Islands and also draw in other income by attracting relatives and friends to the area," he says.

Customs also noted that in Opuā, there was a higher proportion of yachts arriving in NZ for the first time, than in recent years. Judging by the profile of previous first time international arrivals, we could reasonably expect a high proportion of these craft, to make repeat visits to NZ, during coming Pacific hurricane season's.

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