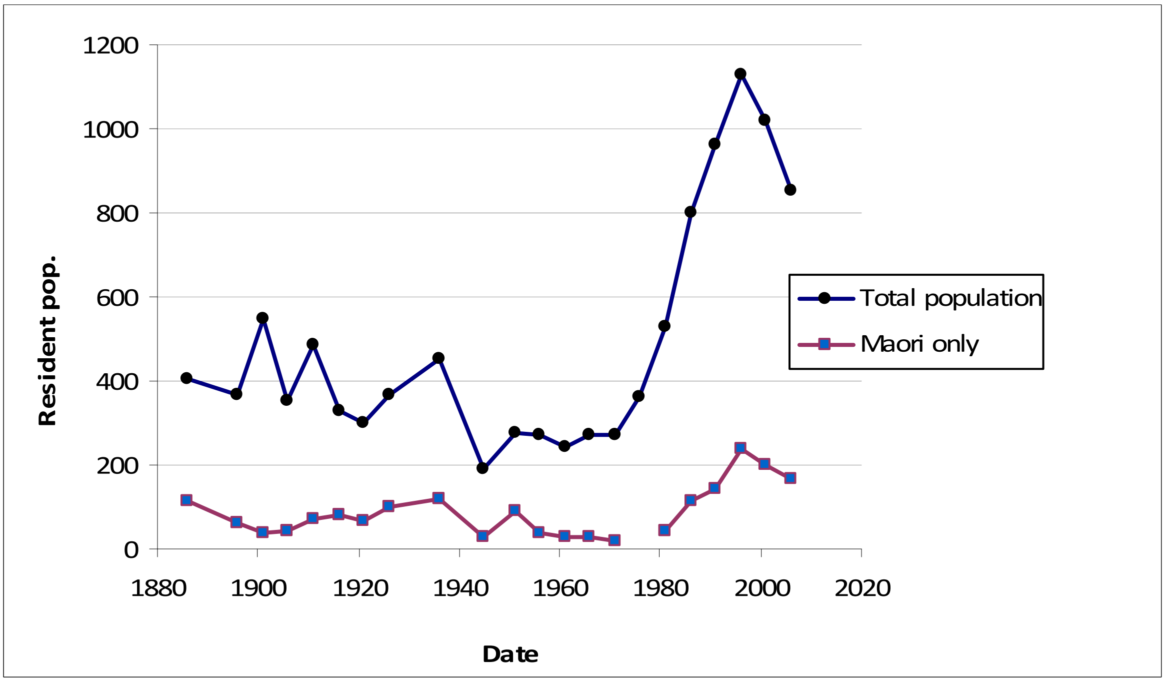
5 Demography and Economy

Demography

People have probably lived on Great Barrier Island (Aotea) since the 13th century. There are few written observations about the number of Maori settled here but these indicate fluctuations over time. The Great Barrier Island population has always had its peaks and troughs depending on the political pressures and the economic possibilities.

Census population counts since 1886 (Fig 5.1) show a long period of stable population until the late 1970’s when it started to rise reaching a peak in 1996. The current decline in population is a cause for concern to many residents, but seen in the longer-term appears more like a return towards an historic level. The figure does not take into account seasonal visitors and tourists, which number several thousand over the summer period. The numerical trends in visitor numbers are unknown.

Fig 5.1. Census population counts since 1886

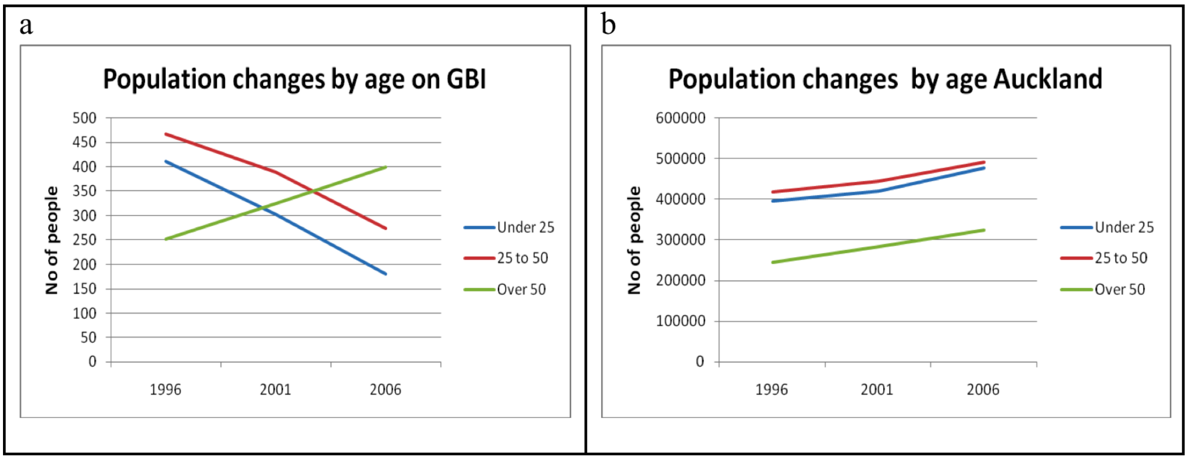


Population figures published previously and used by the health services are slightly different from those presented here. This relates to the way the census data is gathered and the purpose for which it is analysed. We have used ‘usually resident’ from 1971 as recommended by Statistics New Zealand. This may slightly underestimate the numbers present on any particular night (e.g. census night) and also fails to account accurately for the small island populations off the coast of Great Barrier Island.

Age Group

In the period of population decline from1996 to 2006, the 50+ age group shows an increase while the other age groupings are decreasing (Fig 5.2a). These trends contrast to those in the Auckland region and New Zealand as a whole (Fig 5.2b).

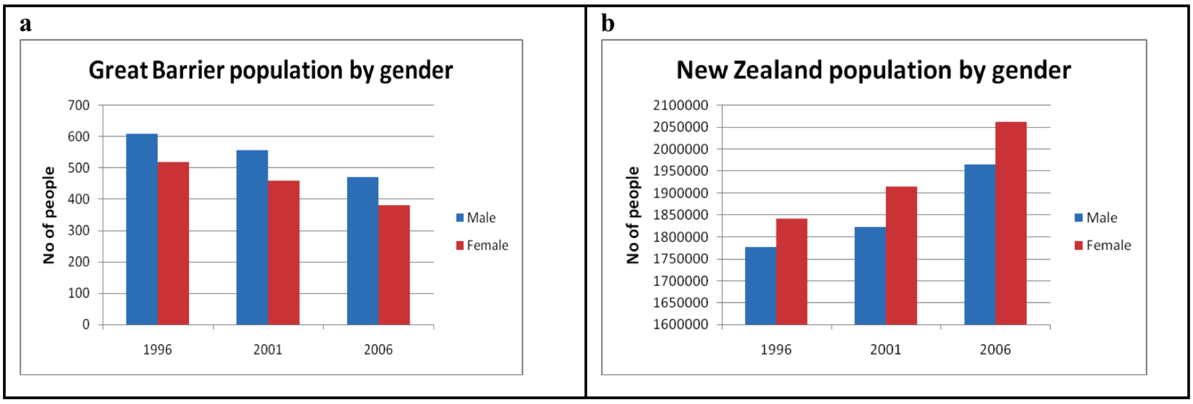
Fig 5.2. Population changes by age group 1996- 2006



Gender

There are more men than women (55% men to 45% women in 2006) on the island (fig 5.3a) and again this is in contrast to New Zealand as a whole (fig 5.3b) where the ratio has been 49% male and 51 % female for the past decade. The numerical trends in different age groups, and the gender imbalance, clearly have implications for the make-up of the work-force and the sustainability of the social structure.

Fig 5.3. Population by gender. (a) Great Barrier Island; (b) New Zealand overall.

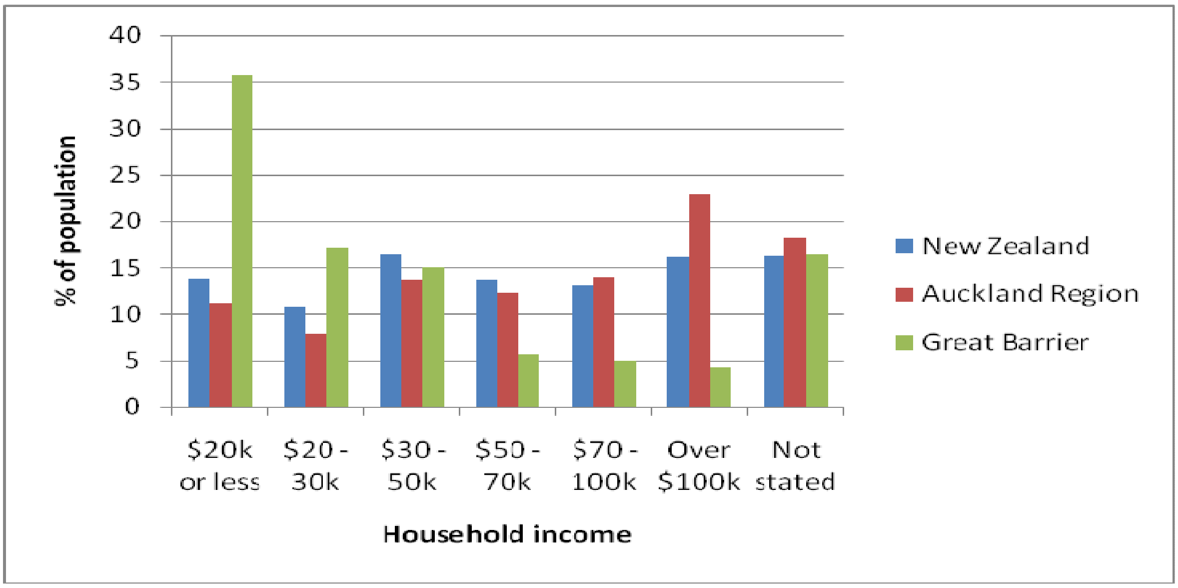


Economy

Household Income

The 2006 census shows that household income on the island is lower than that across New Zealand and the Auckland region (Fig 5.4). In 2006 about half the population (50%) had household incomes of less than $30,000. This compares to less than 25% in the country as a whole, and about 17% in the Auckland Region.

Fig 5.4. Household income comparisons



Dwellings & Property

About 16,000 of the 27,360ha that make up Great Barrier Island are in reserves and managed by Department of Conservation. This is about 60%. There are also some relatively small Auckland City Council reserves and covenants. The remaining land is in private ownership and comprises widely scattered small communities, lifestyle and bush blocks and a number of farms.

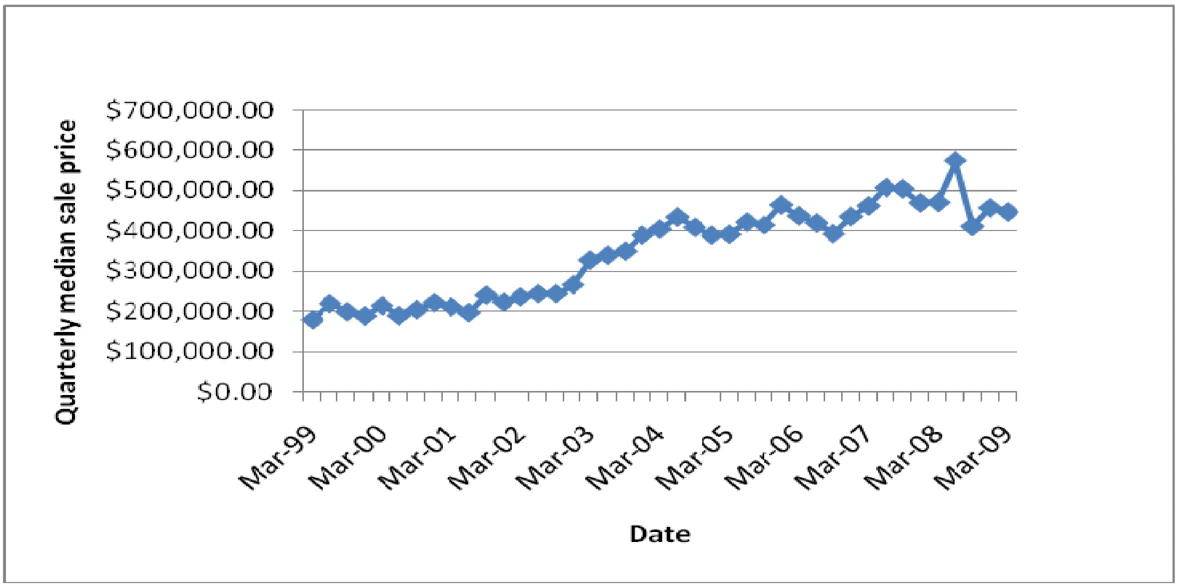
The most recent census (2006) records 'occupied dwellings' as having fallen from 480 in 1996 to 453 in 2006. Auckland City Council valuation data at the end of April 2009 identified a total of 478 dwellings and baches. Of the 1,441 properties on the island, 27% were classified as vacant land (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1. Property classification

Property type	Number	Percentage
Detached dwellings	334	23.2%
Baches	144	10.0%
Vacant land	382	26.5%
Primary Industry – vacant idle	17	1.2%
Multi-use primary	21	1.5%
Stock fattening	71	4.9%
Other*	472	32.8%
Total	1441	100.0%
***includes commercial, recreation, multi-flats etc**		
Source Auckland City Council 28/04/2009		

There have been substantial increases in the median house price in the Hauraki Gulf Islands over the past 10 years (Fig 5.5)[i]. This is reflected in prices on the island and has obviously affected affordability for residents. However Auckland City Council's figures published in City Scene[ii] and updated at the end of April 2009, show a definite downturn in property values, probably back to 2005 levels.

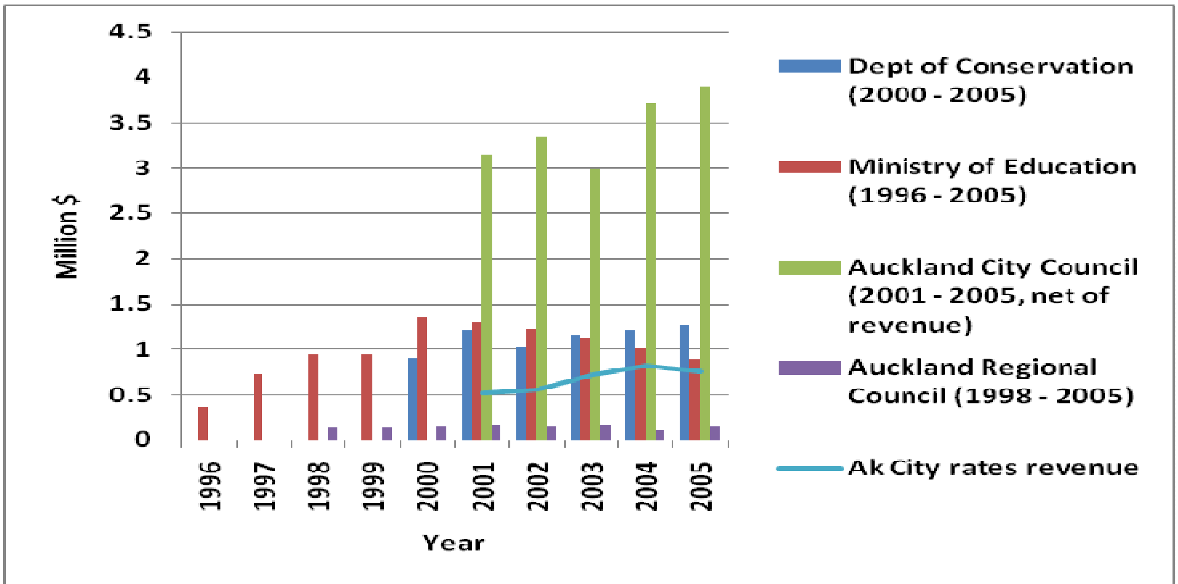
Fig 5.5. Quarterly median sale price in Hauraki Gulf Islands 1999-2009



Government expenditure

Significant government and local authority support (Fig 5.6) comes from the Ministry of Education, Department of Conservation and Auckland City Council. Whilst the amount spent on education has declined in recent years with the falling school rolls, expenditure on conservation has increased slightly. (Note that although ten years of expenditure was requested in 2005, some agencies supplied fewer years than this).

Fig 5.6. Government and local authority expenditure, and rates income, 1996 – 2005 for GBI



Auckland City Council is the local authority for the Hauraki Gulf Islands. It spends between three and four times the amount it collects in total revenue and between six and eight times the amount it receives in rates income. (Note; only five years of figures were supplied by Auckland City Council). Auckland Regional Council expenditure is mainly on biosecurity protection and surveillance on the island.

Value of the environment to the economy
The Great Barrier Island economy is very small (about $9.3m in 2001[iii]) and is increasingly reliant on visitors. Although primary production has been important in the past, the cost of land almost precludes this today; although there are a number of farms and several horticulture initiatives, much of the land previously used for farming is reverting back to kanuka 'scrub'. The monetary value of primary production (beef and sheep) is not known.

There are 29 ha of aquaculture currently and some crayfishing takes place under personal or iwi quota but there is no wet fish industry (all quota was sold to Moana Pacific Ltd in 1995).

While horticulture may be viable on a small and local scale, the main industry is tourism and it is likely that this will continue as the Auckland region grows:

"In one sense the island economy has low resilience but there are good indicators it will continue to experience growth in demand for services by holiday home owners and tourists, particularly given general population and household income growth in the greater Auckland Region. This will generate income for residents from food and accommodation, transport, events, sale of local arts and crafts, property maintenance, and recreation activities"[iv].

Tourism on Great Barrier Island is based almost completely on the outdoors. Many recreational activities are available in a beautiful and varied natural environment. There are over 100 km of walking tracks with 8 walks of less than one hour and 15 tramps of up to five hours, some through very steep countryside. There is one Department of Conservation hut with another two planned. Auckland City Council and the Department of Conservation are working together on a long term project to realise a "Great Walk[v]" around the island.

Visitor Numbers & Trends

Surveys
Only one formal visitor survey was found: that carried out by AGB McNair and contained in the Boffa Miskell report to the Great Barrier Island Community Board in June 1993[vi]. This was completed with support from Department of Conservation. The economic report prepared for the 2006 District Plan[vii] comments:

"There is currently no single method on the island to monitor numbers of visitors to the island per year and little in the way of data about motivations. CRESA reports that most visitors to Great Barrier Island are from Auckland. Previous visitor statistics built up by the visitor centre and confirmed by the Great Barrier Island Health providers as they plan for the peak summer season, show that 75% of visitors are from Auckland and 25% from other areas (including around 5% that come from overseas)".

Using Department of Conservation track counter statistics, a survey of boats at anchor in 2002, and anecdotal reports, the report concluded that about 80,000 people visit the island each year, including approximately 28,000 who arrive on private boats rather than transport operators. This compares to the 60,000 to 70,000 estimated in the 1992 McNair survey and suggests annual growth as little as 1.0%.

However these figures may be over-estimated as the 'visitor' trips may include local residents and holiday home owners. It is important that this gap in information is remedied so that government agencies and private businesses can carry out sound planning for the future. The simplest way would be a survey of arriving passengers.

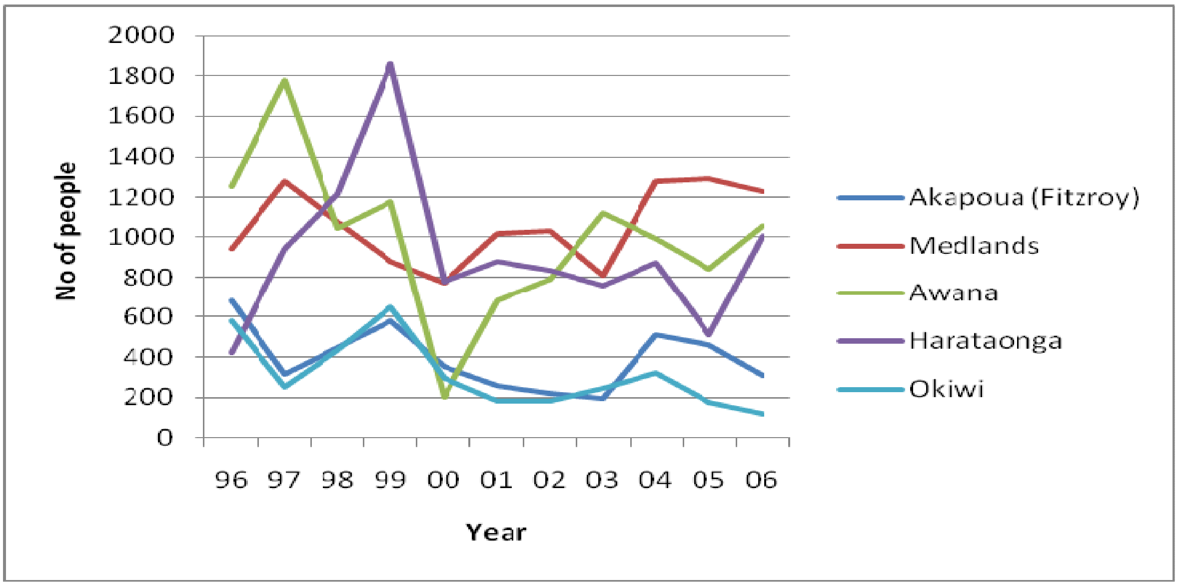
Analysis of the web site advertisements in October 2008 shows about 460 beds permanently available in accommodation premises on the island, ranging from backpackers to luxury lodges. In addition, it is estimated that there are up to another 350 beds in houses and baches that are available for rent for some part of the year (especially the Christmas/January holiday period). A quick calculation indicates that this number of beds would probably be adequate for 80,000 short stay (3 nights) visitors, if they were evenly distributed throughout the year, but unfortunately they are not: the vast majority visit over the Christmas-New Year period.

In addition there are six public and two private campgrounds.

Department of Conservation Campground Statistics

The Department of Conservation has recorded attendance at its campsites for the peak holiday period since 1996 (Fig 5.7). In this time only Medlands has shown a slight increase in camper numbers, the others all trending down on average. This is partly a consequence of Department of Conservation capping numbers at some sites to improve the overall visitor experience.

Fig 5.7. Department of Conservation campground statistics over Christmas/New Year peak (Dec 26th – Jan 12th)



The total number of campers using all six Department of Conservation sites averages c. 3800 for the period Dec 26th – Jan 12th each year, and c. 5000 for the whole year. [viii] This situation – about 75% of visitors for the whole year in a three-week period – may be rather more extreme than that for non-camping visitors, but it gives a clear indication of the strong concentration of visitors over a short period. However, this is clearly an area where much better statistics are needed for future planning.

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i Taken from the *Real Estate Institute of New Zealand web site.*

ii Auckland City, *City Scene, August 10 2008*

iii Kelvin Norgrove & Cathy Jordan, *Report to Auckland City Planning, Economic Influences on Future of Great Barrier Island*, June 2006,p 10

iv ibid. p34

v John Nash Snr Planner, *Great Barrier Great Walk Progress Report to Great Barrier Island Community Board*, 30 March 2006

vi Boffa Miskell, *A Tourism Strategy for Great Barrier Island, Auckland City Hauraki Gulf Islands Area Office*, June 1993.

vii Kelvin Norgrove & Cathy Jordan, *Report to Auckland City Planning, Economic Influences on the Future of Great Barrier Island, June 2006*

viii Based on 1996-2003 data Department of Conservation.