



Whales and Kapiti have significant historic connections. Particularly compelling is the navigation story connecting whales and Māori in the region in pre-European times.

It is believed that in exploring the region in their waka, Māori followed the navigation path of whales to guide them safely through complex and dangerous currents around Cook Strait and Kapiti Island. This helped begin the settling of Kapiti Island which was of strategic and political importance in the 19th century, particularly as a stronghold of Te Rauparaha and Ngāti Toa.

Te Rauparaha started trading with Pakeha by welcoming visiting ships to Kapiti and encouraging whalers and traders to live among Ngāti Toa. Cook Strait became the centre of a lucrative maritime trading empire, controlled by Ngāti Toa from their island fortress of Kapiti.

Humpback and southern right whales were slaughtered by intensive whaling activities based around Cook Strait and on Te Kahe Te Rau O Te Rangi, Kapiti Island during past centuries. According to the Department of Conservation's website, an original population of approximately 10,000 humpbacks at the beginning of the last century was reduced to less than 5%, or an estimated 250-500 whales, of the original population. Humpbacks were given total protection from commercial whaling by the International Whaling Commission (IWC) in 1966 and are classed as Vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

The humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) is a migratory species of Baleen whale found throughout the oceans of the North Atlantic, North Pacific and Southern Hemisphere. Northern migrating Humpbacks in New Zealand waters pass along the east coast of the South Island and then divide into two groups, with one continuing up the east side of the North Island and the other passing through Cook Strait and up the west side of the North Island past the Kapiti region. In 2010, over 40 Humpbacks were sighted migrating through this region.

Image credit: [Bowring, Walter Armiger] 1874-1931. [Jillett's whaling station on Kapiti Island, 1844] - [1907?] source: Alexander Turnbull Library

