

Port Nelson

The port can be viewed from a number of vantage points on the Port Hills, or from the recreational berths on Wakefield Quay, near Olivia's Café.

Like most New Zealand cities, Nelson grew up around its port. In 1841 when local Maori showed Captain Arthur Wakefield the Haven, sheltered by the Boulder Bank, it was the clincher in his selection of the site for the city.

The Boulder Bank starts 13km north of the city, and has built up naturally as rocks have drifted in tidal currents. The lighthouse you can see was the second to be erected in New Zealand – cast in Bath and shipped out in 1861. Until 1915 the oil-fired light was tended by keepers living on the Boulder Bank with their families. The lighthouse was decommissioned in 1982, and carries an 'A' Historic Places Trust classification.

As Nelson grew so did its port. The Cut was made in the Boulder Bank in 1906, opening the way for bigger ships and export growth, as technology developed for sending the region's produce off-shore. The frozen lamb trade to the UK was a major boost to the whole New Zealand economy and cool storage also meant Nelson apples and pears could be shipped in better condition. The pip fruit industry now has niche markets around the world for quality varieties.

Pinus radiata forests first planted in the Great Depression came on stream in the 1960s, and the port reclaimed more land for storage and new wharves. Nelson's forestry sector accounts for the bulk of the 3 million tonnes of cargo shipped from Nelson every year - as raw logs, sawn timber, and processed wood products.

Port Nelson is the largest fishing port in Australasia. Initially the catch from small fishing boats was sent nightly to Wellington by ferry, but the bigger freezer trawlers of the last three decades opened up more distant waters. Nelson now processes fish such as hoki from southern oceans for export to Asia and the USA, along with mussels from farms in the Marlborough Sounds and Golden Bay and scallops from Tasman Bay that are seeded every year in a cooperative enhancement programme.

Port Nelson is also a mecca for recreational boaties – the Nelson Marina is a great stepping off point for the Sounds or the Abel Tasman coastline and locals have the highest level of boat ownership in New Zealand.