

WAITAKERE RANGES PROTECTION SOCIETY

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Arataki Visitors Centre, Monday 25 March, 2002

Annual Report of the Executive Committee

I am pleased to present the 28th Annual Report of the Executive Committee of The Waitakere Ranges Protection Society.

2001 was an eventful year for the society. When I gave the Annual Report to the society a year ago, we were embroiled in difficult negotiations with an unsympathetic Council, and the society felt very much on the environmental back foot. I am very proud to say that we stood our ground, and as you know, were finally vindicated in the local body elections in October, and the clean sweep of Team West onto Council. We now have a Council we can work with, and the way ahead seems very positive. Congratulations to Mayor Bob Harvey and his team who stood up for the Eco City with a strong emphasis on conservation, fair rates, strong economy and a better city for everyone.

Over the past year the society made numerous submissions to local and regional council on Annual Plans, management and strategic plans, resource consent hearings, Environment Court hearings, and community management plans.

Our agenda has expanded considerably over the past year. We worked with Forest and Bird Society to promote the West Coast Marine Park. We initiated weed and pest control programs, and supported those programs of various community groups. It has been really encouraging to work with community groups in the ranges, to hear their concerns for their environments and be able to offer advice, support and assistance. Examples of this are our work with Karekare RRT on the Spencer appeal of the WCC decision not to allow subdivision of his 4ha lot at Karekare into two titles. This would set a precedent both at Karekare and in the Waitakere Ranges Environment. However we recognise the peculiar circumstances in this case and have sought to reach a mediated settlement whereby future property rights are controlled and environmental effects mitigated by restrictive consent conditions. In a case at Piha involving 17 chalets on 5.4ha of very steep hillside, we have worked with the Piha RRA to oppose the development and are currently awaiting the developers decision to see how his appeal will

proceed. It gives the committee great satisfaction to be able to offer the society's knowledge and expertise when contacted by anxious residents who are alarmed at some new development proposed for their neighbourhood. To know that there are so many loyal supporters for the society out there, not necessarily members, wanting to protect and enhance their environment, who recognise the society as the first (and often only) line of defence.

One area in which the society has expanded its activities is that of advocacy. Our publicity machine is gearing up, and the new website, our newsletters, the T shirts, the displays at Arataki, and our presence at community festivals allow us to meet people who have never heard of us or our work. We need more volunteers to offer an hour or two of their weekends to help on the WRPS stall at festival and market days. We have plans for an environmental education kit for schools, and a range of new brochures, postcards and posters to promote the activities of the society.

We are currently working on a major art exhibition in Waitakere City to include the many artists in the society who express their emotional and spiritual relationship with the ranges through their art. This exhibition will reflect the huge support the society has always received from artists. Twenty years ago the society held an art exhibition called "Ranges of Inspiration" at the New Vision Gallery, and some of New Zealand's most important artists were represented. I believe that a new exhibition that includes many of these original artists who are now well established, together with younger artists will be a wonderful way to begin the celebrations for the society's 30th year.

Some of you will recall that in the 1980's much work was done by John Lewis and his committee on the Waitakere Book. 70 chapters were commissioned from Waitakere experts on a wide variety of subjects. Unfortunately, the accumulated information was never published, and as the incoming president in 1998 I inherited a box of files called the Waitakere Book. We investigated various options for using the material, some of which was still entirely relevant while some needed updating. In my Annual Report last year I noted that we were looking at publishing the material on our website as a way of making it available at low cost. However, in the past few months an exciting new possibility has arisen. Bruce and Trixie Harvey have had an opportunity to read the entire material, and have suggested that they are very interested in looking at the feasibility of revitalising the material, editing and commissioning new material, and working with the society to publish it as the definitive work on the Waitakere Ranges. Our negotiations are still at an early stage, but those of you who know Bruce and Trixie, and especially Bruce's fine book on the history of Whatipu published recently, will

understand that if our Waitakere Book is ever to be published, these are the very best editors that we could hope to find.

Last year, Dr Jessica Beever spoke at our AGM about our intention to save two residential properties in Turanga Road adjacent to Spragg Bush. Our knowledge of the rich flora of this undisturbed rain forest continues grow, and so it was a great moment when in June last year we purchased #71 Turanga Road. This was an act of faith, as at the time of purchase we had collected donations of about \$25,000, and at the eleventh hour when a developer was about to sign a purchase agreement the society made the bold move and put in a counter offer. After some days of tense negotiation, we became the proud owners of 2200sqm of rain forest, but were only able to do this through the generous advance of bridging finance of \$55,000 from a member of the society. It was all very nerve-racking at the time, but when we advised our members of the purchase, the donations came flooding in again, and we have just been able to repay another \$13,000 off the bridging finance, making the total donations from members and friends of the society \$38,000. I must add here that a good proportion of this was collected from members of the Spragg family, descendants of Wesley Spragg who donated the land to the people of Auckland. Our intention is to gift the land unencumbered to the ARC for inclusion in the CMP.

Last month, Jessica Beever represented us in a delegation to WCC finance committee and made a strong case to Council for them to come in as partners with WRPS in the purchase of this land. She was successful, and the society gratefully acknowledges that WCC have agreed to give a \$25,000 grant towards the purchase of #71, and in addition, to advance the society and interest-free loan for the outstanding balance of \$17,000. Not only will this expedite the return of #71 to the CMP, but Council have agreed, through the Annual Plan process, to help us raise the money required to purchase #14 Turanga Road, which is undeveloped and still in virgin forest. We will be making another submission to ARC for their assistance with these purchases. We are to meet with WCC to discuss creating a register of strategically important privately-owned land in the WR that we can work towards saving by purchase in partnership with both WCC and ARC.

I want to acknowledge the tremendous work of Jessica Beever towards this project. She initially identified these two properties, and then has put in many hours to assist the society to purchase them. This would not have happened without her enthusiasm. And of course it wouldn't have happened without all those members and friends who made donations to the purchase fund. It is such a positive thing for the society to do, and it gives me great hope to know that we can do this. All of you should take pride in this achievement, and I

urge you all to take a walk in Spragg Bush soon, and know that it is a little larger and better protected by your efforts. #71 is at the very end of Turanga Road, and is accessed by the track that leads into the northern end of Spragg Bush.

The society has used an EIF grant from the ARC of \$600 to continue our bird survey. Our ecologists, Simon and Jane will be monitoring bird recovery at Karekare as part of the Lone Kauri Forest Restoration Program initiated by committee member Mike Nixon. If we are successful in gaining another grant in the coming year, we will be able to extend the monitoring program to include Peter King's La Trobe pest eradication project. These community programs to control pests such as possums, rats and mustelids is most encouraging and is attracting much attention from around the country as agencies responsible for pest control realise just what can be achieved with dedication and local knowledge. We will continue to lobby these agencies to make funds available to extend these programs to the whole of the ranges.

One looming threat to the ranges is the spread of the Painted Apple Moth, and the failure of MAF to contain, control and eradicate this pest of unknown capabilities. We do know that there are certain native trees that the female caterpillars will eat, but we have no idea what the long-term effect on the ranges will be. Male moths have been caught along Scenic Drive, on the Piha Road, and at Nihotupu Dam. We are possibly faced with the difficult decision soon as to whether to allow MAF to spray in the ranges, knowing that many native insects will be affected, as will birds who rely on the insects for food. The society is represented on the PAM Community Advisory Group by Graeme Ramsay and we are in discussion with all agencies in an effort to work towards a solution to this problem.

We continue to work towards resolution of the outstanding WCC District Plan Appeals. Some have been resolved by mediation, others by consent orders, and there remain only the really difficult ones that may need the intervention of the Environment Court. We avoid this if possible, and are committed to working with all parties to save time and money if an out of court settlement is possible. The Proposed District Plan was notified in 1995, and has been edging closer to becoming operative all that time. The society can now see it's way forward to resolution of the remaining appeals in the next year or so. We were extremely grateful to receive a Legal Assistance Grant from MfE last year to enable us to engage expert witnesses to give evidence at DP appeal hearings. Many of these experts had been working *pro bono* for the society in these matters over the past five years, so this is a very welcome opportunity to reimburse them for some of the many hours that they give to the society every year.

I must thank especially our legal counsel Douglas Allan for his huge *pro bono* contribution to the society. We are successful time and time again only because of his generosity. I should add that he has declined to accept any payment for his services from our legal assistance grant, and we are deeply indebted to him and Ellis Gould Ltd. When it came to Resource Management and Planning matters, we could not have had a better representative than Gary Taylor. Gary continues to give many *pro bono* hours a year to the society, and his tireless support over the past 29 years deserves more than we can ever acknowledge. Out in the field, our ecologists Andrea Julian, Simon Chapman and Jane Alexander have given us the evidence we need to defend the ranges against threats to the ecology.

The biggest issue before the society now is the matter of obtaining permanent protection for the ranges. The past three years of developer-controlled Council has shown just how vulnerable the ranges are in their present legal status. The 7000 ha of forested ranges in private ownership are constantly under threat of increased demand for development. The Parliamentary Commission for the Environment, Dr. Morgan Williams addressed the society at our last AGM and highlighted the growing pressures on areas of high scenic value throughout New Zealand. In the next year the society must progress this matter through local, regional and national government. We envisage a new category of land use in New Zealand, in which nature and people can cohabitate, where property rights are clearly defined and where ecological and heritage values are protected. The society will be holding a series of workshops and public meetings over the next year to explore the possible mechanisms, and we would hope to report back in a year's time with a clear way forward. With parliamentary elections only months away, we intend to make this an election issue, and are already encouraged by the support that we have obtained for the Heritage Park in the Ranges.

The new committee you elected a year ago has been the best that I have worked with over the past four years. We have age and experience, and youth and enthusiasm, and above all, commitment to ensuring the ranges are given the permanent protection they need to survive future changes in local, regional and national government.

I would like to ask the outgoing committee to all stand and introduce them to you again. Thank you for your commitment and passion. All these people are volunteers, giving up valuable time to work for the society. It's such a pleasure to work in a team with you all. Especially like to thank in their absence, Kevin Gould and Darryl Short. Kevin edited our newsletter for the

past few years, and Darryl was our treasurer. They have both stood down from these positions but have put their names forward for re-election to the committee. We wish them both all the very best as they travel on sabbatical to France where Kevin will pursue his botanical research for the next four months.

I conclude this Annual Report with the request that all you members give us your mandate for the coming year by keeping your subscriptions current, by keeping the generous donations coming in to fund our projects, and by responding to our need for volunteers to carry out the work of the society, whether it be attending a public meeting, a working bee, a tramp in the ranges, or helping with a stall at a festival. Everyone of you who help out in these ways means that our committee members can make their valuable time go a little further, and ultimately the ranges will benefit.

As we enter our 29th year, I am very proud to say that I think the society is strong and effective, and we are ready to do anything we can to ensure the Waitakere Ranges are conserved, protected and enhanced for future generations to enjoy forever.

John Edgar
President
March, 2002