

THE WAITAKERE RANGES PROTECTION SOCIETY INC.

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING,
Arataki Visitors Centre, Monday 28 March, 2011**

Annual Report of the Executive Committee

I am pleased to present the 37th Annual Report of the Executive Committee of The Waitakere Ranges Protection Society Incorporated.

The past year has been one of considerable activity for the Society. The amalgamation of the seven territorial authorities into the new Auckland Council has been difficult since the government had failed to make adequate provisions in the legislation for the transition. Many important matters were left unresolved on the 1st November 2010 and five months later there are still many uncertainties as the elected members and officers attempt to come to terms with the governance of a region of 1.4 million citizens that stretches from Te Hana to Mercer. Waitakere ward is well represented by Deputy Mayor Penny Hulse and Cr. Sandra Coney, two very experienced politicians who will bring their extensive understanding of our area before the Auckland Council. The Society is also pleased that the Waitakere Ranges Local Board whose jurisdiction incorporates the Heritage Area has six members with a good understanding of the conservation, protection and development issues that need to be resolved. Congratulations to Denise Yates (Chair), Janet Clews (Deputy Chair), Greg Presland, Judy Lawley, Neil Henderson, and Mark Brickell on their election and the Society looks forward to working with them in the coming years.

Auckland Council are currently working on the Auckland Spatial Plan, which will guide the future growth and development of the region for the next 20-30 years, during which time the population is expected to grow to 2.2 million. An initial proposal paper was released in March 2011 and a first draft will be completed in June and this will be the basis for further submissions in August. Of concern to the Society are matters relating to the growth strategy for Auckland in the western region and the emphasis on economic benefits that has been signaled by the Plan Changes 35, 36, 37. While these plan changes have been initiated by the provisions for Local Area Plans in the WRHA Act, opposition to aspects of them by residents and landowners is widespread. The Society has appealed aspects of the three plan changes to the Environment Court.

The Society has made submissions to Auckland Council in opposition to the proposed Pakinui Private Structure Plan Change 40 in the rural area between Birdwood and Waitakere Village. Currently the average lot size is 5.3ha and the area contains 34 lots and 39 dwellings. This proposal has an average lot size of 1.8ha, providing for 65 additional lots and 65 additional dwellings. Meanwhile the Swanson Structure Plan proceedings in the Environment Court are progressing slowly and the Society continues to be a part of the proceedings.

The Society is involved in the Environment Court appeals relating to changes to the Auckland Regional Policy Statement and the Waitakere District Plan pursuant to the Local Government (Auckland) Amendment Act 2004. WRPS has negotiated provisions regarding the Waitakere Ranges that deal appropriately with that part of the region, and consequently we are not appearing in the upcoming hearing.

The simplifying and streamlining of the RMA in the last year has made it more difficult and costly for the Society to appeal. An important issue for the Society is the new Tree Protection rules. The current blanket protection of trees in urban areas such as Titirangi and Laingholm is to be removed in 2012. There is the provision in the Act for specific trees to be scheduled but the deadline for this is 31 March. This has placed an onerous responsibility on residents and ratepayers, and consequently the Society is a section 274 party to proceedings in the Environment Court by Auckland Council seeking declarations regarding the application of section 152 of the Act. I attended a court hearing today when submissions were made by the Council, the Society and other parties. The court has reserved its decision.

Kauri dieback disease remains the greatest threat to the ranges ecology. The spread of the disease as determined by aerial photography and ground truthing has been rapid, and the Society has lobbied with some success for track closure to quarantine areas of very high or low infestation. We believe that the threat to the kauri trees has reached an alarming point, and have called on the government to provide more funding for research into the organism responsible, the vectors that spread it, an effective management program and a cure. A great loss to the research effort was the untimely death of Dr. Ross Beever in June last year. Ross lead a team at Landcare Research studying the disease and his knowledge and expertise is greatly missed. We pass our condolences onto his wife Jessica and family.

After 37 years the committee think it is time to review the past and begin to collect the stories of our influential Society. Stage four of our Oral History project is underway thanks to funding from Waitakere City Heritage Fund. Anna Fomison has recently interviewed Geoff Davidson, Warwick Brown, Dave and Barbara Harre and will soon interview Bruce Hayward, Bob Ussher, and John Staniland. The digital recordings and transcripts are archived in the Auckland and Turnbull Libraries. We have applied for funding from Lotteries Environment and Heritage Fund to continue this important work, and would welcome any suggestions of people who have been instrumental in the conservation and protection of the Waitakere Ranges whom we should interview. In conjunction with this project we have asked Bruce and Trixie Harvey to write a history of the Society, and they have agreed to do this *pro bono* and for that we are most grateful. They have begun by researching the Society's archives, and will be talking to past and present members about their role in the Society in due course.

We acknowledge grants received from the ASB Community Trust towards funding our Heritage Area Coordinator, and both the Lotteries Environment and Heritage Fund and the Waitakere City Heritage Fund towards our Oral History Project. Two years ago we received a grant from Waitakere City Creative Communities to partial fund a painted mural in the Henderson CBD. However two subsequent grant applications for this project have been declined, and we have regretfully had to refund the grant.

Over the past year Mels Barton has continued her work as our Heritage Area Coordinator, and her commitment to community and Council engagement has been a great contribution to our work program. She regularly updates us on her activities in committee, through the newsletter and by email and we are grateful to her for keeping us so well informed.

There are now less than 160 Waitakere Ranges books in stock, and at the present sales rate these should last another two or three years, during which time we will consider a second edition.

In order to qualify for charitable status the Society had to update its constitution, and the new constitution was adopted at a Special General Meeting in June last year. This was submitted to the Charities Commission and we were very pleased to hear on the 1st February that the Society was registered as a charitable entity under the Charities Act 2005. Our new constitution is on our website.

The Society relies on professional consultants to prepare submissions and evidence for us on a range of matters. The *pro bono publico* contribution of our legal counsel Douglas Allan, resource management consultant Gary Taylor and the Environmental Defence Society is invaluable. Douglas informed me the other day that he started working for the Society in 1992, first as a committee member and then as our counsel. And of course Gary was a foundation member and officer of the Society. Thanks also to James Hook at Meridian Planning who has advised the executive and represented the Society on various resource consent matters. And once again our thanks go to Jenny Taylor who has maintained our membership database and coordinated mail outs for many years.

The executive committee meets on the second Wednesday of the month and our meetings are always well attended. Society members are welcome to attend and bring matters to our attention. During the year committee members Denise Yates and Greg Presland were both elected to the Waitakere Ranges Local Board and consequently resigned from the committee and as members of the Society. We are grateful for their contribution to the committee over the past six years. I would like to ask the outgoing committee to stand up. These people are your elected executive who have given the Society so much of their time over the past year. It has been a pleasure to work with you all and I would like this meeting to join with me in showing our appreciation for your efforts on our behalf.

Special thanks go to our vice-president Anna Fomison, treasurer Sandra Jones, and secretary Mels Barton. Amongst other duties, Mels and Anna coordinate our attendance at events and festivals. Sandra has edited and produced our quarterly newsletter but we would like to find someone to either assist her or to take on this task as she has already plenty to do as the treasurer. It has been my honour to be President and to chair the executive committee for the past thirteen years. I want to thank committee members and my family and friends for their support which has enabled me to better serve the Society.

The Society remains in a strong financial position, and while the majority of the reserves have accumulated from sales of the Waitakere Ranges book and are therefore tagged for printing a second edition, we regard the surplus as essential in such difficult financial times. And as we have pointed out before, our total reserves would not be sufficient to purchase and save from development even the smallest of properties in the ranges as the Society has needed to do on a number of occasions in the past.

The Society is especially saddened by the recent passing of Emeritus Professor John Morton who died on 6th March. His contribution to New Zealand science and specifically to our knowledge of the marine zoology of the Waitakere coast is unsurpassed.

As patron of the Society since its formation in 1973 (together with Dr. Lucy Cranwell-Smith), Professor Morton was a pivotal influence in the protection and conservation of the Waitakere Ranges. As the marine life on the rocky coastline came under threat in the 1990's from human predation and natural events, his support was very important in getting better protection of shellfish at Karekare and Piha. He was an inspirational teacher, and many people who were fortunate to accompany him on field trips will remember his enthusiasm as he shared his extensive knowledge and deep respect for the environment.

The Society is honored to have had his support for the past 38 years, and we wish to pass our condolences on to his family, friends and colleagues.

The Society currently has two Patrons, Dick Bellamy and the Rt Hon Jonathan Hunt.

We also note with sadness the death of Gerrard Blokland. Gerrard and his wife have been members for 35 years. Support such as theirs is invaluable to the Society, and we pass our condolences to his family.

The Society goes into 2011 in a strong position. In the 38 years since our foundation, we have gained the respect of the communities we serve, together with a wide and influential group of politicians and professionals with whom we work constructively in our advocacy for the ranges. We have an executive committed to the conservation and protection of the ranges. We have the ability and resources to contribute to the new governance structures of Auckland City in a positive and useful way. The committee is ready for the challenges of the coming years knowing that we have a strong membership who support us and we will continue to do everything in our power to ensure that the objectives of the Society are fully realised.

Thank you.

I move that the Annual Report be received.

John Edgar,
President
The Waitakere Ranges Protection Society Inc.