

THE WAITAKERE RANGES PROTECTION SOCIETY INC.

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING,
Arataki Visitors Centre, Monday 26 March, 2012**

Annual Report of the Executive Committee

I am pleased to present the 38th Annual Report of the Executive Committee of The Waitakere Ranges Protection Society Incorporated.

The past year has been a very important period of transition for both the Auckland region and the Society as the new Auckland Council endeavour to make the amalgamation of the previous Councils successful. While this process will obviously require some time, it is the Society's role to ensure that the Waitakere Ranges are protected from adverse effects on the outstanding environment, landscape and scenic values, and consequently we have been keeping a very careful watch on the Council planning processes.

We made submissions on the draft Auckland Spatial Plan in 2011 which will guide the future growth and development of the Auckland region for the next 20-30 years. Last week we made submissions on the Council's Long Term Plan 2012-2022. However, the most important of the new plans will be the Unitary Plan which will bring together all the previous district plans and it is due out later this year with public submissions in 2013.

As an appellant, the Society is currently engaged in Environment Court mediation with Auckland Council and other parties over Plan Change 35 (Oratia and Waiaatarua), 36 (Economic Wellbeing in the ranges), and 37 (Titirangi Village). These Plan Changes were the legacy of Waitakere City Council. Good progress is being made on all three matters. Other appeals that are progressing are Pakinui Private Plan Change 40, the Swanson Structure Plan, the Lockington and Lyon subdivision in Henderson Valley, and the Dean subdivision in Holdens Road.

We are keeping a watching brief on the new tree rules that came into effect on 1 January as a result of the simplifying and streamlining of the RMA in 2010. These provisions apply to trees in urban areas, and consequently include Titirangi and Laingholm. We were party to an appeal to the Environment Court in 2011 by Auckland Council, which sought a declaration on the provisions for general protection of individual trees and groups of trees in the former Waitakere City and North Shore City districts plans. The decision by the court retained the blanket tree protection rules. However this decision has subsequently been appealed to the Environment Court by the Property Council of New Zealand who have filed an application for declarations concerning general tree protection provisions in the Auckland Council District Plan.

Kauri dieback disease is spreading at an alarming rate, and remains the greatest threat to the ecology of the ranges. Research has shown that between 8% and 11% of kauri trees in the ranges are now affected by the pathogen *Phytophthora taxon Agathis*. The Society welcomes the recommendation this month by the Auckland Council Parks Forum to close 27 kilometers of walking tracks in the ranges in order to quarantine areas where kauri trees have shown no sign of dieback. The track closures will be reviewed in a year's time. Research continues to find more about the way the disease is spread, and to find a cure.

Council has been culling pigs from the ranges as they are considered to be a vector for the spread of PTA. We are also pleased that possums are being culled from Karekare south through the Pararaha valley to Whatipu. This follows successful control programs in the Parau-Cornwallis-Huia-Whatipu area in 2010 and in the Piha-Anawhata-Bethells area in 2011. These are the first widespread control programs in the ranges since Operation Forest Save in 1999.

Our Oral History project progresses well. Between 2004 and 2011 we interviewed 17 people who played key roles in the Society and in the conservation of the ranges. To continue the work, we successfully applied for funding from Lotteries Environment and Heritage Fund for the next ten interviews by our oral historian, Anna Fomison. Anna has recently attended oral history workshops and has made good contacts with other practitioners. We welcome suggestions of other people we should interview.

The committee has decided that the history of the Society currently being written by Bruce and Trixie Harvey will be published in conjunction with our 40th anniversary in 2013. We are still to decide what form that publication will take and how it will be funded. Special thanks must go to Bruce and Trixie for taking on this project *pro bono*. Bruce and Trixie also edited the Waitakere Ranges book, and there are now less than 120 books in stock, and at the present sales rate these should last another few years.

During the year our Heritage Area Coordinator, Mels Barton resigned and for a few months we were without a coordinator. We would like to acknowledge the work she did for the Society over many years as a committee member, secretary and Heritage Area Coordinator. In February we appointed Saffron Toms as Heritage Area Coordinator. Saffron has an MA(Hons) in Geography from University of Auckland. She stood as the Green Party candidate in New Lynn electorate last year, and is currently their spokesperson in West Auckland. She will work closely with the committee, the Council and the community on matters relating to the Waitakere Ranges Heritage Area. This position is funded by a grant from the ASB Community Trust supplemented by tagged donations from members, for which we are very grateful.

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 and Joanna van den Bergen from Ellis Gould Ltd., our resource management consultant Gary Taylor and the Environmental Defence Society is invaluable. Thanks also to James Hook at Meridian Planning who has advised the executive and represented the Society on various resource consent and planning 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 first Tuesday of the month. New committee members Paul Walbran and Nardia Yozin have made an excellent contribution to the executive. 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. Kath Dewar, who is not here tonight, is standing down from the committee after 10 years. Kath has worked hard for the Society and for some years she was Vice-President, secretary, and editor of the

newsletter. Her strategic thinking was always appreciated and we will miss her input at committee meetings.

Special thanks go to our vice-president Anna Fomison and treasurer Sandra Jones. Sandra has also 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. The Society currently has two Patrons, Emeritus Professor Dick Bellamy and the Rt. Hon. Jonathan Hunt. It has been my honour to be President and to chair the executive committee for the past fourteen years. I want to thank Society members and my family and friends for their support which has enabled me to better serve the Society.

As you will hear in the financial report, the Society remains in a strong financial position. The majority of the reserves have accumulated from sales of the Waitakere Ranges book and these funds are currently tagged for future publications.

During the year four long-time members of the Society died and our condolences go to the families and friends of Victor May, Martin van der Wal, Joy Lewis and Len Castle.

The Society, together with a number of local community groups, is most concerned at the proposal by Auckland Council to devolve aspects of the governance of the Waitakere Ranges Regional Park to the Local Board in what is being referred to as co-governance. We are strongly opposed to this proposal as we believe that it will lead to adverse environmental effects, and that it will also have an adverse effect on the wellbeing of the small communities in the ranges. We are working to ensure that the governance of the Regional Park remains with the Council.

Looking ahead, in 2013 we will celebrate the Society's 40th anniversary. Some current members were there when the Society was founded in 1973, and to them and the many others who have joined since we would like to express our thanks for your support over the years. The Society has a history that we can be proud of, and our role in the protection and conservation of the ranges is just as important now as it has been in the past. The Heritage Area Act has noticeably reduced the number of non-complying subdivision applications, and has given more certainty to landowners about how the ranges will change in the years ahead.

Over the years the Society has earned the respect of the communities, politicians and professionals with whom we work and we have also developed a resilience that allows us to be effective advocates for the ranges. Our task is rarely easy, and often the demands on committee members are quite daunting, but it is our love for the ranges and the support of our members that encourages us and we are confident that the Society is in a strong position to face the challenges that lie ahead.

Thank you.

I move that the Annual Report be received.

John Edgar,
President
The Waitakere Ranges Protection Society Inc.