

# THE WAITAKERE RANGES PROTECTION SOCIETY INC.

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Arataki Visitors Centre, Monday 18 March, 2013

### Annual Report of the Executive Committee

I am pleased to present the 39<sup>th</sup> Annual Report of the Executive Committee of The Waitakere Ranges Protection Society Incorporated.

This is a special anniversary year for the Society. It was forty years ago this year that the Society was founded. In early 1973 the first meetings of concerned residents were held at Te Henga to oppose a Council proposed rubbish tip in the old Duck's Quarry in the Waitakere Valley. In a hard fought environmental battle, those activists won, and the Council withdrew the proposal. And as they say, the rest is history. You will be able to read all about it later this year when the Society publishes its forty-year history "Saving the Ranges".

Over the past year the committee has spent a large amount of time and effort working on the new planning documents of Auckland Council. With the Strategic Auckland Plan in place, Council moved to the Long-Term Plan, the Annual Plan and finally the Unitary Plan, a draft of which was released for public submissions on the 15 March. We have made or will make extensive submissions on all these plans that will guide the future growth of Auckland.

The Society was an appellant to the Environment Court on Plan Change 35 (Oratia and Waiaatarua), 36 (Economic Wellbeing in the ranges), and 37 (Titirangi Village); all are the legacy of Waitakere City Council. These plan changes are a consequence of the Local Area Plans that are provided for in the WRHA Act. We have been in Environment Court mediation with the Council and other parties and all three matters have been resolved by consent notice. We also reached a satisfactory mediated settlement on our appeal of the Dean family consent application for subdivision of their orchard in Holdens Road.

The Government's proposed amendments to the RMA have been a source of great concern, and we have made submissions to the select committee on the RMA Reform Bill, specifically on the matter of urban tree protection and the right to appeal Auckland Council decisions on the Unitary Plan to the Environment Court. We are currently considering the discussion document "Improving our Resource Management system" released by the Ministry for the Environment in February, which proposes further changes to the RMA that we consider will have negative effects on the environment, conservation and protection of the ranges.

A year ago between 8 and 11% of Kauri in the ranges were infected with the pathogen *Phytophthora taxon Agathis*. A year later the figure has grown to 11-13%. And 65% of infected trees are along walking tracks, an indication that trampers are spreading the disease. For this reason, the Society and other community groups supported the closing of some tracks to isolate areas showing no disease symptoms and opposed the application by Lactic Turkey to hold a running event along the Hillary Trail from Arataki to Muriwai involving up to 850 participants. After considerable effort by those in opposition, Council declined the application. We have recently learnt that when the current

government funding for research and management of the disease runs out in 2014, the Ministry for Primary Industries will be re-evaluating their role. In a recent statement they said, "We know now there is little hope of eradicating kauri dieback. Our focus must therefore be on slowing its spread and protecting our remaining disease-free forests. We need to be planning for 50 years, 100 years from now. To do this, MPI believes a new approach post-2014 is necessary to take the programme from short-term 'response' mode into sustainable long-term management. MPI has decided that its role, and where it can add the most value, is at the national coordination level." In this communication there was no mention of continued funding for the agencies working on the disease.

We remain concerned at proposals by Auckland Council over the past two years that control of the regional park network can be shared in co-governance with local boards in each area, together with suggestions that the regional parks might become simply named local parks. In the past year, some budgeted funding for regional park acquisition has been transferred to local parks and reserves, and the Society is currently preparing submissions to keep the regional park network intact, and in the governance of the Auckland Council.

Our Oral Historian Anna Fomison has progressed this project well. In the past year five new interviews have been completed and lodged with Auckland and Turnbull Libraries, and three more are currently underway. To date 21 interviews have been completed. We have just applied for funding for five more interviews.

It is a year since Saffron Toms took up her position as our Heritage Area Coordinator. This position is funded by a grant from the ASB Community Trust supplemented by tagged donations from members, for which we are very grateful. Saffron has worked on Council plans, community liaison, Kauri dieback, marine mammal protection and a number of other issues. She took maternity leave in November 2012 and Saffron and Tai's daughter Lily was born on 20 November. We welcome Lily as the Society's youngest member.

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 has met on the second Tuesday of the month. During the year, committee member Nardia Yozin resigned after she found fulltime employment as a planner for DoC in the South Island. We were very sad to hear in August that Graeme Ramsay, the longest-serving committee member since 1995, had a serious stroke and he is still in care. We miss Graeme's hosting of our monthly committee meetings, his scientific knowledge and his enthusiasm for the Society's work. We wish him a good recovery, but unfortunately he is unable to stand for the committee this year. 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, Secretary and fundraiser Lynda Williams and treasurer Sandra Jones. Sandra has also edited and produced our quarterly newsletter with help from Saffron. 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 fifteen years. I want to thank Society members and my family and friends for their support which has enabled me to better serve the Society.

Thanks must also go to Bruce and Trixie Harvey for volunteering to research and write the forty-year history of the Society *pro bono*. Bruce and Trixie also edited the Waitakere Ranges book, and there are now 104 books in stock.

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 five long-time members of the Society died and our condolences go to the families and friends of Leny Blokland, Janetta Newhook, Monica Asher, Doris Dutch and Don Binney. Don joined the Society on his return from England in 1973, and was an ardent supporter until his death. As an artist he had a deep understanding of the Waitakere Ranges, the west coast and the native birds as his iconic paintings and drawings show. He gave the Society two print editions to sell to raise funds for our campaigns, and his support, passion, and art will always be remembered.

This year we celebrate our 40th anniversary. To the members and friends who were there when the Society was founded in 1973, 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, but our work is not done. While the Heritage Area Act has made some matters more certain for both landowners, developers and the Society, some proposed changes to the RMA, if passed, will have adverse effects on the landscape and environment of the ranges. Your support will be more important than ever.

For that reason, we decided to ask Rod Oram to moderate a discussion tonight with Annette Lees, Guy Salmon and Gary Taylor on the subject "The Environmental Future", and we look forward to hearing their analysis of current trends and their predictions for the years ahead.

Thank you.

I move that the Annual Report be received.

John Edgar,  
President  
The Waitakere Ranges Protection Society Inc.