

# THE WAITAKERE RANGES PROTECTION SOCIETY INC.

## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING,**

**Arataki Visitors Centre, Sunday 20 March, 2005**

### **Annual Report of the Executive Committee**

I am pleased to present the 31<sup>st</sup> Annual Report of the Executive Committee of The Waitakere Ranges Protection Society Incorporated.

The past year has been a very demanding one for the Society. The executive has done well to progress our core business while under increasing pressure to attend public meetings and hearings, many related to the Waitakere Ranges Protection Project. At the last AGM in April 2004, we were about to go into consultation round two of the project. These meetings discussed community values and objectives, but legislation was not available and many people would not endorse a bill until they had read it. It was a time of some frustration.

Since then, the legislation has been drafted, it has been endorsed by the ARC, and WCC and RDC have given themselves until May to conduct a third round of consultation on the draft legislation. While we are concerned with what this further delay could mean for the project we are working with the councils and the community to ensure that when the project comes back to a vote in May it will have the support of a majority of councillors. What is required in the next two months is that the councils hear yet again from affected landowners and residents who support the bill. Write a letter to the Mayor and the councillors and tell them you support the legislation. Write a letter to the papers, talk to your MP, and above all, be heard above the small but vociferous group of landowners who would do anything to scuttle this project and who wish to see all private land open to endless subdivision. It is just as Morgan Williams predicted four years ago: if the whole area is not given permanent protection, then it will come, in our lifetimes, to be suburbia. It is time to stand up, to be heard and to know that this project is so tantalisingly close, and yet so precariously balanced. This matter has been the major preoccupation of the executive over the past year, and we will continue to make it our priority for as long as is needed. We were encouraged by the results of the Colmar-Brunton poll that we commissioned in May. 500 Aucklanders were asked how strongly they believed that all of the WR should be permanently protected from further subdivision and associated development by means of a local bill that would hold development provisions at the present level. Of the 250 people living in Waitakere City, 81% agreed with legislation, and of the other 250 people living in the greater Auckland area 87% agreed. Thanks to F&B Waitakere and EDS for their financial assistance with this poll. The three councils have each conducted independent surveys of their own in the past months, and the results have been similar to ours, with always a majority of people agreeing to permanent protection by legislation.

Our thirtieth birthday celebrations in 2004 culminated in full payment for the residential section at 71 Turanga Road, and the registering of a QE II covenant on the land. In November last year we took a delegation to the first council meeting of the ARC, and formally gifted the land to them to

be included in the WR Regional Park. This was our thirtieth birthday present to the people of Auckland. Thanks to all the donors who gave so generously. Special thanks to Greg Presland who did all the conveyancing *pro bono*, and to WC who donated \$25,000 to the purchase price. Donations to the Society continue to come in from many people. We could not achieve as much as we do without this financial support and it is much appreciated. In April it was especially pleasing to receive a donation from Society member and world-famous bird photographer Geoff Moon of \$2161 from sales of photographs at his exhibition in the Corban Estate Arts Centre. As we reported a year ago, there are still a few outstanding District Plan appeals to which the Society is a party, and these are being resolved at present in the Environment Court. The most important of these appeals relate to the structure plan provisions in the eastern foothills. We are opposed to structure plans in principle, as they are ultimately just another way of providing for subdivision. In Birdwood and in Swanson, the SP process has caused huge division and animosity in the communities. This is a social cost that has not been accounted for by Council. Whatever the outcome in Swanson, there are going to be ongoing problems arising from the poor management, the long and exhausting consultation process, and the subsequent sociological and psychological effects on the community. These alone should be reasons enough for not even beginning the SP process in new areas of the foothills, and we are encouraged by the residents association in the Henderson Valley who are strongly opposed to SPs and very supportive of legislation. We will continue to oppose SPs in principle and argue as we successfully did in Birdwood that prohibited activity status is required to stop non-complying applications being made *ad infinitum*.

We have had a substantial input into the long-anticipated WR Visitor Study that has now been drafted by ARC and WCC. Our main cause for concern is the provisions for a trial study of mountain biking in the park. We have for years opposed vehicles in the park, and this trial is most alarming in the message it sends to off-road bikers about the ranges. In the past the rationale for permitting activities in the park has been more about providing recreational opportunities than conservation, and we have a real battle ahead to restrict the more extreme recreational activities like mountain biking and canyoning.

Commercial concessions for canyoning in the ranges continue to be of concern. Canyoning is an extreme form of adventure tourism where people pay to be guided off-track to slide and abseil down streambeds and waterfalls. There are currently two licensed operators in the Park, at Kitekite Falls, Piha and Cowan Steam, Pararaha. During the year we were able to withdraw our Environment Court proceedings after ARC agreed to pay the costs of a rare moss survey in the canyoning streams, and to pay half our costs in bringing the legal action. We will continue to put pressure on ARC to confine these activities to other parks where ecological values are not so high and we need to convince them that extreme recreation like this does not have a place in this park. To that end we are closely monitoring the present activities to ensure that the operators abide by their consent conditions.

We received a grant some time ago from ARC Environmental Initiative Fund to continue our bird counts which we began in 1997. Committee member Mike Nixon carried out a bird survey in the Lone Kauri Forest Restoration area in April. We are determined to obtain more funding to continue this work which gives us basic information on the state of the environment and the effects of pest eradication. The three pest control programs now operating in the ranges, Ark in

the Park, La Trobe and Lone Kauri, are all showing that people with commitment and enthusiasm can really make a difference to the environment, and we remind you that volunteers for these three programs are always needed.

The Society keeps a watching brief on developments at the Te Henga quarry, the water quality issues at Lake Wainamu, and the weed eradication program in the Waitakere Valley wetlands.

Thanks go to our representatives on these various committees. The ARC did a major fish cull from Lake Wainamu over summer with about 3000 exotic fish being removed from the lake, and the water quality improved immediately. We will ensure that this is an ongoing program.

Over the next three days we will be attending a hearing at ARC on the consent applications by WSL to operate the five dams in the ranges. Douglas Allan will make submissions for the Society and committee member and water scientist Mels Barton and native fish biologist Clinton McCullough will give evidence. At present there are no water releases from the dams except when they are full and overflowing, which means that the main stream below the dams is usually dry down to the first tributary. We are arguing that compensation flows from the dams are required to ensure that native flora and fauna have a range of habitats available. This is a project that has been going on for two years and we want to thank Mels for her expertise and the time that she has given to this project, and also Clinton, who is currently working at University of Western Australia and has generously given his time for the hearing.

New committee member Ann Poulsen has initiated the Society's Oral History project and together with Robyn Mason from Waitakere Libraries we have begun a library of tape-recorded interviews with Society members about the conservation history of the ranges. The first recording is of our Patron, Professor Dick Bellamy. Funding to date has come from WC Wellbeing fund, and we are currently applying for further funding to continue recording and archiving this material. We are also considering lodging early Society records with Waitakere Libraries where they can be professionally archived.

The Waitakere Ranges book grows closer by the day. Designer Paul Nicolai is working hard to bring the book to print this year. It is looking wonderful with the huge amount of text and images in a sparse and elegant design. We appreciate that it is overdue, but good things take time, and considering that it is over twenty years since this book was initiated, we feel another few months to get it perfect will be time well spent. Thanks to the editors Bruce and Trixie Harvey this book is going to be the definitive work on the WR for some time to come and will be a great advocate for the ranges and for the work of the Society.

Thanks to our editor Kath Dewar, our quarterly newsletter continues to add to our advocacy and communication. Contributions from members are always much appreciated. Our website continues to be developed by Mike Nixon. Internet presence is an essential tool for the Society as we can ensure that it has the latest information, and we recommend you visit the website regularly.

The Society continues to have a presence at local festivals. This is an opportunity for us to meet people, to explain our work and to promote our message. Having the Society well-represented at festivals such as the recent EcoShow is only made possible by the enthusiasm of committee members, especially our event organiser Anna Fomison. Society members need to support Anna and her team by volunteering to help out for an hour or two at these events. In August the

Society was a sponsor of the EDS Coastal Conference where I presented a paper on the place the coast has in our arts and culture.

Throughout the year the Society relies on professional consultants to prepare submissions and evidence for us on a range of matters. We especially need to mention two people who always find time to give the Society the very best advice. To our legal counsel Douglas Allan and resource management consultant Gary Taylor the Society owes a great debt for their extremely generous *pro bono* contributions to our work. There are also many other people who have worked for the Society, and we acknowledge them all by saying that without each individual's contribution we would not be achieving the way we do.

We would like to thank people for the support that Paul Robinson and myself received when we stood as candidates in Waitakere Ward last October. The Save Our Ranges ticket did very well, and while neither of us got elected we keep the protection of the ranges prominent and it was heartening to hear all seven candidates say they supported permanent protection of the ranges. We made many new friends and with only a few weeks to get organised we ran a very effective campaign. Thanks to Ted Scott's photographs, our beautiful billboards designed by Julia Moore attracted much attention, and incited at least one person to nightly acts of vandalism with a can of fluorescent paint. Obviously neither they nor their friends could spell, and this vandalism alone gained us votes as it became obvious who the real fascists were.

Congratulations to three foundation members of the Society on being awarded New Zealand honours this year. Our Patron the Rt. Hon. Jonathan Hunt was made a Member of the Order of New Zealand, our country's highest honour. We also congratulate Patron Professor Dick Bellamy in being made a Companion of the Order of New Zealand, and Gary Taylor for being awarded the Queen's Service Order. The Society is proud of these three great New Zealanders, and is honoured by their long association with us and by their huge contribution to protecting the Waitakere Ranges. Please join with us in congratulating them.

I want to acknowledge the dedication of your executive committee. This is certainly the best committee that we have recently. The expertise on a wide range of subjects is formidable, and the high level of debate at our monthly meetings is stimulating. The committee requires a huge commitment from each person and there are at times when we are under considerable stress, but the shared vision, the professionalism and the friendships that have developed have carried the day on so many occasions. Jenny Taylor has maintained our membership database and we are grateful for her administration skills. During the year we co-opted Greg Presland and Denise Yates on to the committee and their contribution was immediately valuable.

I would like to ask the outgoing committee to stand up. These people are your elected executive who have given the Society so much over the past year. It has been a pleasure and an honour 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. I would also like to thank Leslie Haines, Melissa Marler and Linda Godfrey who will be standing down this from the committee this year.

Very special thanks go to Sandra Jones who as treasurer has really brought a new level of professionalism to the Society with her meticulous care of our finances. At a time when there has been more money than ever in the accounts due to the grants for the book, such care is much needed and appreciated. The audit of the Society's books this year by our honorary auditor Martin Bailey of McGregor Bailey Ltd is gratefully acknowledged.

I especially want to thank Kath Dewar, our Vice President, who always takes the initiative and who generously gives the Society her valuable time and considerable expertise on so many issues. She has given me great support throughout the year by sharing the work load that would otherwise get quite daunting.

We offer our condolences to the family of Graeme Ashdown of Piha who died last July. Graeme was member of the Society for fifteen years.

Finally we want to thank all the members and friends who have supported us over the past year. We can assure you that the coming year will be even busier and more exciting. We hope that when we meet for our AGM in a year's time the Waitakere Ranges Heritage Area Bill has progressed to the House of Representatives. We are so close to achieving this great vision, and yet there is still so much that needs to be done to ensure that the ranges are truly saved. Please do not relax your vigilance. We need your support more than ever and I cannot see the Society becoming redundant for many years.

John Edgar

President

Waitakere Ranges Protection Society