

Waitakere Ranges Protection Society

Annual Report 26 March, 2001

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

The past year has been most eventful for the society and one of which our members should all be proud. In the face of continual and serious threats to the ranges, the society has worked hard to hold our ground and to negotiate a clear way forward towards our long-term goals. We have never lost sight of our vision to see the whole of the ranges given permanent protection from the many and varied threats and I believe that we are in an excellent position now to make this vision a reality in the near future.

The society was greatly saddened last year with the death of our esteemed patron Dr Lucy Cranwell-Smith. As one of our foundation patrons together with Prof. John Morton, Lucy was a constant supporter of the society, and although she had lived in the USA for many years, she always made contact with us on her return visits and her letters showed that even from her home in Arizona, she remembered her beloved Waitakere Ranges and encouraged us to carry on our conservation work. Lucy's lifetime of achievements was recently remembered in a memorial service in USA and I was proud as your president to make a tribute in writing on behalf of the society.

At almost the same time, in May last year, the society had another great sadness when Kevin Lynch passed away after a short illness. Many of you will know Kevin well after the many years of service he gave to Waitakere City. Over the last few years I came respect Kevin for his clear and uncompromising standards, his wealth of practical knowledge of conservation, and his integrity. We miss him greatly and I would like to invite you all to come to the memorial service to commemorate Kevin's great contribution to our city when WCC open the new Kevin Lynch walkway in Green Bay on Sunday 1st April.

Following our last AGM, the society moved forward into our 28th year with an enthusiastic committee. In keeping with our perennial agenda, we have made submissions to local and regional council on Annual Plans, West Coast Plan, various management and strategic plans including Fisheries and Coastal, Regional

Growth Strategy, Regional Shellfish Bag Limits, Tourism Management Plans, Electoral boundaries and ward representation, and community management plans.

In spite of this often daunting work load, we made significant conservation gains. We worked on Shoreline Protection issues, weed and pest control programs, our Bird Survey, wasp control studies, exotic bird proliferation, mainland island proposals for the ranges, and more. It has been exciting to network with the community groups in the ranges, and we rely on those groups as our early warning systems. They let us know the local issues at an early stage allowing us to anticipate problems before they become critical. The society has worked closely with resident groups on many issues this year, and our networks are stronger than ever, thanks in part to internet communications.

As part of our new look for the 21st century, the society now has a web site and our thanks go to Garry Law who as webmaster has given us a presence in cyberspace which will be a valuable asset in the society's advocacy for the ranges. The website address is www.waitakereranges.org.nz and we are committed to building this into the definitive information site for the ranges. We are considering whether the web might be the place to publish our Waitakere Book. The book, compiled in the 1980's has never gone to print and the 60-odd chapters contain a wealth of information written by experts in many different fields.

We successfully continued our work on the WCC District Plan Appeals, working with council and other appellants to reach out-of-court settlements where possible, and certainly to thoroughly examine the issues before committing to legal proceedings. The appeals in some cases have been much complicated by the council changing it's position to accommodate various appellants who are seeking increased development rights, and the society has found itself time and again defending the original council decision against the new council's more permissive approach in their blatant attempt to deliver increased subdivision rights to their supporters.

We have been much taxed by the plethora of non-complying resource consent applications coming before local and regional councils. This is a serious burden to the society which is often the sole defender of the environment against wealthy developers and a council who have clearly signaled that they will deal with consents on an *ad hoc* basis, attempting to ignore their statutory obligation to consider cumulative environmental effects. This has resulted in a flood of greedy and often ridiculous proposals, but all of them need to be contested, and won. Two really

outstanding examples would be the proposed development of 15 house sites on a 6.5 ha block of forested land off Rimutaka Place in Titirangi. At the environment court the society was represented by a team of seven expert witnesses, ably led by our counsel, Douglas Allan from Ellis Gould Ltd. The society was able to prove to the court's satisfaction that the puriri composite forest was significant and the development would cause considerable adverse environment effects. We won a decision which upheld the provisions of Proposed DP, and identified the ranges as having significant ecology and outstanding landscape. This is a landmark decision for the ranges, and one which will be well-cited in the future.

The other major development which the society successfully opposed was the proposal to build 17 coastal chalets on 5.4 ha at 36 Piha Road. We were very well supported in our case by the Piha Residents and Ratepayers Trust, and once again a decision was handed down by the council commissioners that declined the consent on the grounds that it would create significant adverse environmental effects. The developer has appealed the decision and this matter is currently before the environment court.

There have been many other smaller resource consent matters during the year, some solved simply by the applicant accepting the society's consent conditions. Others require more effort and we have made many submissions to the council's hearing committee during the past year. I am pleased to report that we haven't lost a case yet, and we feel strong and concerted in our opposition to all non-complying applications. This is where your support has been invaluable. We are as always a cash-poor society, but we make up for this lack of funds with a tremendous and vital energy, spurred on by all our members who have passionately supported us over the years and are always there when we need to raise a little or a lot more for the next case.

None of this however would be possible without our dedicated consultants. Whether they represent us in resource management, ecology, planning or legal matters, these professionals have all found time in their busy schedules to take on our cases and, often on a *pro bono* basis, prepare and give expert evidence in their submissions on our behalf. I have sat in various hearings over the past year, and been very proud of the high level of evidence that the society is able to present. Time and again, these consultants have won the day for us, and there is no doubt that without their generous contributions we would not be in such a strong position. In this respect I would especially like to thank Douglas Allan, our principle legal

counsel. Douglas's astute advice has never failed us, and being in court with him has been thrilling and made me very proud to be a member of a society so well represented. The contribution of our other two main consultants, Gary Taylor and Denis Nugent have steered us through the year of countless RM and planning issues. Willy Shaw and Conway Stewart both contributed greatly to our Rimutaka Place appeal, and I would like to thank especially Andrea Julian, our chief ecologist, who has given the society many hours of her valuable time, and her attention to detail has made our ecological evidence of the highest standard.

During the year we have continued to work with the office of the Commissioner for the Environment towards getting a clearer picture of the issues that relate to the protection of areas of high scenic value. You will all be aware of the pressures that are evident in some parts of New Zealand, where values that we cherish are threatened. The Bay of Islands, Waiheke Island, Waitakere Ranges, Taupo Basin, and Queenstown are some of the areas currently threatened by development. During the year the society was able to contribute funds to enable Gary Taylor to make a side trip while in the UK to visit Snowdonia National Park in Wales to study the way that this park, which includes wilderness, farms and privately-owned land, is able to manage people pressures with their Protected Landscapes Initiative. Gary's report was most informative and Snowdonia provides guidelines for the future Waitakere Ranges.

The society welcomes the government's initiative to provide funding to environmental and community groups to allow them better representation in legal proceedings. We have made application to the new fund for our outstanding DP appeals.

We now have two new patrons. They are both foundation members of the society, and I am proud to announce that the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Right Honorable Jonathan Hunt and Auckland University Professor of Biological Science, Dick Bellamy are both agreed to be our new patrons. They join our current patron, Professor John Morton, and the society is greatly honoured.

The society is currently fund raising to purchase two virgin-forest covered sections in Taranga Road. Both these sections are in private ownership, and the forest cover is contiguous with Spragg Bush. Our intention is to purchase the sections then gift them to the ARC as part of the CMP. We are indebted to Dr Jessica Beever, a member of the Spragg family, who initiated this project and has

undertaken to raise the funds and to lobby regional council on our behalf. This has to be an antidote to the "death by a thousand cuts", and proof if it was needed that we do want more parks and yes, we are prepared to pay for them. I have asked Jessica to speak later in the meeting about the unique flora and fauna of Spragg Bush. I hope you will all be able to contribute to our purchase fund.

During the year our committee met once a month, usually at Linda's home, to work through our huge agenda. It has been a pleasure to work with you all and I would like to ask the out-going committee to all stand up now so we can thank them personally for the countless hours that they have given to the society over the past year. I want to thank Kevin Gould who is standing down after three years as Vice President, but who will stay on the committee and continue to edit our newsletter. I would like to thank Jenny Taylor who maintains our membership database. We were sorry to lose Keith Strode-Penny and Kathryn King during the year. Keith left us to work in Wellington, but his new logo that he designed for the society is now part of our new letterhead, our newsletter and our new T-shirts. Kathryn left us to travel overseas where she will undertake postgraduate studies in planning.

I would like to congratulate our very own Denise Yates, committee member and chair of the WCC Community Board who successfully contested the recent by-election in Waitakere Ward made necessary by the untimely death of Cr Gordon Sunde. Denise has been a staunch supporter of the society and has worked with us as a committee member for three years. She is an ardent advocate for the protection of the Waitakere Ranges. She has made the reluctant decision to resign her membership of the society, so that she can better represent the voters of Waitakere Ward. We are sorry to lose you Denise, but are really proud to know that you have much greater work ahead and we know that you will be a strong and passionate councillor who will continue your work for our city and its environment in a fair and impartial way. You have our love and our support; we will not let you down, and we know that you will not let our city down.

I hope you will all support the society by buying and proudly wearing one of our new T-shirts with the new logo. This is a fundraiser and every T-shirt purchased helps fund our programs for the coming year.

This is local government election year, and with only six months before the elections, I urge you all to get involved with your communities, all of which are making strong cases for a change of direction in council. The best way to save the

ranges at present is be to strong in your opposition to the pro-development forces in council, and to support your society as we work towards a permanent protection of these ranges.

John Edgar

President