

# **THE WAITAKERE RANGES PROTECTION SOCIETY INC.**

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING,  
Arataki Visitors Centre, Monday 31 March, 2008**

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

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

The past year has seen some very positive progress for the Society. When we met a year ago, the Waitakere Ranges Heritage Area Bill had had its first reading in parliament and we were awaiting the select committee report back to the house. The Bill passed its second reading on the 19<sup>th</sup> September with the support of the Labour Party, the Green Party, Maori Party and Progressive Party and Taito Philip Field. On 12<sup>th</sup> March this year the Bill passed through the committee stage, leaving the third reading set down for 2 April, and if passed will be enacted within a week or two. The National Party opposed the Bill at every stage and have pledged that they will repeal it if they become Government. Local MP for Waitakere and sponsor of the bill, Lynne Pillay, is unable to be with us tonight but sent the following message from Wellington. "I'm sorry I can't attend the meeting tonight as I have a Select Committee meeting in Wellington. Best wishes to all - if this meeting was a week later you would in all likelihood be popping the corks celebrating the Waitakere Ranges Heritage Area Bill becoming law! Thank you so much for the work you have all done (over decades!) to protect, enhance and celebrate the Ranges. We all look forward to an added level of protection which will provide more certainty to residents and decision makers and all who love this beautiful land."

The Waitakere Ranges book launched in May 2006 has been very well received and sales have been excellent. From a print run of 3000, we now have less than 270 books in stock and are getting quotes on a second edition. The book was submitted for the Montana Book Awards but failed to win in the environmental section. It was some consolation that the winner was Audrey Eagle's "Complete Trees and Shrubs of New Zealand" with its exquisite botanical paintings.

The ongoing saga of the Swanson Structure Plan is still not concluded. To briefly reiterate, the appeals of the Waitakere City District Plan Variation 88 and 89 went to the Environment Court in November 2005 and an interim decision was released by the court in June 2006 which addressed the court's jurisdiction to consider prohibited activity status for subdivision. A

second interim decision was released in September 2006 giving land owners in the structure plan area an opportunity to submit on prohibited activity status for subdivision on their land if their land was not given rights by the proposed Swanson Structure Plan. Following a number of procedural decisions from the court, and the public notification by Waitakere City of the amendments to the Plan, the Society was represented by Douglas Allan and Gary Taylor at a three-week hearing in May 2007. The court has indicated that a final decision will be released in July this year.

The Waitakere City triennial elections were held in September 2007 with the new electoral representation giving better boundaries to the Waitakere Ward, but with only two councillors rather than the previous three. Waitakere Ward councillor and deputy mayor Carolynne Stone did not stand for re-election, and Penny Hulse and Paul Mitchell were elected. Subsequently Penny was unanimously voted deputy mayor and we congratulate her and acknowledge her many years as a Waitakere ward councillor, her strong support for the communities and her advocacy for protection of the ranges.

The Society made submissions on the new ARC bylaws for the Regional Park and to the Regional Park Management Plan and we are generally pleased with the outcomes. The best result here was the complete banning of mountain biking in the park. However the Plan comes up for review in two years and this will no doubt be challenged then. We now have serious concerns with the ARC Auckland Plus publications which promote the economic benefits to be gained by increasing visitor numbers to the Auckland hinterland, especially the Waitakere Ranges. Despite our opposition to the renewal of the two canyoning licenses at Karekare and Piha, both applicants were granted a further four years but with tighter operational conditions than previously. Our opposition to the Piha café was unsuccessful and the consent was granted. The decision has being appealed by Preserve Piha Heritage. Watercare Sevices advised us in September that due to operational difficulties they would be delayed in meeting resource consent conditions for the compensation flows from the WR dams. We have written to the ARC as the consent authority, they have advised that we consult directly with Watercare Services.

In March 2007 the Society made a submission on WC Plan Change 22 which seeks to create a Whenuapai Airport Special Area in the District Plan. About two thousand submissions were received, most in opposition, but to date no hearing has been held. In April the Society will be making a submission to the Royal Commission on Auckland Governance.

We note that the water quality at Lake Wainamu has improved remarkably in the past year with the ARC removing exotic fish in very large numbers. We continue to monitor developments at the Te Henga quarry. We maintain that more effort is required from the territorial authorities on weed and pest eradication programs throughout the ranges. We support the proposed marine mammal sanctuary on the west coast, and we continue to be concerned with the granting of exploration licences for seabed iron sand mining on the west coast.

Our Oral History project that began with the interview of our Patron Professor Dick Bellamy by Waitakere City librarian Robyn Mason in 2005 is now being continued by committee member Carole Shone. In 2006 we received a grant from the Lottery Environment and Heritage Committee and five early Society members, Gary Taylor, Jessica Beever, Don Binney, Juliet Batten and Colleen Pilcher were interviewed by Carole and the tape recordings and transcripts have been lodged with the Waitakere and Turnbull Libraries.

We received a grant from the ASB of \$17,207 for the purchase of equipment which has allowed us to upgrade our display material for events and festivals, and also purchase a laptop computer, data projector and screen.

In order to retain our charitable status the Society is preparing to register with the Charities Commission before July as required by the Act.

Throughout the year the Society relies on professional consultants to prepare submissions and evidence for us on a range of matters. The *pro bono* contribution of our legal counsel Douglas Allan and resource management consultant Gary Taylor is invaluable. We acknowledge the work that James Hook has done for us on various resource consent matters. We thank McGregor Bailey Ltd who have been our honorary auditors for the past four years, and also to Jenny Taylor who has maintained our membership database for many years.

The outgoing committee have worked hard over the past year to ensure the objectives of the Society are realised to the highest standards. The fact that all committee members are standing again this year is evidence to me of their commitment to the goals of the Society and to the very good working relationships that we have forged, where friendship, humour and strong debate make our committee meetings enjoyable. Members of the Society are welcome to attend our monthly meetings and we encourage feedback on matters of concern in your communities. 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 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.

Special thanks go to our vice-president Anna Fomison, treasurer Sandra Jones, and secretary Kath Dewar. Kath has taken on a large part of the workload that I previously did, such as writing submissions, networking with other environmental groups, and keeping our membership informed of issues. Kath has decided not to stand this year as secretary, but is willing to remain on the committee. Anna is editor of our quarterly newsletter which contributes greatly to our advocacy and together with Mels Barton she coordinates our presence at events and festivals. Our website continues to be maintained by Mike Nixon. It has been my pleasure to be Society president and chair of the executive committee for the past ten years, and I have enjoyed it very much. I want to thank committee members and my family for their support which has enabled me to better serve the Society.

We congratulate Bruce and Trixie Harvey, editors of the WR Book, on their Queens Service Medal awards. In September we were pleased to receive recognition of our contribution to sustainability, when the Society was highly commended in the Sustainable Urban Communities section of the ARC Sustainable Environmental Awards.

We want to thank all the members and friends who have supported us over the past year. Generous donations to the Society continue to come in. This financial support is very much appreciated, and is in fact essential for us to maintain our core activities. We chose not to raise our membership subscription rate again this year, and this was recognised by many members who paid their subscription and added a donation. We must acknowledge a most generous donation from Mrs Jean Smith, who wrote that Neil and Jean Smith's art collection which included work by Don Binney, Nigel Brown, Stanley Palmer and Ann Robinson had been sold and she was donating \$20,000 to the Society. When I phoned to thank her, Jean was very modest and asked for no special recognition of this, however I did get her permission to deposit the funds in to a special bank account which we have named the Neil and Jean Smith Fund, and we intend to retain the capital and use the interest to fund various projects. We hope that other donors might be encouraged to add to this capital over the years.

The Society extends its condolences to the family of Sir Edmund Hillary whose passing away touched the hearts of people around the world. Sir

Ed was not a member of the Society, but he was an ardent supporter of the Heritage Area concept and in 1998 signed Jack Colmar's declaration writing "I heartily support the establishment of the Waitakere Heritage Area. It is a magnificent piece of forest and Auckland is fortunate to have it so close."

At the AGM a year ago, I said we hoped that when we meet for our AGM in 2008 the Waitakere Ranges Heritage Area Bill had been enacted. While this has not yet happened, it is tantalisingly close. Already Waitakere City are discussing how the Act will be implemented, starting with the provision for each community in the ranges to have a Local Area Plan, which will enshrine the aspirations of each community in the District Plan. This process will take some years to complete, but will ultimately give greater certainty to landowners and residents of the ranges.

The work of the Society will definitely change with the passing of the Bill, and we believe that we can be more proactive as we put our time and energy into the more positive aspects of conservation and protection. 2008 will go down in the history of the ranges as the year when they finally gained the permanent protection that they have long needed. We want to take this opportunity to thank all the members and friends of the Society who have worked together over the last 35 years to achieve the long-term protection of this exceptional forest. Each person can take great pride in their contribution, and we as a Society can be proud that a vision articulated in the 1970's by our first members was never relinquished, and now 35 years later we have achieved what we set out to do so long ago. We feel very honoured to have been part of this wonderful achievement and we look forward to the coming years as we work to ensure the long-term wellbeing of the Waitakere Ranges and its communities.

Thank you.

I move that the Annual Report be received.

John Edgar  
President  
Waitakere Ranges Protection Society