

THE WAITAKERE RANGES PROTECTION SOCIETY INC.

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING,
Arataki Visitors Centre, Monday 29 March, 2010**

Annual Report of the Executive Committee

I am pleased to present the 36th Annual Report of the Executive Committee of The Waitakere Ranges Protection Society Incorporated.

The past year has been so busy for the Society that I scarcely know where to begin. It hardly seems credible that the Royal Commission report on Auckland governance was released only a year ago. As we now know, the government ignored the majority of the recommendations and proceeded to reform Auckland with three local government bills that will very effectively disenfranchise the citizens, weaken democracy and will in all probability expedite privatisation of some of Auckland's essential assets and services. The Society has made submissions on aspects of the bills that affect the ranges, and we are pleased that at least there will be a Waitakere Ward with two councillors and a local board that largely incorporates the Heritage Area, but that is one of the few positive gains that we have had. We need thank Mels Barton, our Heritage Area Coordinator, for her diligence in keeping us all well-informed of developments over the past year.

For the ranges, the transition has been exacerbated by Waitakere City which has initiated unprecedented changes to the Heritage Area using the instrument of Local Area Plans (LAPS). A year ago the Long Term Council Community plan was for two LAPS a year for the next seven years, but this timetable has been brought forward with LAPS for Oratia, Waiatarua and Titirangi being already notified in Plan Changes, consultation with Henderson, Opanuku and Te Henga Valleys being rushed through with the respective communities, and a Plan Change providing for Rural Activities, Social, Cultural and Economic Wellbeing across the whole of the Heritage Area having far reaching consequences for the future of the ranges. The Society has made submissions on all these Plan Changes, and hearings will be held in due course, but I can signal now that we regard many aspects of these Plan Changes as having serious implications in their scope and permissiveness.

The Swanson Structure Plan proceedings in the Environment Court are continuing but are now focusing on the detail since the Court issued very helpful substantive decisions last year. Parties who are wanting to change the rules that apply to their sites have filed evidence and the Society along

with other parties is entitled to lodge evidence of its own if it wishes to fight those battles. In general, the Society has been taking an active part only where the actions of parties have threatened the integrity or certainty of the Court's substantive decision and has left it to locals to fight about individual lots. The hearing on all but one of the remaining issues is to be held in May. The last issue relates to Mr Healy who has this week been granted a rehearing with regard to the number of lots to be provided on his site. This issue should be finalised before the end of the year.

The Society has been heavily involved in the Environment Court appeals relating to changes to the Auckland Regional Policy Statement and the Waitakere District Plan pursuant to the Local Government (Auckland) Amendment Act 2004. We have been working very closely and successfully with Waitakere City on this matter and the positions taken by the two organisations have been closely aligned. Consent documentation on some elements subject to the Society's appeals has been finalised and the first consent order was issued by the Court last week. Other matters continue and we may need to attend a Environment Court hearing later this year on a number of related issues. In general, however, the Society and Waitakere City's strategy of seeking to have the Waitakere Ranges provisions separated from the general provisions applying to rural areas has been successful and there seems to be little opposition to our efforts to clarify the provisions governing the Ranges.

The simplifying and streamlining of the RMA in the last year has made it more difficult for the Society to appeal. This means we must be more attentive to all consent applications, which places a bigger workload on our planners and legal team. It is however a relief that some of the more draconian amendments were not passed.

We were relieved when Waitakere City Council withdrew its Plan Change for a Whenuapai Airport Special Area, which means that a commercial airport at Whenuapai is off the agenda for some time. This was in part due to the very effective opposition of the community groups but in the end a decision by the government that the air force would not be vacating Whenuapai resulted in a withdrawal of the Plan Change.

With some reservations we support the Auckland Regional Council's opening of the Hillary Trail, a four-day walk through the ranges from Arataki to Swanson. National and international promotion of this walk will undoubtedly lead to increased visitors numbers, and we are concerned that without a visitor management strategy there will be environmental effects that will be hard to quantify in the short term and which may well lead to cumulative

effects that are difficult to mitigate. The ARC do not envisage the commercialisation of the walk, but already tourist operators and other commercial interests are seeking concessions in association with the walk. We have recently completed submissions and hearings on the Regional Park Management Plan, and we supported the ARC's position on this matter and it was pleasing to see that the vast majority of submissions opposed any further commercialisation in the ranges. We await the Council's decision.

The Society supports the three Council's in their effort to remove the remaining willows from the Te Henga wetland. The last trees are so inaccessible that they must be poisoned by aerial spraying. This has proved controversial and one Te Henga resident took out a High Court injunction just days before the annual program was to begin, and this has apparently set the program back for a year. We have it on very good authority that the spraying is a last resort, and that the spray program is in the control of highly skilled operators and will pose minimal threat to other aquatic life.

Our gift in 2009 of the 11 hectare Big Muddy reserve to the ARC for inclusion in the Waitakere Ranges Regional Park was well received and the land was gazetted together with all other Waitakere Ranges Regional Park land and is now protected by Order in Council. The Society made submissions on the third Local Government (Auckland Law Reform) Bill which amongst other matters proposed the repeal of Clause 77 of the Local Government Act (2002). Clause 77 gave the Regional Council ownership of the Waitakere Ranges Regional Park but its repeal without provision for the ownership to be transferred to the new Auckland Council means that ownership would transfer by default to the Crown. This is unacceptable for many reasons including the fact that the bulk of the parkland was gifted to the people as the Centennial Memorial Park to celebrate 100 years of settlement in the region. This Society has been instrumental in purchasing and gifting over 1000 hectares of land to the park over the past 36 years, and we believe that the park is an asset that must stay in the ownership of the new Auckland Council. We await the select committee's recommendations on this matter.

The most insidious threat to the ranges is the microscopic pathogen *Phytophthora taxon Agathis* (PTA). We reported on this at the last AGM and since then there have been a number of developments. The government has allocated a fund for research into the disease to be shared between various agencies. In the ranges, ARC have put in place a management strategy involving signage and boot disinfectant baths but to date have not been prepared to quarantine any areas to prevent the spread of the disease. This is something that the Society considers necessary. We regard this disease that is killing kauri in most areas to be of grave concern, and so this evening

we have asked Dr Nick Waipara from the Regional Council to address us on the research and management program.

After 36 years the committee think it is time to review the past and begin to collect the stories of our influential Society. Stage three of our Oral History project has been completed by Carole Shone. She interviewed Geoff Scholes, Mary Woodward, Dave McKay, John Lewis, and Tony Randerson with assistance from Mels Barton as sound recordist. All digital recordings and transcripts are archived in the Waitakere and Turnbull Libraries. We will be applying for funding to continue this important work, and would welcome any suggestions of people we should interview who have been instrumental in the conservation and protection of the Waitakere Ranges. In conjunction with this project we have asked Bruce and Trixie Harvey to write a history of the Society, and they have agreed to do this *pro bono* and for that we are most grateful. They have begun by researching the Society's archives, and will be talking to many past and present members about their role in the Society in due course.

We were successful in our grant application to Creative Communities for partial funding of a painted mural in the Henderson CBD. However two subsequent grant applications have been declined, and the future of this project is now in doubt. If we cannot raise the full funding to proceed, we will have to refund the grant money received.

There are now less than 180 Waitakere Ranges books in stock, and at the present sales rate these should last another two years, during which time we will consider a second edition.

The greatest change in the Society's function has been the employment of Mels Barton as the Heritage Area Coordinator, made possible by a grant from the ASB Community Trust in 2008. Mels has reported regularly in the newsletter on her activities, and her commitment and diligence has contributed hugely to our work program, and she has certainly taken a considerable part of the workload off myself and other committee members. However, the grant money has now been used up, and we hope that we will be successful in an application we made last month to The Trusts Charitable Foundation. If not, then we will have to seriously rethink our strategy as a Heritage Area Coordinator has become indispensable to our effectiveness as an advocate for the ranges. We will not use members subscriptions or donations to fund this activity unless specifically instructed to do so. At the conclusion of this report, I will ask committee member Tim O'Shea to put to the meeting a funding strategy that the committee has discussed and endorsed.

Thanks to executive member Kirstin Howard we have completed a final draft of a new constitution that is acceptable to the executive and we hope to bring it to a special meeting of the members of the Society in the next few months for approval so that we might qualify for charitable status with the Charities Commission.

Throughout the year 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 resource management consultant Gary Taylor is invaluable. We acknowledge the work that James Hook has done for us on various resource consent matters. Thanks also to Jenny Taylor who has maintained our membership database and coordinated mail outs for many years. Owing to changes to the law, the Society is now faced with having to pay for our annual audit from a registered auditor.

The Society is well-served by an executive with a wide range of professional talents. The committee meets on the second Wednesday of the month and our meetings are always well attended, with strong and stimulating debate and good friendship. Members are always welcome to attend and bring matters to our attention. During the year Mike Nixon resigned after he moved north to live in Kohukohu, and we thank him for his years on the committee when he managed our website and for the work he did in the ranges, especially with pest eradication for the Karekare Forest Restoration Trust. Kirstin Howard is also standing down as a committee member. 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, treasurer Sandra Jones, and secretary Mels Barton. Mels and Anna coordinate our presence at events and festivals. Sandra has taken over as editor of the quarterly newsletter but we would like to find someone to either help her or to take on this task as she has already plenty to do as the treasurer. It has been my honour to be President and chair of the executive committee for the past twelve years, and I have enjoyed it very much. I want to thank committee members and my family and friends for their support which has enabled me to better serve the Society.

Once again we chose not to raise our membership subscription rate this year, and this was recognised by many members who paid their subscription and added a donation. When Sandra Jones gives the financial report this

evening, you will note that the Society is in a strong financial position. The majority of this money is in tagged funds such as the reserve fund for land acquisition, the Book reprint fund, and the Neil and Jean Smith fund. Large reserves are our hedge against the recession to ensure that we can continue to operate at the highest standards.

We have sent our condolences to Margaret Topzand and family on the passing away of husband and father, Hajo. They both attended our AGM every year for as long as I can remember and always sat in the front row, and their support was much appreciated.

The Society was saddened to hear that Mary Dobbie died aged 95 in June 2009. She had been a member of the Society for many years until she had to leave Piha due to ill health. Mary will be remembered as a community-minded person who worked tirelessly for the people of Piha. She established the Piha News and edited it for many years. She helped to build up the Piha Library and was a founder member of the Environmental Group, which was later superseded by Coast Care, as well as being actively engaged in the Neighbourhood Watch network and the Residents Association. Last month the Society was honoured to receive a legacy from Mary's estate of \$1000 towards our work in protection programs.

We send our best wishes to Ross and Jessica Beever as Ross recovers from surgery. As one of the leading researchers on Kauri dieback, Ross would have shared the address this evening with Nick Waipara, and we wish him a full and speedy recovery.

We consider that the Society is in a very strong position which is absolutely necessary if we are to weather the unprecedented changes that are coming as a result of a government that is not committed to conservation, and whose objective would seem to be the privatization of assets and the exploitation of resources. The new governance structures of Auckland will test our resilience over the coming years and the Society will need increased support from its members and friends as we struggle to adapt to the new order. Be assured that your executive remain committed to serving the Society to ensure that the ranges that we all know and love will remain safeguarded forever.

Thank you. I move that the Annual Report be received.

John Edgar,
President
Waitakere Ranges Protection Society Inc.