

THE WAITAKERE RANGES PROTECTION SOCIETY INC.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Arataki Visitors Centre, Monday 30 March, 2015

Annual Report of the Executive Committee

I am pleased to present the 41st Annual Report of the Executive Committee of The Waitakere Ranges Protection Society Incorporated.

The Society is 42 years old. It has been long and effective advocate for the ranges, and we acknowledge the members who have supported us over many years.

We reported last year that in 1973 when the Society was formed, few of the activists who opposed the proposed rubbish tip in the old Duck's Quarry in the Waitakere Valley would have thought that 40 years later we would still be fighting similar battles. We have known that the Te Henga quarry that has operated in the valley for many years would be closing soon, but were surprised last year when Auckland Council Properties Ltd. proposed that the quarry would be used for the next fifteen years as a clean fill dump. Lobbying by the Society and the community resulted in a retraction of the proposal, and we are keeping a close watch on the rehabilitation of the quarry following its closure in April this year.

We have been actively involved with the development of the Te Henga Local Area Plan (LAP). A draft LAP will be available for submissions later this year. Of concern is the recent discovery of a new infestation of the water fern *Salvinia* in the Te Henga wetland. The Ministry for Primary Industries, in partnership with the Department of Conservation and the Auckland Council, is currently carrying out a range of activities to control and ultimately eradicate the aquatic weed which is a notoriously aggressive pest plant that if left unchecked, would rapidly cover the surface of the wetland and ultimately destroy the unique ecosystem there.

Without doubt the best news for the ranges in a long time is that in July Auckland Council purchased the Byer family property at Piha and these 78 hectares of forested land have been added to the Waitakere Ranges Regional Park. This land has been on Council's parkland acquisition plan since the 1960s as it links two disconnected parts of the Waitakere Ranges parkland. It has high biodiversity and recreational values and outstanding natural features including regenerating native forest, sea caves, blow holes and pa sites. It is a key piece of land and is finally in public ownership and fully protected. The site will allow extension of the Hillary trail from Karekare to Piha thereby avoiding Piha Road.

Kauri in the ranges are infected with the pathogen *Phytophthora* taxon *Agathis* (recently renamed *Phytophthora agathidicida*) and there is no known cure. 13% of kauri in the ranges are infected, and 65% of these are along walking tracks, an indication that trampers, runners and animals are spreading the disease. 27km (10%) of walking tracks in the ranges, closed in 2012, remain off-limits to the public but compliance has been poor. Auckland Council is currently undertaking a five-year ground and aerial survey to determine the spread of the disease. New funding of kauri dieback research and management has been made available by MPI to various authorities. However in January, with no public consultation, Council granted a consent for the next three years to the Hillary Trail Ultra Marathon from Arataki to Muriwai involving up to 675 participants each year. We are not convinced that the conditions imposed on the event in March will stop the spread of kauri dieback, the greatest occurrence of which is along the Hillary Trail.

We began our oral history project in 2004, and over the past few years Anna Fomison has progressed this project well. In the last year three new interviews have been recorded and lodged with Auckland and Turnbull Libraries and to date 27 interviews have been completed. Our new website has been active since July, and is proving an excellent tool for communication to members and other users of the ranges. Thanks to Anna Fomison and Tim O'Shea who oversaw the contract with the Think Red design team. Anna Fomison is our webmaster, and we suggest you visit the website regularly to keep up with our news. Thanks also to Auckland Libraries who have scanned and digitised all our newsletters since 1973. These are archived and available to the public at Waitakere Central Library or from the Society at members' request.

At the end of 2014, our Heritage Area Coordinator, Christine Rose resigned to take up a new position with Auckland Council as their Kauri Dieback Coordinator. We thank Christine for her very diligent work for the Society, and while we are sorry to lose her we wish her all the best for her new and very important role.

Over the past year the Society has spent considerable time working on the Proposed Auckland Unitary Plan (PAUP). The complex hearings process has been a challenge for our legal and planning team, but they have represented the Society to the highest standards. The hearings will go on until 2016, when recommendations will be made by the Independent Hearings Panel, Council will make decisions, appeals will be heard and the plan will become operative.

During the year we have made submissions on the Waitakere Ranges Local Board and the Rodney Local Board three-year plans, the protection of Maui dolphin, the Te Henga quarry, and the Te Henga LAP.

We welcome the establishment of the Waitakere Ranges Conservation Network, an organisation that will coordinate with all groups and individuals who are contributing to conservation in the ranges.

During the year we received \$4,500 from the ASB Community Trust to fund the Heritage Area Coordinator. We also made a donation of \$7500 to the Environmental Defence Society towards the development of a new online environment guide. It will contain information about how our environmental laws work and will help community groups and iwi wanting to get involved in plan and decision-making.

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 from Ellis Gould Ltd. and RMA consultant Gary Taylor from EDS is invaluable. Thanks also to James Hook at Envivo Planning who has advised and represented the Society on various 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 Wednesday of the month. During the year we co-opted Joanna Silver onto the committee and as a lawyer and conservationist she will be a valuable member and has already made a strong contribution. 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 them and I would like this meeting to join with me in showing our appreciation for their efforts on our behalf.

Special thanks go to our Vice-President Anna Fomison, Secretary Lynda Williams and Treasurer Sandra Jones. Sandra has also edited our quarterly newsletter and Lynda writes our funding applications. The Society currently has three Patrons, Emeritus Professor Dick Bellamy, the Rt. Hon. Jonathan Hunt and Lynne Pillay. It has been my honour to be President and to chair the executive committee for the past seventeen years. I want to thank Society members and my family and friends for their support that has enabled me to better serve the Society.

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 some long-time members of the Society died. We were very sad to hear that Jean Smith passed away in June. Jean and her late husband Neil had been members for many years and some years ago when they moved to a smaller home, they sold their art collection, and from the proceeds donated \$20,000 to the Society to be spent as we wished. We decided to invest the capital as the "Neil and Jean Smith Fund" and use the interest to fund projects. Bob Ussher who died in October 2014 was a descendant of one of the pioneer families of the Waitakere Ranges. He had tramped every inch of the Ranges and knew every track, and the plants and birds. Bob was a foundation member of the Society, and he remained a member of the Society all his life, serving on the committee for many years. Bob always attended the AGM of the Society and he will be missed. Jack Colmar died in November 2014 and in his many years living at Te Henga was a great advocate for the ranges and especially the concept of the Heritage Area. The list of supporters to his Heritage Area petition in the 1990's included Sir Edmund Hillary, Don Binney, Graeme Dingle, Stanley Palmer, Peter and Silvia Siddell and many other artists and well-known Aucklanders. Long-time member Isobel Thompson died on June 2014. We offer our condolences to the family and friends of these great supporters of the Society.

Our congratulations go to Bruce and Trixie Harvey, editors of our Waitakere Ranges book who received the JM Sharrad book award for excellence in local history. The judges said that the book maintained a high standard of research and writing and also carved a new path by including traditional history, accounts of the natural history and land, and social history. Bruce and Trixie donated the \$500 prize to the Society.

The Society is forty-two years old. To the members and friends who were there when the Society was founded in 1973, and the many others who have since joined we would like to express our thanks for your support. The Society has a proud history, but our work is not done. While the Heritage Area Act has made some matters more certain for both landowners, developers and the Society, recent and proposed new changes to the RMA will have adverse effects on the landscape and environment of the ranges. Your support in the coming years will be more important than ever.

John Edgar, President, The Waitakere Ranges Protection Society Inc.