

Report from Waikato Biodiversity Forum held in Raglan on Monday 22 May 2006

The latest Waikato Biodiversity Forum event was held at the Raglan Christian Camp in a beautiful setting overlooking the coast with sweeping views north and south. The weather held out and provided us with a sunny day. The following is a summary of the main points from the presentations.

Te Whakaoranga o Karioi – John Lawson

Two million years ago Karioi was probably a cone twice as high as the present 756 m. NZ Botanical Society - 127 indigenous species above 300m in 8 distinct plant communities- tree fern ridge, lowland, valley floor, boulder slope, coastal, montane, exposed montane and sheltered. Change to montane within 20 to 30m at about 550-650m, the regular mist line and the upper or lower limit for many species. Most northerly west coast mountain - bush from sea to top. A lot needs to be done to make it true over a greater part of Karioi.

The Karioi group needs help to:

- to run planting days
- to collect and propagate seed
- to monitor bush and streams
- to contact landowners, cat owners, etc
- to publicise - articles, broadcasts, etc
- to raise funds
- to keep weeds and other pests under control
- to plan and repair tracks
- to develop eco industries - tourism? possum fur?
- and many many other jobs.

Whaingaroa Harbourcare

Fred Lichtwark from Whaingaroa Harbourcare spoke of the success of his group with hundreds of kilometres of fencing and over half a million plants planted along river streams and gullies in the Whaingaroa catchment. The evidence of their work is in the clearer waters in both harbour and tributary streams, and recovering shellfish and fish stocks. The whitebait have increased in numbers and recreational fishers who may have caught one fish every 18 hours now catch one every two hours. Surfers no longer report sea ulcers, and eelgrass is now more common as are crabs, shellfish and wading birds in the mudflats.

Environment Waikato-Malene Felsing

EW's Regional Estuary Monitoring Programme started in 2001 and involves permanent monitoring sites, six monthly / quarterly core sampling of sediment level and type as well as animals living in sediments –indicators of health of estuary. The following observations during 2001-2004 have been noted in the Whaingaroa Harbour:

- Mainly worms at Okete Bay, Haroto Bay, shellfish at the rest of the sites
- Increase in shellfish over time at Whatitirinui Island (mainly cockles)
- Most animals at Whatitirinui Island and Te Puna Point
- Highest diversity at Okete Bay, Whatitirinui Island and Ponganui Creek
- Lowest diversity at Haroto Bay
- Possible decrease over time at Ponganui Creek, Haroto Bay and Te Puna Point

A summary of findings include:

- Main animal groups found are bivalves, crustaceans, snails and polychaete worms
- Big difference between the different sites, mainly caused by sediment characteristics (shell-hash and mud)
- Overall the sampling indicates that Whaingaroa Harbour is relatively healthy, with high biomass of animals at many of the sampled sites
- Trends will be detectable after 7-15 years

Waikato District Council-Allan Turner

The major projects of WDC are as follows:

- Major contribution towards the purchase of the Te Toto Gorge reserve
- Wainui Reserve: biodiversity enhancement has been undertaken in conjunction with Harbourcare, and Friends of Wainui
- Aro Aro Bay a 2.5 ha salt march wetland in Raglan. Restoration of about 1/3 of the area is being done as part of a Recreation Centre development. Restoration involves removal of exotic weeds and excavating areas that have become elevated dryland areas of the years. A flap gate opening regime will be trialed to increase the salinity of the area. A new drain cleaning regime has been established.
- Fish Passage. Culverts that prevent fish migration have been identified and staff are working through a priority list to alter culverts to ensure fish passage is possible.
- Landowner Assistance. A contestable fund is available to help landowners. A recent example was to fund an ecologist to provide a report that was attached to a Condition Fund application.
- Rate Remission. The policy was changed last year to provide landowners with a greater incentive to protect significant areas. The remission for the land value component of the general rate is calculated on a pro rata basis (eg if 20% of the property is in native vegetation and there is no economic use of it - such as no stock grazing) then the land value component of the general rate will be reduced by 20%. On average this gives about 6 times greater remission than under the old policy in which the remission was calculated from the economic value of the conservation area.

Whaingaroa Beachcare- Bill Fairweather

Bill described the work being carried out by the Beachcare group which has now been operating for 2 years. Environment Waikato, Tainui hapu and Waikato District Council support this community-based approach and there has been good participation by the local community. The group is presently working on restoring badly damaged dunes along the ocean and harbour foreshore and to reduce human damage through improved management of beach access and use. Several meetings and working bees have been held in 2004 and 2005. To date, the main focus has been on restoring the dunes seaward of the new car park near the old surf club site. These dunes were badly damaged by erosion up to 2003/04 and with the severe winds there were also problems with windblown sand onto the car park area further landward. The primary aim of the work to date has been to restore a good cover of native dune building species – particularly spinifex and pingao – to enhance natural dune recovery. Bill believes it is important to get locals to help and have some sort of social interaction/event after the working part is over. The social aspect contributes to enthusiasm and cohesion of the group.

Department of Conservation- Rachel Kelleher

The main points from Rachels presentations were:

- DOC currently provides several different visitor opportunities in the Whaingaroa area and is investigating the installation of viewing platform and a coastal walk at Te Toto Gorge
- The success of the 1080 pest control on Mt Karioi- scheduled to be re-treated in 2007/08
- Weedbusting around Whaingaroa - focus on boneseed, woolly nightshade, privet and pampas
- Involved in work on a number of species including *Hebe speciosa*, maui dolphin, NZ dotteral and looking at other translocations of threatened plants back into the area
- The challenges of eradicating animal pests- particularly in trying to accommodate an often diverse range of community expectations.
- The goat eradication programme on Mt Karioi - programme has been very successful with numbers now extremely reduced and possibility of eradication.

Pirongia Te Aroaro o Kahu Restoration Society-Clare St Pierre

Clare gave a history of the groups activities as follows:

1998 Working party with DOC. Discussed pros and cons of group structure. Opted for society.
June 2002 Public meeting to form society, Worked on constitution, vision

April 2003 Incorporated at last
 May 2003 Pirongia Historic Visitor Centre – foundation member
 Ongoing commitment to committee meetings and weekend desk duty
 Sept 2003 EIF funding from EW for Mt Pirongia booklet
 Sept 2004 Mangakaraa Pest Control Project – DOC funding granted to develop
 Management Plan
 Sept 2004 Quarterly newsletters for members begins
 Nov 2004 Inaugural Generation Green Weekend
 Mar 2005 Display at Environmental Education Expo
 June 2005 Website launched
 June 2005 Display at Fieldays
 Aug 2005 Inaugural Conservation Week event
 Aug 2005 Runner up in WDC Community Awards: Environment and Heritage category
 Sept 2005 Funding for setting up Mangakaraa Project obtained
 Sept 2005 Inaugural Mt Pirongia Art Awards
 Nov 2005 Purchased Envirocentre Building
 Nov 2005 Subcommittees formed for Mangakaraa Project and Envirocentre Project.
 Nov 2005 Pirongia Tourism Association – working party member
 Jan 2006 Mangakaraa Project: Track cutting and landowner consultation

Plans for 2006

Mangakaraa Project: Commence pest control phase

Envirocentre Project: Secure permanent site, undertake Oral History Project for Mt Pirongia,

Pirongia Tourism Association: Formation of incorporated society, Considering Paid Co-ordinator position for group, Generation Green Weekend - Oct 2006, Mt Pirongia Art Awards Oct – Nov 2006

What has worked well for the group.

- Getting advice – DoC, NZ Landcare Trust, Moehau Environmental Group, Kakepuku Society
- Formal structure has many benefits, despite the tedium of setting it up
- Being prepared to work together with people coming to the group with divergent philosophies
- “Don’t have an ego”
- Follow your dream/vision
- Work well with iwi
- Funding: be prepared to be declined, but don’t give up. Try somewhere else.
- Commitment by small number of key people
- Partnerships outside our group, eg Mt Pirongia Art Awards, Envirocentre project

What would we do differently?

- As leader of group, be prepared to make some mistakes. Talk them through with mentors or committee, as it has a wider impact in the community. Not confined to own group.
- Seek advice quickly when it’s not clear how to move forward with a project or policy.

Hakarimata Restoration Trust

Wayne Bennett from Hakarimata Restoration Trust talked about the pest eradication programme in the Hakarimata range and what a difference this has made. A management plan has been developed. Permanent vegetation plots have been established to monitor progress. The group struggles to find ways of involving the community but partnerships with management agencies have worked well. The group involves local schools in planting and teaching about monitoring for rats.

Field Trip

The field trip took place at Te Toto Gorge to get ideas to hasten the vegetation of the area that was farmland. After much discussion it was felt that maybe the best thing to do is let nature take its course.

Discussion

The afternoon session was a discussion in the large group around questions such as funding, community volunteers, paid workers, education, how to involve people in projects, advocacy. The following points were raised in the course of the discussion:-

- The merits of small groups working with funding agencies for getting a paid worker to do the job rather than engaging community volunteer support. This could however isolate the community from the work and reduce the community 'buy in'.
- Whenuakite have 50% paid workers and 50% volunteers.
- Wayne Todd from Moehau Environment Group (MEG) said it is much more effective to have a paid worker to liaise with funders and co-ordinate the work needed to be done. There are 750 landowners to obtain buy in for the MEG project and one strong opposition group can hijack process. Lobby politicians and agencies –have politicians visit the site. Projects could come to a standstill if community don't want it.
- If there is no community support funders are less likely to support the project.
- Community work depends on the type of work eg pest control needs money and funding to pay professionals in most cases.
- When organizing activities to get community support it pays to have lots of different activities eg the range of activities that the Pirongia Te Aroaro o Kahu Restoration Society undertakes
- It pays for groups to have a series of little projects which get rewards and makes public aware of biodiversity
- Community involvement makes politicians aware
- Sarah from Tongariro Natural History Society said that people are keen but don't have much knowledge. A contractor can come in and teach volunteers and then they become confident and enthused to do the work
- On a small site 50-100ha well advised landowners can do a great job but if larger scale professional help is necessary to carry out work and often to a required standard
- Wynne Johns talked about the community nursery at Tamahere which the group sees as an educational project to help gully owners in Tamahere restore their gullies. The group offers help and advice on gully planting and maybe some of the people will work in the nursery.
- Educate starting with young children. Taking children out into the bush to plant and gather seed. Get hands on experience
- At Whenuakite people on probation help with weeding
- Wayne believes that there is a change of awareness and that funding agencies are funding more on ground community group work that have agency support eg DOC and EW
- The tipping point for people to get involved is firstly awareness and then being involved on a small scale as part of a larger project. Experiencing small successes spurs people on
- If the project dependent on voluntary labour a burden falls on the group to come up with innovative ideas to engage community volunteers vs paid worker
- Whaingaroa Harbourcare talks strategically to groups-landowners, agencies when required –not generally community involved-more focused talking to parties needed to achieve to work
- In Australia biodiversity work controlled by the State –not so much community involvement like to NZ model
- There could be more money on District Council rates to provide for community group work
- People could sponsor 1ha of possum control or the maintenance of a section of track

- People pay \$100 to be involved in running over Tongariro Park as a fund raiser for Tongariro Natural History Society
- The LTCCP is an avenue to work with Councils between reviews to get specific projects established. Get into LTCCP before budget organized. Lobby Council for support of projects
- Conservation Management Strategy will be reappearing for consultation around 30 June 2006
- Run events or hold a Charity run, such as marathon to get funding as participants pay an entry fee and or plant a tree
- There needs to be political pressure on Councils to get funding for projects. Some Councils have officers for conservation protection.
- The role of the Forum is to advocate for strategic biodiversity protection and enhancement across the region
- The Restoration document needs to have report or plan that leads from this strategic document to agency and community group ownership and work. The Forum intends to work with agencies and groups to achieve specific biodiversity work in districts that link with the Restoration document
- Community groups to come to Councils with constructive ideas to solve problems-work with Councils
- Support agencies when they do something good as well as providing constructive criticism

The Forum Feedback

- The Forum is valuable
- The website is a way of providing interesting information about the regions biodiversity-research papers as pdf for people to access and links to other sites

The Forum finished around 3.30pm with afternoon tea.