

## **CHAIRMANS REPORT TO THE NINTH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE NATIONAL WETLAND TRUST**

**19 August 2009, Auckland Regional Council Chambers**

It gives me great pleasure to present this, the ninth Annual Report of the National Wetland Trust.

The economic recession facing us all is a vivid reminder of how dependent we are on international trade and how vulnerable we have become to changes in the global economy. Our export products are seen by our clients and customers to be high value, clean and green, and we are able to exploit niche markets and earn a premium return as a result of these perceptions. I call them perceptions, because those of us living in NZ are all too aware of the damage that continues to occur as a result of not recognising the true environmental cost associated with our export industries. We are making progress, but the tough global economy likely to remain over the next couple of years, will not make it easy to foster and encourage change that is required to continually improve our land / resource use practises and set us on a course to achieve a truly sustainable triple bottom line.

But it is water, and in particular poor quality water resulting from enrichment, contamination and sedimentation, and water shortages, that feature as the most important environmental concerns in our urban and rural communities. For a country that is blessed with an abundance of water, we must ask ourselves "why have we got ourselves in this position ??". I'm sure we can come up with some very well reasoned explanations, but in the end, it is poor management of a critical resource. We can apportion blame on those responsible for administering the various statutes that control water use and allocation, but that is unlikely to resolve the problems. The answer lies in changing how we perceive water and our behaviours around water use.

So if there is a "best" time for the National Wetland Trust to help change perceptions, our engrained culture of excessive water use and, and if we are to promote the role wetlands play in conserving water, purifying water, providing habitat for unique assemblages of plants and animals and the many sport and recreational opportunities wetland provide, it is now.

Over the past year there has been, in my view, a measurable change in community attitudes towards water and wetlands. Yes there is certainly mounting concern over water quality and water use, but we are also seeing communities responding positively to cure local issues by replicating natural wetland functions and possesses like water storage and filtration and re-establishing vegetated riparian margins. There has been significant growth in the number of lake-care and stream-care groups; protecting and restoring wetlands on private land is increasingly celebrated; more are being covenanted under the QE II Trust and the 221 consent provisions of the Resource Management Act 1991; the design of many urban storm water systems, sewage treatment plants, parks and gardens include wetland features; there is growing recognition of the role wetlands play as special features in predominantly agricultural landscapes; and more recently the role wetlands, particularly swamps and bogs that deposit peat, can play in storing carbon .

I'm encouraged by the increasing understanding of wetland and the environmental services they provide, and the Trust over the past year has been active in spreading those messages, helped enormously by our guest speaker's excellent book and the recognition it received in the Montana Book Awards. At a national level, the Trust has made submissions on the National Environmental Standards for Ecological Flows; the National Policy Statement of Freshwater and the Resource Management Act Amendment Bill. Submissions have also been made on Environment Waikato's Regional Policy Statement, and to the Long Tern Council Community Plans for Environment Waikato, Waikato District Council and Waipa District Council. The Trust is very fortunate to have the services of Karen Denyer, albeit for three days per week, to prepare and present very detailed and persuasive submissions on a broad range of topics concerning the conservation of wetlands. This has undoubtedly raised the credibility and profile of the Trust.

In addition to engaging national and local government, Karen, with help from Trustee Monica Peters has been developing a web-based directory of wetlands open to the public, with the Auckland region completed thanks to a grant from Auckland Regional Council, and the Wellington Region almost ready to go, supported by Greater Wellington.. She is also working collaboratively with community groups, designing and establishing wetland trails. Once again the Trust sees initiatives such as these, as a necessary prerequisite to capturing people and growing their interest in wetlands.

The Trust once again hosted a very successful World Wetland Day event. This consisted of a wetland tour, involving three 60 seat buses (all full) from

Hamilton up the Waikato River to Broadlands and return. On route stops were made at the hydro lakes of Karapiro, Waipapa; river oxbows and restoration proposals at Broadlands; the thermal wetland / lake of Rotokawa; and, the Lake Aratiatia outflow and rapids. Our sincere thanks to many Trustees, particularly Keith Thompson and staff from Fish and Game, and the Department of Conservation for helping on the day. A special thank you must go to Mighty River Power for providing funding and substantial organisational and logistical support and a number of staff who spoke throughout the tour on key features of the Hydro lake network and the geothermal development at Ohaki.

The potential for wetlands to contribute to reducing carbon emissions is an issue that could see the profile of wetlands raised considerably. Wetlands that deposit peat, which include swamps and bogs, can sequester and store 1-3 tonnes of carbon (3 - 10 tonnes of carbon dioxide) per hectare per year. The Kopuatai peat dome in the Hauraki Plains could, for example, lock up between \$675k and \$2.25m worth of carbon annually as long as it is kept water logged. Conserving the swamp and bog systems remaining in the Waikato alone could help balance the estimated \$70m worth of carbon dioxide released annually from degrading / farmed peat. Trustee Keith Thompson has been actively promoting the logic of including wetlands in the Governments Emissions Trading Scheme as a carbon credit earner but also introducing the sequestration values of wetlands on the voluntary carbon market.

Over the past year Trustees have continued to grapple with issues associated with the development of the National Wetland Centre. You will be aware the Trust has invested in land at Rangiriri with purpose of building a state of the art Visitor Centre. Achieving the full potential of the site was reliant in part, on the Trust securing access to paper roads adjoined the northern and eastern boundary of the section purchased. Unfortunately the Waikato District has recently used the unformed road to the north to site sewage mains and pump station. Effectively this will prevent the development of the "estuarine lagoon" and car parking as proposed. We are also concerned that the recent Waikato District Council's grow projections for North Waikato show Te Kauwhata as the primary growth node. This together with uncertainty about the proposed road alignments associated with Land Transport NZ Rangiriri Bypass, may restrict the growth and development of Rangiriri township. If this was to occur it would severely impact our ability to fund the ongoing maintenance and management of a Wetland Centre.

The Trustees elected to consider alternative options. These included sites within Te Kauwhata township, sites adjoining the Whangamarino wetland

complex to the north and also sites adjoining the State Highways further south to Hamilton and on to Taupo. As a consequence of this assessment a site at Lake Serpentine (Rotopiko) next to SH 3, between Hamilton and Te Awamutu, has been identified as an alternative location. The primary features of this site are:

- A wetland complex of 30ha consisting of three peat lakes interconnected by swampland. It is visible from SH and possesses examples of four wetland types: peat lakes, peat bogs, mature kahikatea forest and mineralised swamp. This wetland complex is regarded as a priority for conservation management by DOC.
- The lakes and swamp are managed by the DOC, with considerable collaboration from Environment Waikato, Waipa District Council, Auckland Waikato Fish and Game Council, Nga Iwi Toopu O Waipa – all part of the Waipa Peat Lake Accord;
- The Wetland Centre could be housed within an existing 7.7ha Recreation Reserve administered by the Waipa District Council. Both Waipa DC and DOC support the development of the reserve for this purpose.

The Trust has engaged an Architectural Firm to prepare concept plans for a Wetland Centre at this site, incorporating as much of the planning as possible developed for the Rangiriri site. Once these are completed, a formal approach will be made to both the Waipa District Council and DOC for approval to develop the site and to LTNZ to secure access to the site / Centre from SH 3.

While this can be viewed as a significant change to concepts floated at Rangiriri, it is the view of the Trustees that the Lake Serpentine is a prime location; many of the ideas developed at Rangiriri are transferable to this location; it has very significant natural attributes which will reduce the capital investment required (the buildings are likely to be more modest and half of the planned wetland 'gardens are already present as natural features); and, development at the site has the support of both DOC and the territorial authority. Developing partnership with key organisations is a strategy that the Trust sees as important to reduce risk associated with an income largely based on submissions, grants and visitation. In this case the local authority has indicated its desire to promote its District as a "heritage" destination and the development of a wetland centre, particularly a national centre, will likely produce considerable social, environment and economic benefits.

Our Trustee Newsletter 'Wet and Wild' is gaining popularity with members, and we are endeavouring to improve both the content and presentation.

The success of the newsletter is due to the efforts of our writer and editor Shonagh Lindsay and of course those who contribute articles. It is a medium that all members can contribute to, plus it is an effective means, in conjunction with our web site, of communicating our wetland messages. So please pass on your stories to Shonagh. A development in this area is to move towards an electronic copy, for faster and wider delivery, and to reduce the environmental costs of paper, printing and distribution.

We are also very grateful to Mighty River Power for their ongoing and generous support. They provide the meeting venue, teleconferencing for remote trustees, they have covered the cost of printing and posting our newsletter and support for their employee Don Scarlett to attend meetings and provide secretarial services.

Last year our guest speaker was 'bug man' Ruud Kleinpaste. Ruud is a tireless advocate for the natural world which includes wetland conservation, but regardless of his extremely busy work schedule he recently accepted a invitation from the Trust to become our patron. I would like to formally thank Ruud for accepting this position and have little doubt that we will see the National Wetland Trust sneaking into more of this presentation into the future. This needs to be formally ratified at this AGM.

I would also like to publicly acknowledge the work of all Trustees. Wetlands are to many people, not the most endearing of our natural assets and campaigning for the conservation of wetlands is often difficult. It requires fortitude, a sound knowledge of wetland systems and processes, enthusiasm, and the giving of valuable time. While I have mentioned some names in this report, we are a team with each member supporting each other. My sincere thanks to you all

To our Executive Officer Karen, our thanks for your patience, your professionalism and commitment to the tasks undertaken. Over the past 14 of so months you have made a significant contribution to growing the profile of the Trust. I understand you have received mentoring from John Brosnan, from Cooper Aitkin and Partners Ltd., Chartered Accounts from Morrinsville, so thanks also to John, as ultimately the Trust is the beneficiary of improved performance and skills.

I would like to extend a vote of thanks to the Auckland Regional Council for providing the venue for to nights meeting, but also for they financial contributions to printing our introductory brochure and also funding the

Auckland wetland directory. We look forward to developing closer working links with them.

We also of course wish to thank in advance, our celebrated author Janet Hunt who has come here tonight with a strong contingency from Waiheke Island, one of our most proactive communities in wetland protection.