



Report from the **Waikato Biodiversity Forum**

Held in Whaingaroa, Raglan Friday the 18th May

On the 18th of May, the Waikato Biodiversity Forum held their bi-annual hui/field trip in Whaingaroa for the second time, following the first event held there in 2006. The diverse group attending the event consisted of a number of interested locals and people from neighbouring districts, year 13 Papa Taiao (practical based environmental studies) students from Raglan Area School, as well as a range of staff from councils and environmental agencies. The kaupapa of the day was focused on the question of “how do we enhance biodiversity in a growing town”? Like many parts of the Waikato Region, Whaingaroa is experiencing significant growth in its permanent and transient population. This can of course put pressure on the natural environment and community who call it home.

Kokiri Centre

The field trip format moved between several locations within a short distance from Raglan Township. We began at the Kokiri Centre with a Whakatau from Angeline Greensill, welcoming us on to her Whenua, situated at the mouth of the Whaingaroa Harbour. Her korero was rooted in the history of her people and their connection with the land and sea of Whaingaroa. She emphasised that when decisions had been made without this connection recognised, the impacts to our environment have been inherently negative. One such example was Raglan’s sanitation treatment system, which pipes sewage through treatment ponds and then directly into Whaingaroa Harbour. This design adversely affects marine life and therefore the ability of Tangata Whenua to gather kai moana. Whereas on the Kokiri Site, iwi have [collaborated with NIWA](#) and used tikanga based design principles to construct a land-based waste treatment system. The design and implementation not only reduces the contamination of the harbour, but also addresses tikanga which favours treatment of human wastes via the cleansing capacity of soil (Papatūānuku) and the avoidance of water.



Angeline speaking on her whenua at the Kokiri Centre

Photo: Landcare Trust

Whaingaroa Beachcare

After morning tea, Angeline took the group on to Wainamu beach, directly in front of the Kokiri Centre to view the Beachcare mahi that she, alongside her husband Allan and late father Tex have been involved in for a number of decades.

The West coast is a highly dynamic coastal system which experiences high levels of natural erosion. There is no one tried and true methodology for restoring dune systems. Angeline has taken the perspective of observing the natural cycles of Tangaroa and working within these. Overall this degraded and modified dune system has recovered a great deal through a combination of planting native dune

species and building Manuka fascines (a rough bundle of brushwood) where erosion has been particularly severe. Since 2004 the Waikato Regional Council's Beachcare program has supported their work greatly by supplementing the plants they already propagate in their own nursery and providing other resources such as signage, technical advice and building materials. The work not only protects the beach from eroding, but also provides habitat for the range of sea birds that nest in the foreshore and back dunes.



Wainamu Beach tour with Angeline

Photo: Landcare Trust

Rangitahi Peninsula Development

After Papa Taiao student Te Kaha Broadbent gave a mihi to Angeline, the group left the Kokiri Centre and headed for the Raglan Golf Club. This provided us with an excellent viewing point of the new Rangitahi Peninsula residential development, where 500 houses are planned to be built in five stages. No one can deny that the development will have a big impact on the town, but both David Peacock and Boffa Miskell ecologist Jacqui Bell explained that the environmental impacts will be minimal and there may in-fact be some enhancement of the environment.



View of Rangitahi Peninsula from the golf club

Photo: Landcare Trust

Tipping his hat to the influence of Whaingaroa Harbour Care, David said they will continue to plant a huge number of native trees on the formerly pastured land, as well as creating a number of vegetated wetlands on the site. This work will not only be done to meet consenting conditions, but also beyond this, to continue the extension of Whaingaroa Harbour's growing vegetated riparian buffer. David is the biggest land owner in the Whaingaroa Catchment and going by the amount of riparian planting that has already taken place on his farmland and residential developments so far, an enhancement of biodiversity on the peninsula is a very strong possibility.

In terms of environmental impacts during the initial development stages, the sediment controls put in place are state of the art and the protection of the peninsula's remnant vegetated margins are a big priority. As far as the direct impacts of the development on the "feel" of the town, David spoke of creating a layout for the development which is an extension of the Whaingaroa community's eclectic culture and lifestyle. Furthermore, that Rangitahi would not be a gated community and they will be providing walk ways and parks for the general public.

Whaingaroa Harbour Care

Our next destination was Ngarunui Beach. Where, with an expansive view of the Tasman Sea in the background, both Fiona Edwards of Whaingaroa Harbour Care and Bexie Towle of the Karioi Project spoke about how their highly successful projects got started and how they have enhanced local biodiversity so far. For Harbour Care, their work with local farmers to improve water quality over the last 20 years has resulted in a massive ecological transformation of the Whaingaroa

Harbour Catchment. In that time over 1.2 million native trees have been planted and fenced along 450 km's of the harbour and its streams. Vital habitats like seagrass and cockle beds have now returned and fishing catch rates have improved hugely. In short, Harbour Care alongside local farmers have set the benchmark for catchment wide riparian restoration in Aotearoa.

Speaking in relation to Harbour Care's roots, Fiona explained that after setting up a nursery and planting team, the expectation was that farmers would be knocking at the door to give up riparian land for the free fencing materials and planting services offered. This was not the

case, so with the formation of a committee consisting of some local farmers and Tangata Whenua, the WDC was successfully lobbied into letting Harbour Care use their council owned farm, located between Wainui stream and Ngarunui Beach as a sustainable farming demonstration site. The transformation of the farm involved the fencing off all steep slopes, stream sides and wetlands and planting these areas with suitable native species. The farm then quickly became more productive due to a big drop in stock losses and a marked improvement in pasture growth rates. From this point, the local farming community began to come on-board to the point that now over 70 farmers within the catchment take on yearly riparian restoration works as part of their yearly farming plans, and 30% of the catchment is protected by a vegetated riparian buffer.



Fiona at Ngarunui Beach

Photo: Lancare Trust

Karioi Maunga Project

The Karioi Project has been operating for a comparatively short time to Harbour Care but, since initiating in 2009, the project has already had a big impact on bio-diversity in Whaingaroa. The Karioi team alongside partners like the Ahu Whenua Trust, DOC and Waikato Regional Council have worked hard to grow the outreach of the project, which now traps pest mammals on a large portion of the Whaingaroa side of the Maunga. Mentoring from more experienced groups like Harbour Care has really helped to accelerate this growth, but the passion of the community and their willingness to put their time into servicing trap lines has given it the biggest boost. There are now more than 50 regular volunteers and 150 casual, as well as an ever expanding backyard trapping program. The flagship species on Karioi has been the Oi (Black-Faced Petrel), which were formerly numerous on the mountain before mammalian pests pushed this friendly seafaring bird to the brink of extinction on the Mountain. The trapping also protects a range of other bird species on the Mountain including Blue Penguin, Kaka, Bellbird, Tomtits, Kereru, Ruru (Morepork), Tui, and Fantails.

Outdoor biodiversity education for Whaingaroa Rangatahi is now also an important aspect of the project. This is offered to 8-12 year olds through the Karioi Ranges program and to year 12 and 13 students via an NCEA approved Earthcare course at Raglan Area School. Incidentally, the current crop of Earthcare students were on hand, following the Fiona and Bex talks, to help with some trap operation demos, which took place on some of the numerous trap lines which lie amongst the regenerating bush around the beach.



Bexie speaking while Fiona holds up example of an Endangered "Oi" Photo: Landcare Trust

Xtreme Zero Waste

From the beach we headed back for lunch at the Union Church Hall where we heard from our final two speakers. The first of which was Rick Thorpe from Xtreme Zero Waste. Rick described how "Xtreme" came out of an ecological crisis, when it became apparent that toxic leachate from the town landfill was making its way into the Wainui stream, turning it from pristine to lifeless. As a result of this discovery, it was decided that the landfill must be filled in, and that all the waste would be shipped up to Hampton Downs. But luckily Rick and fellow community members saw an opportunity to do something special and successfully fought to create a community run refuse station in 1998, which would focus on turning Raglan's waste to resources. At the same time Harbour Care created a wetland system which has successfully filtered the old-landfill



Rick Thorpe

Photo: Landcare Trust

leachate to the point where its toxicity is unable to be detected by Regional Council.

Since its initiation, Xtreme has moved closer and closer to its goal of Raglan becoming zero waste. The recently launched household food waste collection service and industrial hot composting facility has given them a recent boost, with over 80% of waste now diverted from landfill. Another exciting development is the “plastic bag free Raglan” campaign which has had huge support from retailers and community. Alongside this, a further reduction in single use plastics has also been gained from takeaway food outlets in Raglan converting from plastic to biodegradable packaging.

Like Harbour Care, Xtreme has captured the imagination of many other communities by turning sustainability ideals into realities. This has led them to provide their expertise in mentoring other communities to develop their own waste minimisation enterprises. They also offer site tours and a zero waste education programme in schools which are hugely popular.

Tourism in Whaingaroa

Tourism in Aotearoa is booming and Raglan has become a hotspot on the map. The story of popular destinations becoming overcrowded, over commercialised and eventually losing the essence of what made them special, is an all too common tale which responsible tourist operators like Phil (Solscape Eco-lodge) are very conscious of. With this in mind, he expressed the view that tourism operators have a duty to provide visitors with an authentic experience, which gives them a true appreciation for the natural environment and community which make Whaingaroa special.

Phil put forward two examples of ideas which community members are currently developing, to help visitors contribute positively to Whaingaroa’s natural environment and community. The first of these is creating a set of suggested “Raglan Rules” to be issued to visitors by tourism operators. These rules would state expected behaviour in a range of areas ranging from zero waste practices to etiquette at surfing breaks. The second is a programme which would give visitors the opportunity to engage themselves in one of the many local biodiversity projects in Raglan. Tourist operators could refer interested visitors on to a bridging organisation, such as the Whaingaroa Environment Centre, who would then be able link them up with a project of the visitors’ choice. The idea behind such initiatives is to create a local tourist industry which adds value to Whaingaroa, environmentally, culturally and economically, rather than just for the benefit of a few individual operators.



Phil McCabe

Photo: Landcare Trust

Conclusions

The overwhelming feeling on the day was that of positivity. It became clear to see, that many aspects of biodiversity had in fact already been enhanced in Whaingaroa. The work done by the established groups like Harbour Care and Xtreme Zero Waste, have been particularly ground breaking. These groups have set the benchmark in sustainable farming and waste management practices for the rest of the country to follow. Along with the individual champions who have established these projects, a huge factor that has worked in Whaingaroa’s favour is its culture for care. Very little of the good work done would have been able to take place without a community that cares for each other and the paradise they live in.

A big concern from the full spectrum of speakers on the day was around keeping Raglan's unique culture alive and well. The feeling in the town is that Raglan is at a crossroads. If a greater sense of individualism and a gold rush mentality prevail as the tourism and property markets boom, the opportunities for collaborative biodiversity projects will certainly diminish. To proactively counter this prospect the community have been developing a "Raglan Naturally" plan, which will look at how the community's collaborative culture can be preserved and enhanced into the future. This will then help inform sections of Waikato District Council Long-term plans impacting on Raglan's future.

Raglan has shown us that when a sense of collective care for fellow community members and the natural environment exists, the possibility for establishing and maintaining successful biodiversity projects is increased greatly. We can be sure that if this quickly growing community can continue to stay on its current path, it will be standing in the best position possible to protect and enhance its biodiversity and continue to show other communities what is possible.

