

SPEECH NOTES

Opening address

NZ Institute of Landscape Architecture Conference

9am Friday, 4 April, 2008

Hyatt Hotel, Auckland

Michael Lee Chairman ARC

*E nga mana, e nga reo, e nga hau e wha, tena koutou,
Nau mai, haere mai, haere mai ki Tamaki Makau Rau,
Na reira, tena koutou, tena koutou tena tatou katoa.*

Good morning ladies and gentlemen.

I would like to thank the session chairman Rod Barnett for his kind words and also to acknowledge the President of the NZILA Renée Davies, The President of IFLA Di Menzies, Mike Thomas of the Auckland Branch of the Institute who invited me here today, and could I also acknowledge my old friend and colleague Di Lucas Chair of the Nature Heritage Fund. Finally the sponsors - Designsource and Hub Street Equipment.

Members of the Institute, Ladies and Gentlemen on behalf of the Auckland Regional Council welcome to Auckland. A special welcome to those who have travelled a long way to be here, especially our guests from overseas.

This conference takes place at a critical time in Auckland's history – there is much happening right now in the Auckland region, especially in terms of making real progress in building important civic infrastructure – especially transport infrastructure, especially public transport infrastructure – after a two generations of neglect and delay. The conference theme “Shift” therefore is very pertinent to this time and this place.

Perhaps the most significant event in terms of Auckland's social and political history taking place right now is the Royal Commission on Auckland Governance. The Royal Commission has a wide-ranging brief to examine the present regional and local government arrangements in Auckland and to make recommendations for a new system of local and regional government - a structure which will be designed to govern Auckland for the next 50 years. The implications for regional and local government are therefore profound

We in the Auckland Regional Council see the Commission as an opportunity of historic dimensions and therefore we are fully committed to assist the Commission to the best of our ability in its task of reshaping the *architecture* and therefore the political *landscape* of the Auckland Region - in the interests of present and future generations. So in many ways – our profession as politicians and bureaucrats has some similarities with yours.

And of course in terms of ARC's environmental management and planning responsibilities those similarities are more than just passing – our work and our objectives (if not our passions) have much in common.

Decisions made in local and regional government – or even in some cases – decision not made - can have a profound influence on the natural landscape and indeed the built environment of the City.

In Auckland our visitors will readily see for yourselves where the planning and decision making process has had a beneficial influence on the environment and where unfortunately (and all too often), it clearly has not.

But I won't go into that this morning.

The Auckland Region is now home to almost one third of New Zealanders and is continuing to grow disproportionately – I should say unsustainably – in comparison with the rest of the country, and yet the Auckland region constitutes only 2% of the New Zealand landmass.

The Auckland Regional Council's long held strategy imperative

has been to restrict urban sprawl and to manage growth - our main planning instrument within the Regional Growth Strategy has been the Metropolitan Urban Limits. This as you would expect is controversial - and is subject to ongoing opposition by some vociferous elements in the property development industry. However we believe a compact City is a far more desirable model for a whole number of reasons. Not only for the quality of life for our citizens, ease of getting around and sensible and economic use of resources - but to also protect remaining open space and landscape and also to protect the productive use of our rural land – in a hungry world.

The other instrument the ARC has used to protect the landscape is our Regional Parks network. The Auckland Region lies some 400 km from the nearest National Park and therefore in the early 60s the Regional leaders of the time led by Dove-Meyer Robinson with considerable foresight established the regional parks system.

Today there are 25 Regional Parks, covering some 40,000 hectares of land including the highly visible forested Waitakere Ranges and Hunua Ranges (major sources of Auckland's water supply) and 150 km of superb coastal landscape.

In regard to the Waitakere Ranges, it is great to see the regional park and the surrounding foothills have been give further protection with the Waitakere Ranges Heritage Protection Act passed into law just the other day

Back to the coast. Such is the relentless pressure of development and the limitations of statutory planning that on the eastern seaboard of the Hauraki Gulf, the only significant open space left is in the Auckland Regional Parks. Fortunately there are 11 regional parks along that coast, 5 to the south of the City and 6 to the North. And while on the subject of Regional Parks, tomorrow our latest regional park Atiu Creek Regional Park (not on the Hauraki Gulf but on the northern Kaipara) will be formally opened by the Governor General His Excellency Hon Anand Satyanand. The new park - all 843 ha was gifted to the people of New Zealand by Pierre and Jackie Chatelanats in an extraordinary act of generosity.

Then there is the Hauraki Gulf itself some 5000 sq km and 350 islands – an incredibly rich and productive maritime ecosystem – again thanks to the foresight of our ancestors many of these islands remain in pristine condition or are currently undergoing restoration projects to repair habitats and disrupted ecosystems.

Perhaps the most visually striking is the 700 year old volcano – Rangitoto which is a much-loved ever present feature of the Auckland landscape - a veritable Icon. After years of lobbying from a small number of conservationists including myself – the government (Department of Conservation) has agreed to remove all alien pests and predators from the island and its contiguous (and much older) neighbour Motutapu within the next 3 years. At 4000 or so hectares this then would form one of the biggest wildlife sanctuaries in New Zealand – bigger than Hauturu or little Barrier Island, and bigger than Kapiti Island– both world renowned wildlife sanctuaries and about 20 time bigger than the famous Tiritiri Matangi open sanctuary. And only a few minutes from the Auckland CBD! This would bring remarkable benefits for nature conservation, biodiversity, and education. Its impact on tourism would also bring major economic benefits

The Hauraki Gulf itself after years of lobbying by the conservation and recreational boating lobby had its national and international importance formally acknowledged in the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park of 2000 – I am sad to say the Park itself has yet to achieve its implicit promise – but I have no doubt that it will – some of us are working on that.

Back on the mainland the ARC Group through ARH and its subsidiaries Sea + City Ltd and Ports of Auckland is working to redevelop the Auckland waterfront – our focus has been on the 18 hectare Wynyard Point which we envisage as a mixed use area living and entertainment area which retains also the marine industry element. The capstone for that development we see is the 4.5 headland park. Further along the waterfront we are working with

Ports of Auckland to see the tremendous possibilities of Queens wharf being realized in terms of a new Cruise and Passenger ship terminal – publicly accessible and forming a maritime gateway to the region linking the City and the Pacific Ocean.

I spoke earlier of transport and public transport. One of the great Auckland success stories today is rail - rail passenger patronage has rocketed from 2 million trips per year 5 years ago to over 6 million today. This has given the ARC Group and Central government the confidence to give the green light to electrification which we hope to have the major elements in place by 2011. Rail is of course already undergoing a major upgrade in Auckland, with double tracking of the western line, the major reconstruction of Newmarket junction, new stations and so on led by our friends in Ontrack and ARTA.

In terms of landscape architecture one of our high priorities is to see the rail corridors transformed from its present state - unsightly weed infested urban slums - by having the weeds removed and replaced with suitable native plant species – along the same lines as the magnificent motorway plantings by Transit NZ . This would:

- 1 reduce opportunities for graffiti;
2. make the rail corridors look more attractive and
3. would also create potential wildlife corridors for native birds moving for instance between the inner Gulf islands and the Waitakere Ranges.

In closing can I express my personal admiration for your profession as landscape architects. I see your role as linking the built environment with the natural environment. Your technical ability is undoubted but I see you more than just technicians - you are also conservation biologists and perhaps most importantly artists. The Auckland region today has great need for your services.

Our common objective should be that our built environment aspires to match Auckland's peerless, sublime natural landscape.

I wish you all a very successful conference and I hope you enjoy your stay in Auckland,

Thank you.