

Mike Lee speech notes – 10th anniversary of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park. Motutapu Island 27 Feb 2009.

Toitu te Marae o Tane, toitu te Marae of Tangaroa, toitu te iwi – tihei Mauri ora. E nga mana, e nga reo, e nga rangatira maha, tena koutou, tena koutou tena koutou, katoa.

*E te Moana o Waitemata, tikapa Moana, te Moana nui a Toi – tena koe
E nga moutere rongonui, nga moutere ataahua tena koutou.*

Rau rangatira ma, te mana whenua o tikapa Moana, te Moana nui a Toi – nga mihi ki a koutou, no reira tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa.

Hon. Kate Wilkinson, Minister of Conservation,
My local government colleagues including the chair of the Hauraki Gulf Forum John Tregida, Local MP Nikki Kaye, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

10 years ago – parliament passed into law the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act. Though it was one of the first pieces of legislation of the then Labour Alliance coalition government, the antecedents of the Act were somewhat older, and the political parentage somewhat broader.

The Hauraki Gulf Marine Park is now 10 years old but like a tree the roots go down deeper. The beginnings of the Marine Park idea actually go back to the late 1980's when for some reason the government of the day decided to abolish the old Hauraki Gulf Maritime Park Board.

My good friend and former colleague the late Allan Brewster a member of the ARA/ARC and a long time chairman of the regional parks committee, was one of the first – as a spokesman for recreational boat owners - to raise the idea of a marine park and this was taken up by the National Minister of Conservation Denis Marshall.

In 1991 Denis Marshall set up the Hauraki Gulf Working Party led by Jim Holdaway who is with us today. Of course there was a huge amount of public interest in the proposal especially in Auckland. The Working Party received 764 submissions. After due deliberation and after considering a number of options the working Party reported back in 1992 and recommended a 'National Marine Park' over the whole Hauraki Gulf. Mr Holdaway's report to the Minister summed up the essence of the public attitude towards the Hauraki Gulf *"For many people the bottom line is environmental protection and enhancement. For example the Hauraki Maori Trust Board said: "We would concur with the premise that something must be done about Tikakapa Moana, and urgently."*

I recall being at the function in September 1992 at which the Minister Denis Marshall and the bright new local MP Christine Fletcher formally released Mr Holdaway's report. Unfortunately the good work of the government was undermined when in briefing the Auckland Mayoral Forum, the Minister found to his surprise and dismay that behind closed doors the Mayors were deeply hostile to the idea of a Hauraki Gulf Marine Park (doesn't that all sound familiar?). The Minister duly reported back to cabinet and after that momentum for a park was lost - but in 1995 very soon after Team NZ won the Americas Cup Minister Marshall held a meeting with Auckland conservationists and boaties at the Royal Akarana Yacht Club and at that meeting he pledged to us he would try again. Some months after that the Hon Nick Smith became Minister of Conservation and he took up the Marine Park cause. In 1999 Nick Smith had got the process as far as draft legislation with the assistance of Graeme Campbell but it was left to the incoming Helen Clark government and new

Conservation Minister Sandra Lee, a long-time advocate, to pass the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act into law.

My point is that Hauraki Gulf Marine Park, from the moment it was first proposed in the late 1980's, despite its rather long tortuous history, has enjoyed not only enjoyed the overwhelming public support but also strong political backing and ownership of both the two major political parties and across the political spectrum. It is fair to say – and I have had dealings with them all on this matter - that all the Ministers of Conservation - regardless of party affiliation from Denis Marshall onwards have all been strongly supportive of the Hauraki Gulf and the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park. I welcome and congratulate our new Minister of Conservation Hon Kate Wilkinson and demonstrated by her presence today I am sure she will be as equally supportive.

This principle of consensus and partnership is very much interwoven through the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act. Partnership between the government and Iwi and partnership between the Treaty Partners and local government.

All have rights and also responsibilities.

The Act is in three parts – the first part related to RMA matters and elevates the Gulf as a special area. Part 2 relates to the Hauraki Gulf Forum and Part 3 establishes the Park itself.

Its no secret to say that in the past I have been critical of the lack of action in maximising the opportunities that the marine park presents – and I am also remain critical of the tardiness that local government has exhibited in complying with its obligations under the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act especially complying with sections 7, 8, and 9 of the Act. Because of this negligence in terms of RMA decisions around the Hauraki Gulf – I am sorry to say it is still very much business as usual.

That is not what parliament intended and it is time that local government and the legal establishment woke up to the fact that the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act was enacted to recognise and 'protect and enhance' the 'special nature' of the Hauraki Gulf.

This will no longer be acceptable in the second decade of the Act's existence especially given the clear warnings from the scientists that agricultural and industrial sourced marine pollution will compromise the precious waters of the Gulf and its fisheries.

The solution to these problems are not easy but will be much more readily achieved when it is generally understood right across our society that the Hauraki Gulf is indeed a unique and special place that needs to be valued and protected. That is why this ceremony today and the related publicity is so important – because it will help raise public awareness of the uniqueness and importance of the Gulf.

For looking at the positive side of the ledger there is an enormous amount good news to be proud of. Here I would like to acknowledge not only the dedicated work of DoC but also that of the numerous community based conservation groups which have sprung up around the Gulf and whose remarkable citizen volunteer efforts are making a significant difference.

Let us take an imaginary voyage through the Gulf – sailing in from the north as it were. First of all we come to Great Barrier Island – Aotea – nearly 28,000 ha

containing the biggest area of publicly-owned conservation land in the Auckland region. Great Barrier has strong representation here today led by the chair of the GBI Community Board Paul Downie. Great Barrier is free of possums, mustelids and Norway rats – it has extensive areas of kauri forest, and significant numbers of Kaka parrots, brown teal and black petrels. However the island also has ship rats in abundance and removing them from such a vast area constitutes a major technical challenge. All credit then to Judy Gilbert and the Great Barrier Charitable Island Trust for articulating a vision of a rat-free Great Barrier Island which would not only have a major positive impact on natural biodiversity but also on the island's economy in terms of eco-tourism and other benefits. Congratulations also to Judy and the Windy Hill Trust landowners for walking the talk and showing the way in suppressing rats and feral cats in their nature sanctuary near Tryphena.

Congratulations also to Tony Bouzaid yachtsman-come-conservationist at Port Fitzroy – Over the last two years Tony has built a predator-proof fence and removed all pests from his 60 ha Glenfern Sanctuary. The change in bird life there now is quite remarkable

Lying at the entrance to Port Fitzroy is Kaikoura Island – Motu Kaikoura – this island of 535 ha was purchased in 2004 by the joint efforts thanks to the leadership of former Minister of Conservation Chris Carter, of the government (Nature Heritage Fund), the ASB Community Trust, Auckland local government – especially the Auckland Regional Council after a long public campaign. Now it is ably managed by the Motu Kaikoura Trust led by Harry Doig and its redoubtable caretaker Will Scarlett. In 2008 the Motu Kaikoura Trust eradicated a population of fallow deer from the island and organised and paid for an aerial bait drop to remove rodents from Kaikoura, Nelson and Motuhaku Islands and the Grey Group of islands which have existing and potential value for seabirds.

ets us a few nautical miles south to a the Maori owned Broken Island group lying off a few nautical miles to the south. The Broken Islands include Rangiahua, Mahuki (with its remarkable gannet colony), Little Mahuki, and Motutaiko. In 2007 the Ngati Rehua Trust Board approached me requesting that the ARC help the islands' owners, the Ngawaka family to eradicate rats from those islands. This we were only too pleased to agree to and in 2009, ARC Biosecurity completed the mission thus enabling important petrel and muttonbird breeding on those islands to be protected and restored. Of course removing rats from islands is one thing – keeping them off quite another and the ARC will be working with the landowners to ensure rats do not re-establish.

Let us sail on across the strait to Hauturu/Little Barrier Island - the world-renowned wildlife sanctuary - and congratulate DoC for its superb management – and notably for eradicating in 2004 Pacific rats. Thus returning Hauturu to virtually pristine condition and enabling huge benefits to a whole range of native species from tuatara to Cooks petrel. The department's work has been well supported by the Little Barrier Island (Hauturu) Supporters Trust, led by Ruud Kleinpaste and more recently by John Hagen.

On the northern horizon we will make out the Moko Hinau islands which have become so important as a strong hold for sea bird breeding since DoC removed rats in the 1990s. Here we should recall the remarkable rediscovery of the New Zealand storm petrel believed to be extinct for over 150 years. Its sudden reappearance in the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park in 2003 caused a sensation in ornithological circles all around the world. Seabird scientists led by Chris Gaskin believe that the evidence points to this mysterious bird breeding somewhere on the Mokohinau Islands. Its

reappearance (perhaps in the nick of time) suggests its numbers have recovered from near extinction as the result of the removal of rats by DoC. Good luck to Chris and his team in locating this breeding place.

Now we are now sailing close Mangawhai-Pakiri coast – where the ARC is developing two spectacular new regional parks at Te Arai and at Pakiri. Southward we sail past the famous Goat Island Marine Reserve – and rat free Goat island (15ha) and the Auckland University Marine research centre beyond - part of the vision of marine scientist Bill Ballantine. Onward we sail past the ARC managed Tawharanui marine protected area - soon we hope with government approval to be transformed into a fully fledged–Tawharanui marine reserve – which will be added into the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park. The Tawharanui marine reserve will be contiguous with the popular Tawharanui Regional Park and the Tawharanui Open Sanctuary. Can I also acknowledge here the work of the ARC heritage scientists and park rangers for the remarkable achievement at Tawharanui. Thanks also to our TOSSI volunteers. Behind the pest-proof fence a whole range of native bird species are thriving – remarkably bellbirds returned spontaneously from Hauturu in 2005 and are breeding on the northern New Zealand mainland for the first time since the 1860s. Grey-faced petrels have also reappeared and have been recorded breeding on the mainland in this area for the first time in living memory. Robins, whiteheads, kiwis, brown teal and red fronted kakariki parakeets have been introduced by ARC and DoC and are all doing well.

Let's sail on southward to historic Kawau Island (2050 ha) and Mansion House Bay famous for being the home of Governor George Grey. We should here acknowledge the work of the Friends of Mansion House, Kiwi Care Trust, Pohutukawa Trust, and the Wintle Trust. Kawau has been extensively modified over the years but that being said, in addition to its historic heritage values it has important populations of North Island weka and North Island Brown kiwi. The ARC is working with the community on plans to eradicate all exotic pests from the island while setting aside some space for Governor Grey's wallabies and arboretum of exotic trees from all around the world which we recognise as having heritage value.

To the south of Kawau lies Motuora Island (85ha)– Motuora is pest free despite the odd attempt by members of the rat fraternity to move in. Thanks to the patient and methodical work of the Motuora Restoration Society over nearly 20 years the island is now extensively regenerating with important introduced populations of NI brown kiwi, whitehead, Duvaucels gecko and diving petrel. The diving petrel introductions is interesting as the translocation of seabirds is a new and very important aspect of conservation management and the island has become an important hatchery for kiwi which are then transferred to other islands and protected areas such as Tawharanui.

Motuora was actually the second island in the Gulf to be actively restored – but the first and most famous is someway off to the south Tiritiri Matangi. When it became the first 'open sanctuary' Tiritiri changed the whole paradigm of conservation management and set the standards for all that has followed. From bare wind-swept paddocks 25 years ago to lush native vegetation ringing with bird song today Tiri remains the shining example of what can be done by committed government agencies, working with the scientific community and thousands of dedicated volunteers,

Let us pay tribute then to the members of the old Hauraki Gulf Maritime Park Board, including my friend Ted Lees, to the officers of the old Lands & Survey Department, to Prof John Craig and Neil Mitchell from Auckland University, to Ray and Barbara Walter and to DoC but especially all those many thousands of citizen volunteers led

at first by the Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society and then so ably by the remarkably successful Friends of Tiritiri Matangi who in 20 years completely transformed this island into a living breathing example of pristine historic New Zealand. If the restoration of Tiri created the template for island restorations then the Friends of Tiri ably led by chair Peter Lee are the exemplar for island conservation volunteer groups.

Lying close by Tiri is the Whangaparoa Peninsula and the ARC Shakespear Regional Park – before we go out of business at the end of the year the ARC intends to build a pest-free open sanctuary on the same lines as Tawharanui. A sod-turning ceremony for the predator-proof fence is scheduled to take place next week. And while we have a hard-working TOSSI volunteers at Tawharanui, at Shakespear we already have an energetic fund-raising SOSSI.

Lets now tack across to the Noises Islands – Otata, Motuhoropapa, Maria or Ruapuke and numerous islets and stacks - significant islands in terms of conservation value and those values are well protected in the stewardship of private owners Rod, Zoe and Sue Neureuter. Here on the Noises the very first experimental attempts to eradicate rats from islands were carried out in the 1980s. The islands are now rat free and the ARC and Auckland City at the request of the Neureuters have organised the removal of boxthorn from Ruapuke or Maria Island – home to an important colony of white-faced storm petrels – the nearest petrel colony to Auckland.

Nearby lies Rakino Island, almost totally privately owned but its size 147 ha and its position lying between Motutapu and the Noises makes it strategically important. I am proud to say that the ARC at the request of the Rakino Island Ratepayers Association using bait stations removed a destructive population of Norway rats from the island in 2000. Now that Rakino has been rodent-free for some 10 years, the constant reinvasion of the neighbouring Noises has stopped and bellbirds, probably from Tiri have colonised both Rakino and the Noises. A special acknowledgement of the work resident conservationist John McKenzie for his efforts.

And now entering the inner Gulf we come to my home island of Waiheke Island where last year Rob Fenwick had his privately-owned land the 350 ha Te Matuku peninsula included in the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park. This coming May the Auckland Regional Council in association with Landcare Research with the consent of DoC will be transferring some 200 bellbirds sourced from both Tawharanui Regional Park, and Tiritiri Matangi Island, to Rob's predator managed Te Matuku peninsula, and to similar managed Whakanewha Regional Park (270 ha), to Motuihe Island and to the Hamilton Gardens. This will be one of the biggest and complex bird translocations ever – certainly looked forward to avidly by conservationists especially on Waiheke and Motuihe Islands and indeed Hamilton.

To the east of Waiheke lies Rotoroa Island 90 ha which has been dramatically transformed over the past two years by the seven member Rotoroa Island Trust chaired by high-flying businessman Chris Liddell and managed by John Gow. Thanks to business philanthropists Neil and Annette Plowman who are generously funding the restoration work. This project has already seen 20,000 pine trees removed, and chipped and their replacement with thousands of native trees – 400,000 before the project is finished. The island will have a small number of private homes and the rest of the island will be open to the public next year.

To the west of Waiheke lies Motuihe Island 195 ha. 10 years ago – despite appearances from a distance Motuihe was a rural slum, overrun with rabbits and being engulfed in invasive weeds. It was the island concessionaire Ronnie Harrison

who called a group of us together in that auspicious year 2000 to form the Motuihe Trust and since that time under the dynamic leadership of chairman John Laurence the Trust supported by DoC and thousands of volunteers has literally transformed the island. Since 235,000 native plants have been planted and saddlebacks, kakariki and little spotted kiwi have been released and are thriving. This year 55,000 more trees will be planted, with more little spotted kiwi to be released in March and bellbirds in May. Motuihe Island really is now a precious jewel.

Lest not forget the small islands. Halfway between Motuihe and Waiheke lies tiny Crusoe Island – or Papakohatu. One of several hundred stacks and islands of less than 1 hectare scattered throughout the Gulf which have important existing or potential conservation values - especially for seabirds. The island was a research project of mine when I was doing my Master of Science degree and I was able to remove a population of mice. Since that time with the help of ARC biosecurity and volunteers all weeds have been removed and the islet is now in pristine condition. Early in January the ARC and scientists Massey University Albany campus released shore skinks on the island and later in the year we will release more shore skinks and common geckoes.

And now finally we come to Motutapu – the restoration of Motutapu Island began, I well recall on a stormy Saturday in 1993 – led at first by Jim Holdaway, Rob Fenwick and now for many years by Christ Fletcher, the Motutapu Restoration Trust have planted well over half a million trees and perhaps even more importantly removed a huge amount of weeds. Chris has been ably supported by a small but formidable group of women Mary Flaws, Bridget Winstone and Belinda Vernon. Last year the Restoration Trust initiated the fantastic Dual Traverse a marathon/half marathon and mountain bike ride across Motutapu/Rangitoto which was a remarkable success – and very much in the spirit of the recreational and tourism objectives of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park. Congratulations to the Great Barrier Community Board for initiating the similar wharf to wharf (from Tryphena to Fitzroy) run – and for MP Nikki Kaye for completing it.

And of course Motutapu cannot be considered without taking into account Rangitoto. The two islands though millions of years apart in terms of geologic age are joined-at-the-hip – a double island comprising nearly 4000 hectares of very diverse topography and habitat. Together these two islands are significantly bigger than New Zealand's most renowned wildlife sanctuary, the internationally famous Little Barrier Island – and is nearly 20 times bigger than Tiritiri Matangi.

Last year DoC Auckland Conservancy undertook what most people would agree would be the single the most important conservation programme in the history of the Hauraki Gulf. The successful removal of ship rats, Norway rats, mice, stoats, feral cats, and rabbits virtually in one stroke over such a large area was unprecedented in the history of conservation science and a truly remarkable achievement. Congratulations then to Sean Goddard, Richard Griffiths and Brett Butland and their team for this outstanding achievement – a world first in conservation science.

The benefits for natural biodiversity conservation, education, and tourism and for the quality of life of Aucklanders that such a pest-free wildlife sanctuary, thriving with native birds and reptiles, only a few minutes by fast ferry from the Auckland CBD will bring are huge.

Of all the wonderful work, and achievements I have talked about a pest free Rangitoto/Motutapu has got to be the crowning achievement. Because of this work the future is bright indeed.

I have only touched on some of the work – work that is going on now and will take place in the future. Much remains to be done – especially in integrating the management of the park and promoting it both in New Zealand and around the world. One aspect I feel strongly about is the need to work much more closely with the recreational boating community – after all in many respects they were the people who proposed the idea of a marine park in the first place.

So 10 years on – with “ the future set fair” - it can be truly said that we are at last “breathing life into the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park”.