

***New Perspectives on the Gulf* A symposium to celebrate 10th anniversary of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park. 30 March 2010**
Mike Lee speech notes

Kia ora koutou. On behalf of the Auckland Regional Council and the Auckland War Memorial Museum welcome to *New Perspectives on the Gulf* – a symposium to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park. Here today there are an impressive list of speakers all experts in their fields who will present on many and varied aspects of the Hauraki Gulf and the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park. Before I begin my opening address can I express our thanks to the management and staff of the Auckland Museum for their support and especially for providing the superb venue.

10 years and one month ago – parliament passed into law the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act.

And 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 beginnings of the Marine Park idea actually go back to the late 1980's when quite unfortunately the government of the day decided to abolish the former Hauraki Gulf Maritime Park.

My friend and colleague the late Allan Brewster, a member of the ARA/ARC and 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 to replace the maritime park and this was taken up in 1990 by the National spokesman on Conservation Denis Marshall – who the same year became Minister of Conservation.

In 1991 Denis Marshall set up the Hauraki Gulf Working Party led by Jim Holdaway and including Marjorie van Roon and Jan Crawford. Jim Holdaway needs no introduction, a decorated World War 2 serviceman, (DFC and bar) founding member of the ARA, a chairman of ARA regional parks, and later chair of the Conservation Board. Not surprisingly there was a considerable amount of interest in the idea especially in Auckland. Jim Holdaway's Working Party received 764 submissions. After due deliberation and after considering a number of options the working Party reported back in 1992 with a wonderful comprehensive report recommending 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."* Actually when one thinks about it there are a whole lot of reasons why Jim Holdaway should be considered the 'father' of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park.

I recall being at a function in September 1992 at which the Minister Denis Marshall and the bright new local MP Christine Fletcher formally released the Holdaway report. A further round of submissions ensued. Unfortunately the good work of the government was undermined when in briefing the Auckland Mayoral Forum, Minister Marshall (as he told me at the time) was rather stunned to find out that behind closed doors the Mayors of Auckland 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 for a time. 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 Minister 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 very appropriately new Conservation Minister Sandra Lee, a long-time Marine Park 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 overwhelming public support but also strong political backing and ownership of both the two major parliamentary parties and of parties 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. But that being said there has always been a counter force in play – a sort of anti Marine Park undertow as exemplified by the attitude of the Mayors of the time and I have to say the resistant, negative attitude has quietly persisted over the last 10 years. It is especially apparent in what I would call the 'RMA sector' – in the attitude of certain planners, council officers, lawyers and even Environment Court judges have been quite dismissive of the Act. Nevertheless the Marine Park Act is a fact - and if compliance with the HGMPA makes the RMA consenting process somewhat more exacting – well then good – because that's exactly what it was designed to do. The Act is in three parts – the first part related to RMA matters and elevates the Gulf as a special area in terms of planning and consents. Part 2 relates to the Hauraki Gulf Forum and Part 3 establishes the Park itself.

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

All have rights and all have responsibilities.

Its no secret to say that over the past 10 years 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, 9, 10, and.13 of the Act – and indeed s32 *Purposes of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park*. Because of this negligence, in terms of RMA decisions and environmental impacts in and 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 passed into law to recognise and proactively 'protect and enhance' the 'special nature' of the Hauraki Gulf the CMA and islands of which now constitute a Park.

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

Heavy metals from the Auckland conurbation accumulating in harbour estuaries in the harbour itself is one major concern – another is the enormous amount of nitrogen run-off now occurring in the Firth of Thames. This has been reported by Environment Waikato scientists notably Peter Singleton as 32 truck loads of Urea per week. There is a real concern that if nothing is done to control this run-off then we will be facing the horrific prospect of a large anoxic dead zone in the Hauraki Gulf within 20 years. There are stark lessons to be learned from the United States, there because of run-off from animal waste in recent years there has been a proliferation of these oxygen depleted dead zones (some 230 so far) in US coastal marine waters such as in the Gulf of Mexico and in Chesapeake Bay (America's equivalent to the Hauraki Gulf) which as heavily populated as this area is there is more nutrient pollution from farm animals than from human sewage.

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 the celebrations around the 10th anniversary of the Park including this symposium today and the publicity generated from

these events are so important – because they help raise public awareness of the importance and specialness of the Hauraki Gulf.

And the Gulf is important – and quite special for so many reasons.

Some 13,900 sq km of plankton-rich sea, warmed by the sub-tropical east Auckland current and fed by streams and coastal estuaries draining catchments extending over 100km inland – almost to Rotorua. This benign combination of factors provides the habitats and the nutrients to support highly productive marine ecosystems which in turn support millions of seabirds, as well as lizards, plants and invertebrates.

And then there are the islands - extrapolating from Appendix 1 of the DoC publication *Register of Northern Offshore Islands* compiled by Graeme Taylor way back in 1989, the number of islands, within the Gulf proper, including reefs, stacks and sandbars, is 425. If you count only the permanently dry areas, those which support terrestrial plant life, the number of islands is 351 – ranging from Great Barrier at nearly 28,000 to rock stacks or islets as small as 0.5 of a hectare but which may support the breeding of 100s of seabirds.

Then there is the remarkable bird life – the conservation islands of the Gulf provide critically important refugia for a large proportion of New Zealand's forest bird species – but less appreciated is the importance of the Hauraki Gulf for seabirds. In fact it could be argued that the Hauraki Gulf is the world capital of sea birds.

Again as Graeme Taylor has pointed out – this time much more recently.

“The Auckland region from the Kaipara Harbour to the Waikato River in the west and the Hauraki Gulf from the Poor Knights Islands south to Thames and out to Great Barrier Island encompass one of the richest seabird habitats on the planet. Ninety-six seabird species have been reported from this area (about a quarter of the world's seabird species). These include 25 breeding species (and two possible breeders), 22 regular visiting species, 24 rare visiting species and 24 vagrant species. Three seabird species now only breed in the Hauraki Gulf region (NZ fairy tern, black petrel and Buller's shearwater). Graeme notes that at least four breeding species are in decline but on the other hand at least seven seabird species are making a comeback. These include Cook's petrel, Pycroft's petrel, grey-faced petrel, northern diving petrel, little shearwater, black-billed gulls and Australasian gannets.”

Lets then talk about the positive side of the ledger for there is an enormous amount of good news to celebrate. 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 is free of possums, mustelids and Norway rats – it has extensive areas of kauri forest, and significant populations of Kaka parrots, brown teal and black petrels. However the island's sub tropical forest supports ship rats in abundance and removing them from such a vast area constitutes a major challenge. All credit then to Judy Gilbert and John Ogden and the Great Barrier Charitable Island Trust for articulating a vision of a rat-free Great Barrier Island. A rat free Great Barrier 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 trying to lead by example in managing 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 of the Nature Heritage Fund, the ASB

Community Trust, Auckland local government – especially the Auckland Regional Council after a long public campaign. Here I would like to thank the Native Forest Restoration Trust, Brian Rudman of the *NZ Herald* and the Minister of Conservation at the time Chris Carter. Motu Kaikoura is managed by the Motu Kaikoura Trust led by Harry Doig. In 2008 the Trust eradicated a population of fallow deer from the island (the first time this had been achieved) and funded two aerial bait drops to remove rodents from Kaikoura, and also the neighbouring Nelson and Motuhaku and Grey Group islands – all of which are important for seabirds.

A few nautical miles to the south of these islands lay the Maori owned Broken Island group. The Broken Islands include Rangiahua, Mahuki (notable for its remarkably large gannet colony and important population of Cooks Scurvy grass), Little Mahuki, and Motutaiko. In 2007 the Ngati Rehua Trust Board as part of the consent process around Kaikoura rat eradication approached me requesting that the ARC help the islands' owners, the Ngawaka family to eradicate rats from those islands. They came to the right guy! The ARC was only too pleased to agree to this and in September 2009, the ARC Biosecurity department completed the mission. The removal of ship rats from these islands will enable important petrel and muttonbird breeding sites 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 over many years – notably for eradicating in 2004 Pacific rats. This has essentially returned Hauturu to a virtually pristine condition and has enabled huge benefits for a whole range of native taxa - from tuatara to Cooks petrel and I'm sure numerous plant species. The department's work has been well supported by the Little Barrier Island (Hauturu) Supporters Trust.

On the northern horizon we will see the Moko Hinau islands which have become 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 have been extinct for over 150 years. Its sudden reappearance within the waters of 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 the NZSP breeding somewhere on the Mokohinau Islands. Its reappearance suggests its numbers have recovered (perhaps in the nick of time) from near extinction most likely as the result of the removal of rats by DoC. Good luck to Chris and his team in their endeavours in locating the breeding place of this remarkable bird.

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) important for Grey Faced petrels 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 - the island has also 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 earmarked for active restoration – but the first and most famous is somewhat 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 Hauraki Gulf Maritime Park Board and the Lands and Survey Department - to John Craig and Neil Mitchell of Auckland University - for the Tiri open sanctuary was very much their vision and 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 took place on 2 March and the fence should be completed by mid May. 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 – which I believe is the nearest petrel colony to Auckland.

Nearby lies Rakino Island, subdivided in the 60s and 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 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 support 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 Rotorua Island 90 ha which has been dramatically transformed over the past two years by the seven member Rotorua Island Trust chaired by ex-pat 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 2003 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, and a couple of weeks ago a further 26 little spotted kiwi were released. And of course bellbirds will be released there in May. Motuihe Island really has been transformed into a precious jewel of the Hauraki Gulf.

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 15 years ago and as part of that research I was able to eradicate a population of mice. Since that time with the help of ARC biosecurity and volunteers all weeds have been removed and Crusoe is now in pristine condition. Early in January the ARC and scientists Massey University Albany campus released shore skinks on the island and a second batch of from Tawharanui were released there last week - next month we hope to release 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 especially supported by a small but formidable group of women Mary Flaws, Bridget Winstone and Belinda Vernon. Last year the Restoration Trust initiated the fantastic *Motutapu/Rangitoto Dual Traverse* marathon/half marathon which was a remarkable success – and very much in the spirit of the recreational and tourism objectives of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park.

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. Here I must acknowledge the Ferry companies Fullers and 360 especially – their support has been absolutely vital to these island restoration projects.

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.

What needs to happen next is the completion of a Hauraki Gulf Marine Park visual identity or logo, the erection of signs at key points to let people know that there is a Marine Park and for a purpose-designed DoC managed web site to promote the Marine Park both at home and around the world. Work for this is, I am pleased to say is underway and progressing well. But a lot more needs to be done also – such as to involve the important recreational boating sector ideally represented by the Royal New Zealand Yacht Squadron and other boat clubs into Park associated activities. For instance the Louis Vuitton and BMW yacht racing should really be promoted also as Marine Park events - after all it was the recreational boating fraternity who were very much to the fore proposing a marine park in the first place.

In terms of the impressive conservation restoration work being carried out on numerous Gulf Islands – this needs to be coordinated and integrated into a Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Management Plan – perhaps as a subset of the DoC Conservation Management Strategy.

That all being said, there is much to celebrate. 10 years on - it can be truly said that we are at last “breathing life into the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park” and therefore the “future is set fair”.