

worst offender in destroying natural estuarine systems.

Paihia, in the Bay of Islands, dumps its rubbish at the head of an estuary — just over the hill from the tourist heartland. Rubbish tips on mudflats are still common in provincial New Zealand. Whangarei City has a massive landfill operation on the harbour shoreline. And in the country's largest metropolitan area, Devonport Borough has been progressively reclaiming Ngataranga Bay with its rubbish for many years.

All these destructive practices must stop.

Sewage and waste

Another insidious threat to the coastal environment is the tradition of discharging sewage and industrial waste into the sea.

Of particular concern to the Maori people, this practice at best offends community values and at worst constitutes a health hazard. It is true that you could — if you were keen — drink some effluent, but the standard of treatment is often a function of costs and of operator efficiency. Things can and do go wrong.

It is time the alternatives to the cheapest disposal option — sea discharge — were looked at more seriously.

Verge of collapse

Perhaps the best example of the commercial benefits of conservation lies in the fishing industry. Our coastal waters provide a potentially self-sustaining food resource if managed properly.

The inshore fishery, 'controlled' by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, has in recent times been on the verge of collapse. Overexploitation, mainly the responsibility of plundering trawlers, has devastated a once bountiful resource and put the industry on notice of the importance of sound conservation management.

It is here that we go back to where we began: the estuaries and saltmarshes must be protected if the inshore fishery is to survive.

Over six central government departments and dozens of regional and local bodies administer New Zealand's foreshores and coastal waters. Jurisdictions overlap and land/sea boundaries are poorly defined.

While developers flaunt the law and exploit the ineptitude of the system, conservation flounders. The only way of formally protecting marine areas, the Marine Reserves Act, has been a notable failure. In the past 10 years only a paltry two marine reserves have been created. To add insult, last year one of them was reduced in size.

The ecological ideal of a reserve covering a unified area of land, intertidal zone and underwater has proved far too difficult. How can Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries actually agree with the Lands & Survey Department to create such a reserve when MAF has such a poor record of creating purely marine reserves?

New era

Fortunately, all these horrors may be behind us. The Department of Conservation (DOC), which comes into existence on 1 January 1987, will take over most ad-

ministrative and management functions for the coastline. Common sense appears to have prevailed, and for the first time a single agency will be responsible for both land and water reserves, and for issuing reclamation approvals.

Other powers currently vested incongruously in the Ministry of Transport will be transferred to DOC. The Minister of Conservation, Russell Marshall, will be in a powerful position to shape a new ethos in coastal management. And we should not forget Transport Minister Richard Prebble who has willingly given up part of his portfolio responsibilities in the interests of conservation.

These changes herald a new era. DOC, with its role as conservation advocate, will be able to take a firm line in exercising its responsibilities. Developments impinging on coastal values will have to pass fresh tests before obtaining approvals.

The Government in fact appears to have adopted most of the submissions presented by Forest & Bird to the Ad Hoc Cabinet Committee on Environmental Restructuring.

In a paper prepared by the authors, the Society argued amongst other matters —

- that the Department of Conservation be given responsibility under the appropriate legislation for the administration and management of foreshores and coastal waters including issuing grants of control.
 - that the Department of Conservation be given responsibility for protection of marine mammals.
 - that the Department of Conservation be given responsibility for marine reserves.
- These three crucial areas of concern to conservationists have been accepted.

Maritime planning

DOC will also have a new role in approving the establishment of Maritime Planning Authorities. Maritime planning is a worthy concept that has never amounted to much. Just as we plan for the land by zoning for varying uses in different areas, so too the theory goes, we should plan for the water — or at least for harbours.

The only maritime authorities approved and established to date are the Waitemata, Manukau, Wellington and Marlborough ones.

The tragedy of maritime planning is that usually it is the harbour board that is given the task. But those outfits are development oriented — their principle task being that of a port authority. They lack the more neutral stance required to act as a planning agency, balancing the sometimes competing interests of conservation and development. Rumours have it that they may be corporatised soon.

As a result of research including a nationwide survey of local authorities, we have concluded that there is *no need* for the establishment of maritime planning authorities. Most harbours can be adequately controlled by the district planning process — simply dealing with the waters as part of the district scheme. In the very few instances where there are a number of councils bordering a harbour, the regional or united council may be the best agency.

In the Bay of Islands, for example, the Bay County already has the waters of the harbour within its district, but has not done any planning because everyone is waiting for a maritime planning authority to be set up. Yet the Hokianga County is making considerable progress in planning for its harbour — because there is no maritime planning authority vying for the job. Fortunately the Northland Harbour Board has flagged away the maritime planning role altogether — after pressure from Forest & Bird and others.

Thus maritime planning is actually hindering planning for harbours, not facilitating it!

The Department of Conservation holds the key to the protection and wise use of our precious coastline. We must encourage it to develop a conscious strategy of coastal conservation. This should ideally remedy some of the mistakes of the past — such as failed reclamations. It must also mean a fundamental shift in attitudes and a much greater emphasis on conservation values for the future.

Widespread change pervades environmental administration in the 1980s. Those changes may yet save our remaining coastline.



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WAITEMATA HARBOUR MARITIME PLAN

The Auckland Harbour Board's Draft Maritime Plan is bad news for the conservation of the Waitemata Harbour.

- Pollen Island, the most important flora and fauna site on the harbour is identified as a future container port. This saltmarsh island in the middle of the city has the harbour's last fernbird colony.
- Many conservation zones have approved reclamations within them.
- Important mangrove areas throughout the Waitemata Harbour and Tamaki River have been left out of the conservation zones.

The plan is a guide for squeezing port revenue out of the harbour. It disregards the needs of conservation and passive recreation. Forest and Bird believes Harbour Boards are totally inappropriate bodies for maritime planning; this maritime plan shows why.