

# COASTAL WORKSHOP

## THE NEW WAVE by Mark Bellingham Society Conservation Officer

*For the first time in 150 years of European government in New Zealand, our coasts may receive proper administration and protection — certainly this is the best chance we have of achieving this.*



Society Conservation Officer Mark Bellingham addresses the Forest and Bird coastal workshop on a hill overlooking Manukau Harbour. Photo: Ken Spencer

The above theme for Forest and Bird's recent Coastal Workshop in Auckland was also laid down as a challenge to participants who had come from regions as far off as Whangarei and Wellington, and included local Maori, Auckland Regional Authority and Harbour Board representatives, as well as many other concerned conservationists.

The morning's field trip started at Tahuna Torea Wildlife Reserve, an urban coastal area nestled in Auckland's eastern suburbs that was once destined to become a rubbish tip until locals forced a change in plans. We

were accosted by ducks and pukeko, and were impressed by the large number of godwits feeding nearby. The reserve is also a stop-off point on an extensive coastal walkway.

From there we travelled up the Tamaki Estuary past thousands of moored boats (it is New Zealand's densest pleasure craft area) to the heart of Auckland's industrial belt. Ecologist Gordon Maxwell met us at the site of the Christmas 1984 ICI chemical fire, when five million litres of chemicals spewed out into the Tamaki Estuary. Gordon's ecological monitoring has shown the

extraordinary resilience and recovery powers of marine organisms, but a long term heavy metal problem remains.

On Manukau Harbour, 80 years of heavy industry have made Mangere Inlet New Zealand's most polluted estuary. Chemical wastes still leach into the harbour and the largest mangrove area is "trapped" between the railway tracks at Westfield Railway Station.

A coastal field trip would not be complete without a visit to the Mangere sewage treatment plant! We viewed the world's largest treatment ponds from the safe perspective of the magnificent bush-clad cliffs of Wai-kowhai at Mt Roskill. But even there, Auckland's largest kohekohe and kowhai forest is threatened by housing sub-division.

The main theme of the speakers and workshops was to develop a new direction for coastal conservation.

Mrs Nganeko Minhinnick explained the tragedy of the tangata whenua of the Manukau — how they had been dispossessed of their kai moana and land, and how their culture was being debased by the sewage and industrial wastes which continue to pour into the Tainui foodbowl — the Manukau Harbour. She made a plea for respect of the coast and a recognition of Maori cultural values.

Society advocate on coastal issues Gary Taylor and the author echoed this by stating that when local authorities planned for water areas they had to accept an obligation to plan for permanent living systems

### Department of Conservation

### Kaitiaki of the Coastal Estate.

*The following is an abridged version of an address made to the Auckland coastal seminar by the Director-General of the Conservation Department, Ken Piddington.*

Thank you for your invitation to be here and to address you today. I applaud your concern for our coastal heritage which has brought us together on this unique isthmus. This workshop represents a turning point for the conservation movement just as the environmental administration represents in my view a maturing in our perceptions for the management of New Zealand's public estate, and in particular the coastal zone. Until the events of the last two years there was neither an environmental group nor a

public administration focus on the coastal zone area as an entity in its own right.

What is the appropriate form of trusteeship to be afforded our commons? The coastal zone encapsulates all elements of and pressures of management of the commons. Its present state reflects the mismanagement of the past. But without the coastal assets that we take for granted what would our identity as New Zealanders be? I remember the mudflats and the mangroves of the Waitemata. I even caught snapper in the harbour, capsized my sailing dinghy and collected driftwood on the Northcote foreshore. After some 35 years the rhythm of the tides and the sunrise on the water still say powerful things to me.

The major problems really relate to our perceptions as a society and the stage of maturity (or lack of it) that we have collectively reached. In my view, if we go back — 10 or even 5 years ago — we find that New Zealand was not ready for conservation management of our public estate, our heritage — nga taonga katoa a Aotearoa. It is debatable whether or not we are ready now but I can report a wave of enthusiasm for DOC and what it represents. Different techniques have to be used and DOC will embody that element of the role of the Crown which is not one of ownership but one of trusteeship. DOC itself is a caretaker and owns none of the estate, in the case of the highly protected estate this function becomes one of Kaitiaki or Guardian.

Constitutionally I think it is important to test the model which Government in open consultation in 1984–85 arrived at.

The Government has given the Department of Conservation responsibility for the Marine Reserves Act and the Marine Mammals Act in the marine setting and for the coastal area, and responsibility for aspects of the Harbours Act. Except for commercial port areas, within which the Ministry of Transport will retain all existing functions under the Harbours Act, marine and coastal administration will be carried out on a functional basis. DOC will have responsibility for the allocation of space and managing the public interest — in other words, from the mean high water zone to the 12-mile limit, the foreshore and seabed will be administered by DOC under its stewardship role.

What then are the implications for coastal zone management? The most dramatic is the integration of activities under the DOC umbrella. DOC will be responsible for the promotion and management of reserves, from the mountain tops to outlying islands. This has particular significance for harbour and inter-tidal areas and allows for the management of broader but related groupings of habitats and wildlife.

Yesterday I visited Okiwi, an estuarine system on Great Barrier Island. It is a classic, and happily still intact example of the inter-relationship between land use and water quality. Since it contains the habitat of about 50 percent of the endangered brown teal population, it is a system of international importance. An area of farmland has been acquired by the Crown to act as a buffer for this habitat. It is typical of such conservation areas that they contain a