

PARTIES COME TO THE TABLE

Since 2002, when the Advocates began calling for all the parties to come together to develop a management plan for the Tongariro River, there have been times of activity and times of prolonged silence. Eventually, in December 2006, Environment Waikato (EW) produced a plan, but it was not a catchment management plan but rather a flood protection plan, and is not far reaching enough.

After nearly six years, a break through has come as a result of the River Management Forum meeting in October this year, where Graeme Nhakies, Advocates member and advisor to the Advocates committee, tabled his review of EW's management plan, which the Advocates had commissioned. The Advocates are ensuring that the momentum created at that meeting of the forum is maintained, by accepting a very welcome invitation from Turangitukua to attend the next meeting of the River Management Forum on the Turangitukua marae. This is the first time we have been invited to meet on the marae, and consider it an honour and a significant milestone.

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE LOCAL DIDYMO RESPONSE TEAM

The Regional Didymo Action Plan was put to the test in the Central North Island with the announcement, at the end of October, that Didymo cells had been found in a number of central North Island rivers. Thankfully, it turned out to be a false positive finding, as only dead cells were detected in the full range of tests.

The central North Island is one of the few regions in New Zealand to have the benefit of a high quality, comprehensive Didymo response plan. This is thanks to work over a number of months by staff from DoC,

Genesis Energy, and Biosecurity, in consultation with representative stakeholder groups including the Tuwharetoa Trust Board, Horizon District Council, Environment Waikato, Taupo District Council, Fish and Game NZ, the NZ Canoe Association and the Advocates.

When the test came, the plan provided a solid basis for the operation on the ground, and will be adapted to incorporate what was learned from the October operation. Sound use of local knowledge and well-developed networks among staff of key agencies involved added significant value to the operation. Our appreciation also goes to Genesis Energy who provided a base, support and sustenance for those involved.

FERAL PINES ERADICATION PROJECT

You may wonder why some of the pine trees along the river are turning brown and dying off. It is the result of a programme initiated by the Advocates to eradicate the feral (or wilding) pines.

These trees along the river have seeded from nearby pine forests and have increased in number over recent years. The various agencies and trusts that we consulted as part of planning this project agreed that the feral pines are an environmental nuisance. They inhibit regrowth of the native scrub and trees, and pose a major threat when the river is in flood. For example, fallen pines took out the Major Jones Bridge in the flood of 2004.

The Advocates have managed this project in partnership with DoC. The pilot phase was able to go ahead thanks to a \$5,000 grant from the Waikato Catchment Ecological Enhancement Trust (WCEET), an offshoot of Mighty River Power, and we were fortunate to be able to contract the services of a fishing guide with forestry qualifications, Will Kemp.

Having received positive responses to the proposal from all parties consulted, and support and advice from DoC, the area to be covered was inspected, a plan and an agreement drawn up, and using DoC recommended methodology, work was begun in September. Trees that have been zapped to date are the wilding pines on DoC-administered land on the true right bank, from State Highway 1 up to the Red Hutt Bridge. There is already evidence of the trees browning off. Now almost complete, the work has gone without a hitch and more ground has been covered than anticipated in the planning stage.

Trees likely to fall across walking tracks have not been touched, as, for safety reasons, DoC must take responsibility for these, nor have we touched trees on the river's edge, as managing flood protection is the role of Environment Waikato.



The Department of Conservation has provided much appreciated support. Biodiversity Manager Leith Rhynd and Angela Paget have provided invaluable encouragement, help and instruction.

DoC is now motivated to pick up the reins and zap the trackside trees, and we are expecting Environment Waikato to manage the trees likely to come down in a flood. This will be a condition of further work by the Advocates.

The availability of funding will determine whether we are able to continue beyond the pilot stage. Advocates committee member John Toogood has done fine work in networking and getting support from respective stakeholders and, with John Wheeler, in managing the project. The success of the pilot programme will lend weight to funding applications in the new year.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

The Day of the Dead is what they call October 31st in New Orleans. For the Tongariro River this year, it became the Day of the Dead Didymo Cells.

The Advocates committee was kept well informed through the testing days that followed the announcement of dead Didymo cells having been detected in samples from several central North Island rivers, including the Tongariro. I am grateful to our secretary, Eric Wilson, for getting that information out to Advocates as soon as it came to hand, through our web site.

After several days of testing, resampling and retesting, Biosecurity NZ announced an all clear, ie, that that no live cells had been detected in any of the samples and that the dead cells had diminished in number with each batch of samples tested. This reprieve brought a sense of uneasy relief and uncertainty as to how the dead cells might have got there.

DoC scientists were just as baffled as the rest of us. A week or so after the incident, some of us from the Advocates committee met with Glenn MacLean who said that DoC assumed contamination to be the cause, but had no clarity as to how this might have happened.

It was on Friday 23rd November, in a press statement from the Minister of Biosecurity, Jim Anderton, that confidence in the scientists suffered a blow. The Minister stated that the source of the dead cell contamination had been traced to a Didymo testing laboratory in Christchurch, where containers used for collecting water samples around the country were stored.

NIWA scientists working under contract to Genesis Energy had been collecting and testing samples from central North Island rivers as part of the scheduled delimitation surveys. A Genesis staff member explained the cause of the contamination and what is being done as a result. We were told that containers used for collecting river samples in the central North Island had been stored in the Christchurch laboratory, in the same room in which Didymo testing was done. The contamination resulted from fumes generated as part of the testing procedures, penetrating the cabinet in which the containers were stored.

Genesis immediately suspended its contract with NIWA, pending the findings of a MAF audit of the Christchurch laboratory and, more specifically, on satisfactory action being taken to address a number of hygiene and other inadequacies that the audit identified. NIWA carried out its own audit of the laboratory with similar findings. Genesis will decide whether to reinstate the contract once the findings have been addressed and have asked NIWA to account to the Genesis annual meeting with stakeholders at Tokaanu on December 14th. Meanwhile, North Island delimitation surveys are continuing as scheduled, with the Genesis section being undertaken by Waikato University.

Genesis and Biosecurity NZ staff have assured me that the practice of moving Didymo-related equipment from the South to the North Island has been discontinued. Although Biosecurity NZ has not picked up on the Advocates repeated calls for measures to quarantine the South Island, few, if any, of us had imagined that the scientists were not following strict quarantine procedures.

All of us, officials and experts included, have had a lucky escape. Thankfully, October 31st did not turn out to be the Day of the Dead River, and everyone is now more aware of just how much care needs to be taken in order to protect North Island rivers.

*Heather Macdonald,
President*



WWW.TONGARIRORIVER.ORG

Web site design is well underway, and in the New Year, further changes will make the site even easier to navigate and more informative.

Shortly, our new strategic planning framework will be posted on the site, providing an overview of the various projects we have on the go and the rationale for taking these projects on. Secretary/treasurer Eric Wilson manages and regularly updates the site - keep an eye on it.

The photographic archive is intended to become an important record of the river. If you have digital shots of the river, historic or current, we would be pleased to receive them. Please send them to us through the email link on the web site



IN THE DARK REGARDING TROUT CONDITION

The Advocates August newsletter carried an article expressing concerns about the condition of trout. As we have not yet had a response from DoC to the submission we made to them on this matter in September, we are unable to shed any light on the problem.

In the absence of information from the experts, speculation continues about what might be the cause of the food shortage. Most recent speculation puts it down to insufficient spring winds over the last year or two to produce thermoclines created by the lake water turning over and releasing phytoplankton and other nutrients consumed by trout. However, we don't yet know.

Scientific analysis is needed, and the committee is expecting to hear something from Fisheries scientists or the Fishing Advisory Committee just as soon as they are out from under the recent and unscheduled Didymo alert.

SHANE ARDERN, MP ADDRESSES PUBLIC MEETING

There was a full house and no tractors or sheep in sight when Shane Ardern, MP for Taranaki and National Party spokesperson for Biosecurity and Rural Affairs, addressed a meeting at the Bridge Fishing Lodge in Turangi at Labour weekend.



Shane Ardern was invited to address the meeting and take part in discussion because the Advocates wanted to have input into National Party policy development on biosecurity. A paper outlining key points for an effective policy platform, developed by the Advocates and the NZ Federation of

Freshwater Anglers, was presented to Shane Ardern. The paper can be seen on the Advocates' web site, www.tongariroriver.org, along with Shane Ardern's address.

HIT AND MISS AT OUR INTERNATIONAL AIRPORTS

Travellers' tales abound about Didymo signage and checking procedures – and, too often, about the absence of it – at airports and the Cook Strait ferry terminals.

Despite Biosecurity NZ's announcement that, from mid October 2007, all used

freshwater fishing gear would be checked and decontaminated on arrival into New Zealand, it is disappointing to hear of cases where this is not happening. Advocates Committee members have now begun to follow through when such instances are reported to them, by contacting Biosecurity and relevant members of parliament in the belief that there needs to be accountability.

CHECK, CLEAN, DRY... OVER AND OVER AGAIN

You get tired of hearing it and it is not very popular, but all of us have to adopt the Check, Clean, Dry approach after every river we fish, every time.

As a health epidemic, however, more is needed and the Advocates continue to lobby for:

1. Increased signage – good signs and plenty of them, strategically placed, could give clear messages about what is expected, eg, in the Taupo Fishing District for instance, it is not OK to fish without cleaning your gear. Signage would make the location of gear cleaning stops known and advise that felt soles should be not be used.
2. Saturation awareness and education that gives the Check, Clean, Dry message a personality boost, by using well-known and respected New Zealanders such as Anton Oliver, Colin Meads or Linda Topp to show for example, that this is all it would take to kill your river, so be sure to Check, Clean, Dry... etc.
3. Quarantining infected areas would significantly reduce the risk of spread to the North Island by mandatory decontamination at South Island departure points (ferry terminals and airports).
4. Prevention measures to protect the Taupo Catchment Fishery under the provisions in section 131 of the Biosecurity Act.
5. No felt soles – Biosecurity NZ has told the organisers of the International Fly-Fishing Championships, being held in the central North Island in March 2008, that there are to be no felt soles. Why not New Zealand as a whole?
6. Research at the highest level of capability – aimed at fully understanding the ecology of Didymo.

If these measures, or even some of them, can be adopted, with the best efforts of individuals also in the mix, we may be able to stave off Didymo, at least until research comes up with some control or eradication measures.

ADVOCATES MAKE SUBMISSION ON VARIATIONS 19-21 OF THE TAUPO DISTRICT PLAN 2050

A submission was made by the Advocates on variations to TD2050 (the long term district plan). The full submission is on the Taupo District Council web site.

Eric Wilson, on behalf of the Advocates, took the 15-minute opportunity offered to speak to our submission. This submission is on the Advocates' web site. Three points were emphasised:

1. Regarding proposed development of the Mangamawhitiwhiti Block, that the walking track on the true right bank of the Tongariro, between the Red Hut Bridge and State Highway Bridge be guaranteed in perpetuity.
2. That the reduced flow due to diversion of water has led to the river in its lower reaches being unable to clear its sediment load creating problems in the surrounding land
- 3 That there be no further hydroelectric power development on the river.

Resulting Action

No change will be made to the plan as a result of these submissions. However, there will be further opportunity for stakeholders to submit if and when Mangamawhitiwhiti Block development goes ahead.

APPRECIATION

The Advocates are most grateful for the ongoing support of the Pharazon Trust. The trust, which has made a number of grants to the Advocates since we began as a society in 2002, has this year donated \$10,000, half of which was tagged for Didymo-related activity.

This funding enables us to take initiatives that would otherwise be out of our reach, such as the design and printing of 2000 "Could you be a Didymo carrier?" postcards, designed by Cognito, which were distributed widely and a copy of which was enclosed with your last newsletter.

SUBSCRIPTIONS DUE

Subscriptions for 2008 are due on 1st January, and a form is enclosed with this newsletter. Alternatively, you may renew your subscription online. Your support is very much appreciated.

STOP PRESS

The Tongariro River will have the full run of its water for four months from 7th January 2008, when Genesis Energy's diversions will be closed off for upgrading.