



ADVOCATES
FOR THE
TONGARIRO
RIVER

ADVOCATE

ISSUE THREE

· THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE ADVOCATES FOR THE TONGARIRO RIVER INC ·

NOVEMBER 2003

Meetings with Ministers get the Tongariro on the Government's agenda

Two formal meetings were recently held with Hon Mark Burton. The Advocates presented an outline of the river problems and the likely adverse outcomes of continuing to use the river in an unsustainable way.

The Minister advised that he believes the damage done as a result of the Tongariro Power Development Scheme and subsequent mismanagement of the river is no great concern of the Government. This essentially means local ratepayers will continue to pay for the river's restoration, despite the tiny rating base of Turangi and the burden the town already carries in paying relatively high municipal rates.

The Advocates will continue to contend that nationally important, natural icons such as the Tongariro River, which generates substantial revenue from tourism and fishing, should be part of central government's responsibility.

The Minister of Tourism (Hon Mark Burton) has proposed a further on-site meeting involving the Minister for the Environment (Hon Marion Hobbs), himself and the Advocates. At that meeting we have two strategies: first, we will demonstrate the environmental damage that has occurred; and second, we will advance a plan for restoration of the river based on a campaign to restore

pride in the river itself. This direction was suggested by Advocate Richard Kemp.

Conceptually, our proposal will promote the view that the Tongariro is part of a single entity made up of mountains, river and lake and that future management be formulated around this concept.

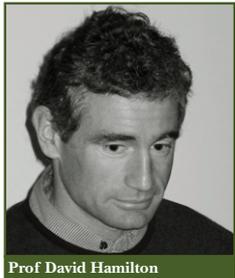
We will also advocate the recognition and protection of heritage landscapes. Just as New Zealanders respect heritage buildings and heritage sites, we should also respect heritage landscapes and environments, which have value to the country as a whole. The Delta is a good example of this, with its ecologically important wetlands, geographical uniqueness, recreational value and significance in facilitating the migratory patterns of Taupo trout.

Thirdly, there is the aforementioned need to restore pride in the river by instigation of a plan to provide better management and access for all users of the river environment.

We intend to put it to the Government at the next meeting that these vital conservation measures could form the platform for ecotourism ventures in the near future, which would have substantial benefits for Turangi and generate more tourist dollars benefiting the entire country. Hopefully the logic of this direction will be recognised.

EXPERTS OUTLINE ISSUES AFFECTING LAKE TAUPO

The Advocates hosted a seminar focusing on issues affecting Lake Taupo as a sustainable environment and habitat for trout, at the Bridge Fishing Lodge, Turangi recently.



Prof David Hamilton

Professor David Hamilton, who holds the Chair of Lakes Restoration and Management at the University of Waikato, began the session with a presentation outlining his work with waterway restoration in Western Australia. He described how the unpredictable and environmentally damaging effects of human impact on the Avon River catchment had led to salination of soils and massive losses of viable agricultural land in the district.

Professor Hamilton also told of findings in the Rotorua district, with diagrams plotting the decline of Lake Rotoiti, where a proliferation of algae has resulted in the deterioration of water quality in recent months.

To reverse this process, he said there is a need for further protection of riparian margins from livestock, nutrient-filtering wetland areas need to be expanded and developed, and storm water drains going directly into waterways require redirecting.

He said that, as with Lake Taupo, the topdressing of fertilizer in the catchment is a major cause of high levels of nitrogen entering the Rotorua lake system.

Professor Hamilton hopes to research the effects of forestry clear-felling in the district and emphasises the complexity of lake water quality issues generally. He believes that multiple impacts from the effects of land use change over time require greater understanding and more competent management.

His colleague, Dr Ian Hawes, a scientist with NIWA, spoke

about his ongoing work with the Lake Taupo Monitoring Project.

Dr Hawes said, "We are moving forward with imperfect information, as many aspects of scientific monitoring have only been in effect for the past eight years." He said multiple stressors on the rivers and lake in the district include contaminants, invasive species, shoreline development, agricultural and forestry practices, the artificial control of water levels and climate change.

Dr Hawes described the monitored effects of increased nitrogen leaching on the lake's water quality. He said there is a time lag of at least 30 years due to the slow filtering of nutrients through the pumice soil, which means we will see an increase in adverse effects in the decades to come.

He explained that through the complexities of natural water-mixing processes, algal levels in Lake Taupo are highest during the winter months as accumulated nitrogen at the bottom of the lake is mixed with warmer surface water at this time. This water-soluble nitrogen is most accessible to algae, and Dr Hawes believes that we are now seeing an overall trend of water clarity loss due to an increase of 13 tonnes per year in accumulated nitrogen.

Of great interest to Turangi people was Dr Hawes' report on invasive species entering the lake. Like many New Zealand waterways, Lake Taupo is particularly vulnerable to invasive species due to the lack of competition for habitat. Weeds such as elodea or wormwort, which have no root system, can spread out endlessly across the lake. Catfish, too, are known to be in their expansion phase and are already threatening the native koura.

Dr Hawes said that despite a decline in government funding for water quality research over the past 10 years, NIWA is committed to monitoring Lake Taupo and advising the various authorities concerned on appropriate restorative measures. He believes that the proposed

PRESIDENT'S COMMENT

The previous few months have been busy ones for the Advocates and this issue details our progress on a number of fronts. Although we are still feeling our way, we have a growing sense of achievement and effectiveness.

This was confirmed when the Advocates recently won the TrustPower Lake Taupo District Community Awards. The awards reflect a great team effort and the fact we have moved forward in a professional and effective way.

Engaging various fly fishing groups and explaining our objectives have seen our membership swell to close to 300 members, which should significantly help us in facilitating future activities. Our short-term target is 500, so if you have any friends or family interested in our objectives please sign them up!

Formal meetings with Minister of Tourism and Taupo MP Mark Burton on environmental damage issues and the question of who pays for repair work have been held, and will lead to further discussions involving the Minister for the Environment and Mr Burton. The Advocates will advance plans for a restoration strategy at these meetings, helping to get our message across at the highest level.

Around 50 members attended our first official seminar on issues affecting Lake Taupo. Disturbingly Dr Hawes, a NIWA scientist and guest speaker, drew attention to a report on invasive species entering the lake. More about this potential problem in the article below.

Several issues and challenges remain. Perhaps the greatest is getting recognition of the Tongariro region as an environment vital to our spiritual, ecological, recreational and economic future. When the Prime Minister recently opened the superb National Trout Centre in Turangi, she constantly referred to Taupo instead of Turangi or the Tongariro, reflecting what appears to be a general lack of awareness about our area's unique regional significance.

On a more positive note, awareness of the Advocates' cause and communication with our members will be greatly enhanced when our web site comes on-line in a very short while. Our thanks to Sylvia Smith and her team at Origin Design for getting this project underway.

Please read more about these issues in this, our third newsletter of the year.

Mark Cosgrove,
President.

ADVOCATES MEET WITH ACRE

Following a meeting with the Advisory Committee for Regional Environment (ACRE, advising Environment Waikato), ACRE requested a brief paper outlining the issues one which the Advocates would like ACRE to provide support.

The list covered the critical river issues including support for the management forum, the need for more government protection of heritage landscapes, the Delta issues and the need for more scientific research and information.

Contact with ACRE is part of the Advocates' strategy to link with other like-minded conservation groups to build a strong platform for achieving common objectives.

Members will be kept informed of any developments with ACRE.

(see over)

Environment Waikato variation aimed at reducing the nitrogen load on the catchment by 20 per cent will work towards maintaining Lake Taupo at its current level of water clarity. (Jane Penton.)

The Advocates' interest in the water quality of Lake Taupo and the management of the great lake (through its use as a hydroelectric storage site) is obvious: challenges to fish rearing habitat especially near the river mouths, weed removal and invasive species of plants and animals.

Readers of the New Zealand Herald will note the attention being brought to bear in the Rotorua Lakes regions where, it seems, most if not all of the lakes are in some state of distress because of nutrient run-off. The Herald has presented five articles 'looking at the toxic threat to some of our magnificent lakes'. Refer www.nzherald.co.nz/environment, also the Centre for Biodiversity and Ecological Research, University of Waikato, cber.bio.waikato.ac.nz. We support the work of the Rotorua advocacy group, Lakes Water Quality Society, led by Ian MacLean, and hope to learn from the strategies adopted there.



Advocates' Vice-President, Heather McDonald

A letter to the Editor (New Zealand Herald, 5.9.03, p.A14) brings home the problem with considerable pungency. The writer, Pamela Wilcox, says "that (a Rotorua District engineer) has warned that it will be expensive to implement measures to clean up the lakes. But the alternative is much more expensive - no tourists, no fishing, no swimming. In fact, the heart would be removed from Rotorua's and Taupo's scenic and recreational attractions. That is expensive."

And that is how the Advocates think too; put positively, we believe that Turangi and its region can only benefit from an ecotourism thrust based on the many ecological and recreational values that the Tongariro River possesses.

The Hamilton-Hawes seminar was convened by Advocates Vice-President, Heather McDonald. We are grateful to the management of the Tongariro River Bridge Fishing Lodge for the free use of the conference room there.

Advocates for the Tongariro River overall winners in the TrustPower Lake Taupo District Community Awards

At the function held on 13 October 2003 and organised by TrustPower in conjunction with the Taupo District Council, the Advocates received the best in category award (Heritage and Environment category) and were awarded the Supreme Winner's award for the region.

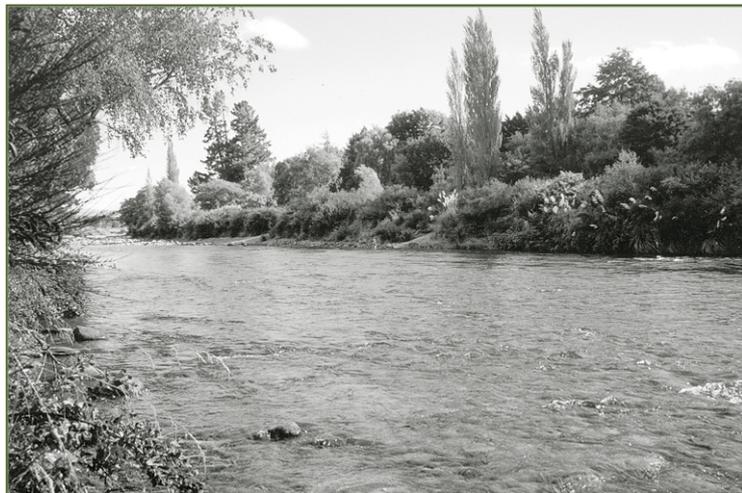


The Taupo District Council will support the Advocates in developing a submission for this, and TrustPower generously funds two members of the Advocates and the Mayor of Taupo to attend the Blenheim award ceremony. The Advocates are honoured that our work has been recognised in this way and will use it as an opportunity to further our advocacy for the river and the region. Special thanks to Robin Parish in nominating the Advocates for this award and the Advocates extend their appreciation to TrustPower and the Taupo District Council.

These awards are given on an annual basis in recognition of work done by volunteers in the community. The winners of each category and the Supreme Winner each receive a generous sum of money from TrustPower. We congratulate the Tongariro National Trout Centre which was selected as winner in the Educational and Youth Development category. As the Supreme Winner, the Advocates have been chosen to represent the region at the National TrustPower Community Awards to be held in Blenheim in March 2004.



Advocates' secretary Gill Osborne and Robin Parish collected the awards



A reminder of about what it's all about - keeping our famous river clean and pristine. This shot shows the Tongariro running low just before welcome relief of steady rain in October.

WALKWAYS AHEAD

After a presentation by the Advocates recently, the Turangi Tongariro Community Board has agreed to form a working party to look at extending the walks around the river.

This is an encouraging step for many who would like to see better access to the river and maintenance of existing paths.

If any members have good photos of the river, please send them to us for inclusion in future issues. Photo: Robert MacDonnell

GOOD NEWS DEPARTMENT

The Advocates are pleased to acknowledge a grant of \$1,668 from the Bay of Plenty Community Trust to assist in the preparation and production of the first Annual Report. This grant, together with one of \$6,000 from the tavern in Turangi (Huckleberry's) has been important in allowing us to present high-quality documents to members.

Rotorua Lakes Symposium a warning for Lake Taupo

Advocates' President Mark Cosgrove attended the Rotorua Lakes 2003: Practical Management for Good Lake Water Quality Symposium, hosted by the Lakes Water Quality Society Inc and the Royal Society of New Zealand. Here's his report:

The overall standard of the event was excellent in both the quality and scope of the papers presented and the quality of organisation. The lessons for Taupo were starkly obvious - allowing nitrogen and phosphorus to run off from farms, forestry development and towns is a recipe for disaster with respect to water quality; and restoration is extremely expensive and may not deliver the desired result.

There were two papers specifically about Lake Taupo. The first dealt with recent scientific findings by Bill Vant, that water entering Lake Taupo today probably entered the catchment 40 years previously; the implication being the run-offs of today will not show up for another 40 years. This suggests we could expect further deterioration, for example algal biomass (blooms present 2001 and 2003) and more drastic deterioration some 50 years ahead.

The second Taupo paper from Tony Petch outlined Environment Waikato's long-term vision for Lake Taupo. The bottom line here was that Environment Waikato would endeavour to increase the area of low nitrogen leaching land in use, such as for forestry, forage harvesting and new horticultural crops. In addition efforts would be made to reduce nitrogen outputs from urban areas.

SUBSCRIPTIONS 2004

The next financial year starts on 1 January 2004. We have set the subscription for that year at \$20 for one member, and at \$25 for two or more members living at the same address.

We should explain this increase. The principal use of members' subscriptions is in providing information to members. Each financial member receives three editions of the Advocate newsletter each year and a copy of the Annual Report for that year. The newsletters cost about \$1.50 each to print and about 50 cents to post. Each Annual Report for 2002 cost about \$13.00 to produce and a further \$1.00 to post. Yet the membership subscription for the period 1 September 2002 - 31 December 2003 was \$10.00. The shortfall came from two grants, totalling \$7,668, which have subsidised our activities. These grants cannot be guaranteed for future years although we are hopeful that some income will continue to come from this source. So we think that we have no alternative than to cover our direct costs from subscriptions. Even at \$20.00 there will be little enough left to provide for advocacy work.

It is noteworthy that members have been especially generous in making donations and we wish to encourage this. In the period from 1 April this year some \$1,400 or so has been received in this way. We are particularly grateful to those members; we know that they identify passionately with the problems of the Tongariro River and being in a position to assist have done so.

JOIN THE ADVOCATES

Become an Advocates' member for just \$20 or make a larger donation. Your support is vital for the Tongariro's future.

Surname: _____

First Name: _____

Postal Address: _____

Town/City: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Cheque Enclosed for: _____

Mail this coupon and cheque to: Advocates for the Tongariro River, PO Box 335, Turangi. For more information, email cosgrove@reap.org.nz