

THE TONGARIRO RIVER – *the Present Situation*

Mark Cosgrove, Immediate Past President



A new stop bank being constructed along the true left bank in front of the Tongariro Bridge Fishing Lodge.

After some 30 years, the Tongariro River bears the effects of major water abstraction and consequent heavily-reduced flows. The recent history of advocacy for the river sees two groups working in parallel, but independently, to bring about the restoration and sustainable management of this once great river.

The first of these groups is the Ngati Turangitukua Environment Committee whose parent tribe, Ngati Tuwharetoa, owns the river, and the second is the Advocates for the Tongariro River Inc. (AFTR), representing some residents and recreational users.

Our story so far

2000 – 20 May, Virginia Church presents a petition from 600 citizens to Parliament seeking the Government's intervention (as promised in the 1960s) to manage the river.

2001 – Environment Waikato introduces Project Watershed to fund ongoing catchment protection work in the whole region. Turangi citizens are unimpressed by the limited scope of this project and the direct costs involved.

2002 – 17 June, Parliamentary Select Committee for Local Government and the Environment calls for a submission in support of the Church petition. This submission is prepared by a group of citizens (and is published in the Advocates' first Annual Report, 2002-2003). From this group and the Tongariro River Action Group (TRAG) a new group - the Advocates - is formed.

The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment's report to the Select Committee asserted that Project Watershed would cope with the river's restoration and ongoing viability. This has turned out to be unreliable, as Project Watershed is more interested in the river as it passes by the town of Turangi and has very little interest in the state of the whole river.

2002 – Advocates for the Tongariro River are established as a community action group, incorporated on 3 October 2002.

2002 – Genesis Energy undertakes to fund river recovery work; some millions of dollars are pledged over the 35-year period of the Tongariro Power Scheme consent.

2003 – 12 November, the Tongariro River Management Forum is formed, under the auspices of Environment Waikato, as a result of AFTR lobbying.

2004 – June, AFTR propose a model of resource use funding to the Minister for the Environment.

2004 – EW and Taupo District Council approve river works, principally to remove 15,000 cubic metres of rock near the State Highway 1 bridge, and to extend flood protection barriers on the right bank below that bridge. AFTR opposes the consents on the grounds that they do not go far enough (suggesting 50,000 cubic metres would be more effective).

The AFTR successfully seeks the incorporation of a River Management Plan as a part of the consent.

2004 – Environment Court grants 35-year consent to Genesis Energy for the Waikato-TPD hydroelectric scheme.

2004 – Dr G. Smart's NIWA briefing paper on the 'higher Lower Tongariro' summarises the present state of the Tongariro River and its catchment, then sets out six possible actions for river recovery and restoration:

- Do nothing
- Zone the delta as a wildlife reserve and leave it
- Rejuvenate the present channel
- Lower the lake permanently
- Make a new channel into Stump Bay
- Increase the present channel capacity by extracting gravel
- Retrain the river by cutting off meanders.

2005 – AFTR asks Dr Paul Williams, Professor of Geomorphology Auckland University for his views on these proposals. Dr Williams views are published in full elsewhere in this report. His main points are:

'If the aim is to restore the river to as close to its natural state as possible downstream of State Highway 1 bridge, then (i) the lake needs to be permitted to operate within its natural range, (ii) the river should be left unconstrained to operate naturally, and (iii) regrowth of natural vegetation needs encouragement.'

2005 – EW completes river works: there are new barriers in front of the downstream lodges, gravel has been removed (unfortunately leaving some hectares of silt, sand and as-exposed) and stockpiled awaiting crushing, and some 60 tonnes of logs and fallen trees removed from the Island Pool region.

2005 – May, EW commissions Cheal Consultants to examine some of Dr Smart's Management Options using a cost-benefit-risk analysis.

Currently the AFTR are exploring the issues associated with:

- the notion of lowering the Lake to provide a steeper gradient
- dredging the main mouth and the hook to remove the sand, silt and ash deposits
- re-vegetation of the river's banks.

FROM THE PRESIDENT...

Thanks to the Advocates' Committee and membership for their confidence in me for the role of President. I am pleased to have the opportunity to build on the firm foundation established under Mark Cosgrove's leadership. Mark has put the Advocates on the map, and we are fortunate to have the benefit of his continuing contribution.

What has happened over the past year?

The Advocates have either spearheaded or provided impetus for the following:

- Problem identification regarding key aspects that need to be addressed in managing the river.
- River Management Forum. The Forum we lobbied for – to get representation of all groups involved with the river round the table – has been convened, under the auspices of Environment Waikato.
- A River Management Plan. Environment Waikato has undertaken to develop a Catchment Management Plan for river management into the future.

We are pleased to see Environment Waikato's Project Watershed work nearing completion, providing riverbank strengthening and new stopbanks to improve flood protection of Turangi properties identified as being most at risk. (See photographs in this newsletter showing some of that work in progress).

What is happening now?

The Advocates are focussing primarily on:

- contributing through the River Management Forum for the purpose of gaining a shared view of values as a basis for river management and intervention
- contributing effectively to the process of developing a River Management Plan, drawing on available scientific and engineering information (See Mark Cosgrove's article and the report from Professor Paul Williams)
- developing a partnership with the Department of Conservation and others with a view to a collaborative approach to riverbank planting and track initiatives.

My personal vision for the coming year

I am keen to see the Advocates:

- move towards an increase of mutual trust and understanding with Turangitukua Environment Committee and other river bed owners
- add value to the quality of thinking and dialogue needed for the process of developing an appropriate and useful River Management Plan
- lobby for the plan to be given real teeth, enabling it to be used as a valuable and dynamic working document to maintain existing relationships with other groups who are involved with or concerned about the river or other rivers, and seek to build new connections
- continue to be involved in an education and information dissemination role through convening seminars (the next one is at Labour Weekend) and extending the knowledge base.

Thanks to all Advocates, and in particular to the Committee, past and present, for their ongoing efforts. Appreciation too to Bob MacDonnell (of Cognito) for his generosity in continuing to edit and publish these newsletters.

Heather Macdonald
President



MEMBERSHIP: HOW ARE WE DOING?

While membership stands at 250, and we are pleased about this, we are concerned to build membership and also provide current members with the things they expect of a society such as this. Some members have not renewed for this financial year and, while this may be an oversight, it may also be that we are not doing what they consider to be a good job.

We have considered doing a formal survey of members and may do this during the current year. Meanwhile, we need to know what members think of the work the Advocates.

If members would like to write to me to give their thoughts about current and future directions, I would be very pleased to hear from them.

The reason for having a membership is that

it is required in our Constitution. We need a financial base with which to do our key task of communicating and disseminating information and ideas, whether it be through:

- our seminars
- our Annual Report, a highly regarded document produced with the enormous unpaid efforts of Mark Cosgrove and Sylvia Smith
- this newsletter, which is produced at the lowest possible cost with the generous auspices of Bob McDonnell
- projects such as the planned planting project.

We want the Advocates to continue to be looked to for our ability and willingness to provide quality information. Membership subscriptions are essential. We also ask you to bear the Advocates in mind when you wish to make a charitable donation or a bequest. Donations and bequests can be made in a way which targets the funds for specific purposes or research.

TONGARIRO VIEWS FROM Professor Paul Williams

Paul Williams, a geomorphologist and angler, is Professor in the School of Geography and Environmental Science at Auckland University.

“My general position on managing the physical features of the landscape is that ‘nature knows best’. This is because natural processes can be so powerful that our human-scale ‘fixes’ are usually of only limited effectiveness.

Floodplains will flood and there’s no way we can stop that. We can only stop the frequency with which small floods (<50 years) overflow onto the floodplain. Big floods will always beat us unless, perhaps, we dam the river and have a lot of spare storage capacity behind the dam.

So my reactions to Graeme Smart’s suggestions are as follows:

1. The sensible course of management will vary according to what one’s trying to achieve.
2. If the aim is to restore the river to as close to its natural state as possible downstream of State Highway 1 bridge, then (i) the lake needs to be permitted to operate within its natural range, (ii) the river should be left unconstrained to operate naturally, and (iii) regrowth of natural vegetation needs encouragement.

3. In practice the above may not be possible and we’ll have to compromise. The operators of the power schemes may wish to continue to control the lake level, as at present, and the owners of land downstream of the bridge may wish to see flooding no worse than at present. My reaction to that would be: (i) try to achieve a median lake level reduction of 10 cm while permitting the lake to still be controlled within the existing range and (ii) maintain existing flood protection downstream of the bridge.

I believe that lowering the lake level would definitely help improve the lower reaches by promoting natural scouring of the river bed, thereby increasing channel capacity and reducing the frequency of channel overflow. This is the best way to ‘rejuvenate’ the channel. Taking gravel from the channel is a waste of time as an almost limitless supply of gravel is waiting upstream to replace any that’s taken. It would be an ongoing cost with the money better spent elsewhere.

It is possible that willow clearance along the lower reaches might also help rejuvenate the channel by reducing channel friction, but the downside might be channel widening and less channel stability, because the river would be able to migrate more freely. Willow clearance would need to be done from the delta end working upstream. I’d be in favour of that provided it’s done cautiously, bit by bit to assess its effect.

If retraining is contemplated by cutting through meander bends, then that would certainly increase average channel slope and send a wave of river bed scouring upstream. Depending on how much meander cutting off was done, and where it was done, the bed scouring could reach upstream to the piles of State Highway 1 bridge. This would reduce the depth of flooding by about the depth of the scouring in the areas concerned. However, considering the cost of making the cut-offs and maintaining them, I’d be doubtful if the benefits would be justified.

4. If the desire is to reinstate the farming activity in the lower reaches, then both lake lowering and floodway construction (overflow route to Stump Bay) would be necessary, though even that would not stop the larger floods from inundating the delta area. Construction of a grassed floodway to Stump Bay from Graces Rd would alleviate some of the impact of flooding downstream, but there are so many potential natural overflow routes on both right and left banks that it would be much cheaper to let nature decide which ones to use.

However, the grassed floodway recently constructed on the left bank of the Tauranga-Taupo River seems to be successful and equal success could probably be achieved with a channel to Stump Bay (or left to the Blind Mouth). Though unlike the TT, there’s not a settlement to protect (other than Graces farm buildings) at the delta, so the cost is less justified. The more water that is encouraged to follow overflow routes, the less water is left for scouring the main channel and its distributaries as it passes through the delta.

GRAEME NAHKIES’ ADDRESS

At Easter 2005, as part of the Advocates’ AGM, Graeme Nahkies was invited to make a presentation, identifying some possible strategies for the Advocates for the Tongariro River. Graeme has a strong background in public management and board work, and a passion for the Tongariro River.

Graeme outlined:

- ways in which the Advocates might work to advance the cause of restoration and ongoing management of the Tongariro River
- some strategic thinking issues.

He said the Advocates have to work through (and with) the mandates and authorities of other parties:

- EW – the principal regulatory authority
- Ngati Turangitukua – the owner of the river bed
- DoC – the management of the fishery
- Taupo District Council – land-use regulator/community representation
- Genesis – resource consent holder
- Land owners – access/use.

While acknowledging that none of these agencies/people need our permission to do anything, he showed that the Advocates can influence them but really can’t do much (or anything) without their agreement or ‘co-operation’ with the Advocates’ aims.

His advice was that the Advocates need to be very clear about their purpose, and what we want to achieve. He said that we must have ‘a seat at the table’ and that we must be:

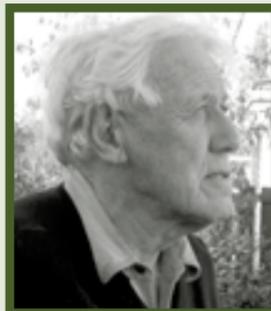
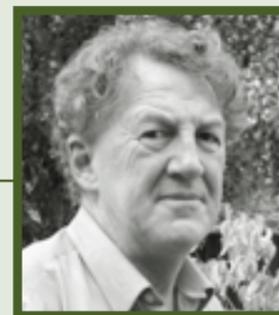
- able to contribute something unique (and of value to others)
- well informed/knowledgeable
- ‘reasonable’ (but not passive!)
- respectful of the rights of others
- responsive and supportive
- ‘professional’ to deal with
- a ‘can do’ organisation.

We found Graeme’s comments extremely useful in shaping our direction and approach for the coming year. The Advocate’s strategic plan for 2005 – 2007 is on our website

New to the Committee this year

The Advocates will benefit from the experience and networks of its two new committee members – Julian Proctor, Wellington, and John Wheeler, Turangi.

Julian Proctor has joined the Advocates’ Committee. Well known for his forthright views on managing the Tongariro River as a fishery, Julian has some 50 years’ experiences of the river.



John Wheeler is a retired Land and Engineering Surveyor. He has a lifelong interest in conservation and the outdoors, but alas (says John) he is not a fisherman. He is a Member of the NZ Geographic Board and on the Executive of the Federation of Mountain Clubs. John is also involved with the Tongariro Natural History Society.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS 2005 - 2006

President	Heather Macdonald	heather@turangi-nz.co.nz
Vice-President	Richard Kemp	Richard.kemp@izardweston.co.nz
Secretary/Treasurer	Eric Wilson	ericandefwilson@actrix.co.nz
Past President	Mark Cosgrove	mark@cosgrove.net.nz
Kaumatu	Tuatea Smallman	
Adviser	Graeme Nahkies	nahkies@boardworksinternational.com
Members	Bruce Coldicutt	bcoldicutt@xtra.co.nz
	Graeme Duff	gduff@propertypack.co.nz
	Gill Osborne	gillo@xtra.co.nz
	Julian Proctor	patchrubber@paradise.net.nz
	Sylvia Smith	Sylvia@origindesign.co.nz
	John Wheeler	wheeler@reap.org.nz
Taupo Fishing Advisory Board Representative	Bob Appleton	aletal@xtra.co.nz

GOOD NEWS FROM DoC

We are delighted with the following news from John Gibbs, Department of Conservation Fisheries Manager, who has written to the Advocates as follows:

The Department of Conservation has confirmed construction of a new section of track on the true left side of the Tongariro River between the Admirals Pool and the Neverfail Pool. This will provide a continuous link from the SH1 bridge to the Tongariro National Trout Centre.

Approximately 770 metres of new track will be built to the DOC day-visitor standard and include provision for mountain bike access. While much of the track is on reasonable terrain, about 15-20% traverses a steep scarp and will require significant benching and possibly steps. Capital funding has been confirmed for the work and it will be completed in the new financial year beginning July 2005. While the primary purpose of the track is to improve anglers’ access along the river, because it lies entirely on land managed by the department, provision will be made for general public walking and mountain bike use.