

AOTEA CONSERVATION PARK ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Annual Report to 30 June 2019

Prepared for:

Honourable Eugenie Sage ONZM
Minister of Conservation
Parliament Buildings
Wellington 6160

Prepared by: Kate Waterhouse, Nicola Macdonald and Judy Gilbert on behalf of the Aotea Conservation Park Advisory Committee.

Membership

Members

Paul Downie

Roger Burrill**

Anthony Christiansen

Judy Gilbert

Nicola Macdonald

Catherine Munro

Liane Ngamane

Rodney Ngawaka

Kate Waterhouse

Vacant

Position

Chair

Community representative

Community representative

Community representative

Iwi representative

Iwi representative

Iwi representative

Iwi representative

Community representative

Iwi representative

**John Wii, iwi replacement committee member who was to replace founding member Noelene Ngawaka – Forster (passed away 23/8/17) tragically also passed away on 19 November 2018.*

***Roger Burrill resigned from the Committee, effective 16th September 2018.*

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AOTEA CONSERVATION PARK ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Mihi

Aotea moutere rongonui

Aotea whakahirahira

Aotea utanga nui

Aotea taonga maha

Aotea te tauranga o ngā waka maha

Aotea te kāinga o Ngāti Rehua – Ngātiwai ki Aotea Ngā kitenga i te pō,

ngā kitenga tauranga me ngā takutai

Teitei ngā maunga me Te Wao-nui o Tāne,

he kāinga oranga mai i te whenua ki te moana Aotea te taonga nui o Te Moana-nui-o-Toi

Aotea te whenua tūturu me taku tūrangawaewae

Aotea is the sacred island

Aotea the landing place of many waka

Aotea the home of Ngāti Rehua – Ngātiwai ki Aotea From starry nights, to shining seas and shores

Lofty mountains and forests a land of plenty

Aotea is the jewel of Te Moana-nui-o-Toi

Aotea my home

Aotea my place to stand

Nicola MacDonald, Ngāti Rehua – Ngātiwai ki Aotea

AOTEA CONSERVATION PARK ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Dear Minister Sage,

This is the third annual report of the Aotea Conservation Park Advisory committee since it's appointment in July 2016, following the formation of the Aotea Conservation Park.

Background

The Aotea Conservation Park covers some 12,282ha, approximately 43% of Aotea Great Barrier Island. The Department manages more than 16,000ha on Great Barrier, the remainder being in scenic and other reserve land including Rakitu and the Harataonga Scenic Reserve.

Aotea is approximately 90 kms north-east of Auckland and has a population of around 1000 permanent residents. As you know, the only mammalian predators are feral cats, ship rats and kiore. The island is home to at least 75 species of nationally rare and endangered species such as the endemic chevron skink, national strongholds of pāteke / brown teal and takoketai / black petrel, important populations of NZ dotterel, banded rail, kākā, kereru and a number of rare and endemic plants. Other pest animals include rabbits and feral pigs.

Meetings and relationship with the Auckland Conservation Board

Note that the interconnectedness of the island's ecology is acknowledged by the Auckland Conservation Board and the Aotea Conservation Park Advisory Committee. At a first joint meeting between these two committees in April 2017 it was agreed that whilst outside of the Terms of Reference for the Aotea Conservation Park Advisory Committee (ACPAC), it is both sensible and of value for the committee to provide advice to the Department and Auckland Conservation Board on a holistic basis, inside and outside the Park's boundaries because outside influences will also affect the Conservation Park. This was particularly helpful in relation to the eradication of rats from Rakitu.

There is a standing invitation for the ACPAC Chair to attend meetings of the Auckland Conservation Board and vice versa. A protocol is in place to share minutes and annual reports and coordinate meeting times. Two members, Nicola Macdonald and Rodney Ngawaka sat on both groups until 2019. There is one joint meeting of the ACB and ACPAC annually, usually in the first quarter of the calendar year. See below for shared priorities workshoped at our most recent meeting. ACPAC as a committee met three times since from June 2018 and for the last time in early 2019 as follows:

Date	Location
11 June 2018	Schoolmasters House, Art Gallery, Claris
17 September 2018	Schoolmasters House, Art Gallery - Claris
10 December 2018	DOC Offices, Level 7, Bledisloe House, Wellesley St, Auckland

AOTEA CONSERVATION PARK ADVISORY COMMITTEE

11 February 2019

DOC Offices, Okiwi (*NOTE: this was the final meeting of the first Aotea Conservation Park Advisory Committee and a joint meeting and workshop with the Auckland Conservation Board*)

Overview of key activities and priorities for 2018:

For context, the year will always be remembered as the year rats were eradicated from Rakitu (see below). While the island is a nature reserve and technically outside the park, the DOC team on Aotea, Ngati Rehua Ngatiwai ki Aotea, the Local Board and all those sanctuaries and landowners actively managing pests on Aotea were active in the debate that dominated the island through the first half of 2018.

Unfortunately the Rakitu project damaged DOC's brand on Aotea with some vocal parts of the community. Combined with other incidents including vandalism of signs and community pressure, may have contributed to reluctance on the part of DOC staff to engage with the community in general. While understandable, this will need to be addressed in the Department's workplan and resource allocation on the island in 2019 and 2020.

In relation to the Conservation Park, our priorities have been as follows:

1. **Hirakimata pest management:** we advocated for increased control of cats and rats and a management plan with related budget support around Hirakimata (Mt Hobson). The purpose is to support the ecosystem as a whole (it is a nationally significant biodiversity site) and to protect the key breeding site of endangered takoketai / black petrel. The Department co-funded a small pilot of A24 traps as a low impact rat suppression option in difficult and sensitive terrain, and reintroduced cat trapping in the petrel breeding season. A larger deployment is planned using recycled A24s from Auckland Council/Windy Hill's 24 pilot.
2. **Kauri dieback:** Track closures and remediation were completed to prevent the spread of the Kauri dieback from known sites. A summer ambassador programme was trialled alongside increased signage and cleaning stations as part of the national programme. Pig numbers are an increasing concern to many in the community, but there is also a small but vocal pig hunting group. While pigs are not confirmed as a significant vector, the committee agreed appropriate kauri dieback protocols for hunters and their dogs are needed.
3. **Te Paparahi "Bring back kōkako"** led by the late Noelene Ngawaka-Fortzer (former ACPAC member) and supported by Chair Nicola MacDonald and trustees of the Ngati Rehua - Ngatiwai ki Aotea Trust. It includes knock down and ongoing control of pests across about 3000ha (noting that the CMS Milestone 14.2.3.6 states this was to be completed end 2017). The Committee is very supportive of this project but notes the project will require significantly more support, resourcing and funding to succeed. Alternative non-toxin options need to be included in feasibility

AOTEA CONSERVATION PARK ADVISORY COMMITTEE

- and options analysis, given community reactions to the Rakitu eradication. Te Paparahi is currently free of kauri dieback and we have grave concerns about any ground based activities in the core kōkako area increasing the risk of dieback there.
4. The committee continues to be concerned about the **declining pāteke numbers** on Great Barrier Island. While the 2018 flock count showed the population stabilised, we asked for increased cat, rat, pukeko and rabbit control in key pāteke habitats to continue. We have not had a satisfactory response from the Pāteke Recovery Group as to what actions they will take to determine and address the reasons for the continued decline in the largest source population of the species in NZ.
 5. **Input into consents in the park:** the committee expressed a preference to provide the Auckland Conservation Board with feedback on all consents for activities in the Park or on Aotea. This has been coordinated by the Chair. We noted that there is ambiguity around the use of drones in the park and erred on the side of caution. A key concern is the maintenance of the remote and undisturbed qualities of the park, respect for culturally significant sites. We also noted the need to ensure that where possible, consents for activity in the park should be encouraged from local businesses and those bringing sustainable economic benefit to the island as a result of the consent being granted.
 6. The committee continued to **actively support partnerships** between the Department, mana whenua, Auckland Council, Windy Hill and Glenfern Sanctuaries, the Great Barrier Local Board and Great Barrier Island Environmental Trust, landowners and community stakeholders to coordinate and develop projects to restore and protect biodiversity on Aotea.
 7. The committee supported an initial **Great Walk proposal** submitted by Destination Great Barrier but is concerned about the sustainability of a Great Walk on Aotea. Despite being in such close proximity to New Zealand's largest urban population and the largest visitor gateway to New Zealand the Aotea proposal was shortlisted but unsuccessful. The comments from the evaluation panel indicated they had reservations about the visitor experience. There are a number of opportunities to improve experiences with more cultural heritage components and alternative routes and facilities. However the committee and community will need to be convinced that visitor impacts on the park and "Barrier way of life" are acceptable to support future proposals.
 8. **Budget, resourcing and volunteer capacity:** the committee has raised on a number of occasions the adequacy of resources and funding relative to the CMS objectives and area of the Park and wider island under management. We highlighted that with a permanent population of 1000 with the lowest average income in the Auckland region, and no subsidised transport, the island lacks community volunteer capacity available to others to support conservation delivery.
 9. **Risks to the park – biosecurity and fire:** we applauded the local DOC team's response to a suspected stoat incursion on Aotea in January 2019. The joint

AOTEA CONSERVATION PARK ADVISORY COMMITTEE

response of DOC and Auckland Council was an example of partnership and collaboration in action. Incursions of stoats would be a disaster for biodiversity on Aotea. The committee requested that the department explore fire risk and response following input from committee members on the fire risk in the centre the island due to hakea and other flammable species. Plague skink work has been ongoing with Auckland Council to reduce the impact of this invasive species on native lizards. Finally, we have been advocating for an increase in control of dogs in summer to protect bird life.

Significant work undertaken adjacent to the Aotea Conservation Park

1. Rakitu eradication: CMS Milestone 14.2.3.4 originally scheduled to be completed 2017 "including the removal of Weka". The programme was approved by the Chair (Nicola MacDonald) and trustees of the Ngati Rehua - Ngatiwai ki Aotea Trust and supported by Kaumaatua and Kuia, notably the late John Wii (former ACPAC member). ACPAC unanimously supported the eradication and members actively supported the DOC team through extremely difficult circumstances leading up to the two drops in the winter of 2018. Throughout, the committee expressed the clear view that weka should be removed from Rakitu permanently, as they will delay, or prevent in some cases, the recovery of seabirds, lizards and invertebrates. Seabird experts are clear that Rakitu sits in a "seabird highway" and has the potential to become an important seabird sanctuary, as well as home to reintroduced species such as hihi, tieke, bellbird and whitehead. Prioritising and funding the removal of weka to allow the intent of the eradication to be fulfilled is of great importance to the committee and the iwi and community members we represent. We also emphasised the need to communicate clearly with iwi and the community the post-eradication restoration plan and successes.
2. Marine dumping: there has been widespread, united opposition to the ongoing dumping of dredge spoil at a site just outside the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park approximately 25kms east of Aotea. Two legal challenges were mounted against an EPA decision to grant 5 times the currently permitted volumes over a further 30 year period. The Department (Auckland office), Auckland Conservation Board, mana Whenua, Local Board and community members all submitted against the consent being granted. Any future marine protection consultation will need to factor in this issue.

Priorities for 2019/2020

The new committee appointed by you in July attended an induction in Auckland on 16 August 2019. We aim to meet twice before the end of 2019 to establish priorities and build a platform for our work.

AOTEA CONSERVATION PARK ADVISORY COMMITTEE

As we enter a new term as the 3 returning members, we would like to highlight the alignment between the Department’s long term goals and the work that is needed on Aotea. We have summarised some of the most relevant themes in DOC’s goals and provided you with commentary to inform your thinking below. We will use this as input into discussions on the priorities for the next committee – ideally by the end of 2019.

DOC goals	Related targets	Key issues on Aotea
Protect natural heritage	<i>90% of species managed</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Declining Pāteke population Declining black petrels Long term impact of high rat densities on other species
	<i>50% of ecosystems pest managed</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very limited DOC pest managed areas (cat focus) Key ecosystems eg Mt Young, Te Paparahi, have no predator control Restoration plan for Rakitu (including weka removal)
	<i>Marine reserve network</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Following up on community support for change Process for island-generated options for protection Food source, sale of locally caught fish Influence of non-resident rec fishers eg on no take areas
	<i>Fresh water ecosystems</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wetland protection Pest fish and marine biosecurity risks
Living treaty partnership	<i>Kaitiakitanga practiced</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Settlement process Co-governance Bring back kōkako (CMS milestone 14.2.3.8) Rakitu restoration Recognition of cultural heritage and stories
Benefits from nature – social, cultural, economic	<i>90% think impacts of visitors are well managed</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DOC outreach projects in populated south of island Visibility of cultural heritage in park and on tracks Dogs on beaches – enforcement in summer Americas Cup impact Building case for pest free Aotea post-Rakitu
Visitor experience	<i>90% exceptional rating</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainable destination development America’s Cup impact
	<i>Enriched by connection to nature</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Value of enhanced biodiversity to island Sliding baselines – loss of knowledge of abundance
Healthy functioning ecosystems	<i>Measures and monitoring (not specified)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State of Environment Updates for birds, others tbc Mountains-to-sea links, including marine Climate risks to park and biodiversity
Working with others	<i>N/A</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agreeing shared short term priorities for Aotea and roadmap to achieve Partnering with Auckland Council, iwi, landowners on CMS pest free goal Biosecurity response (kauri dieback, pest species)

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Aotea Great Barrier Area Plan (Auckland Council process, enables biodiversity protection)
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Shared priorities with the Auckland Conservation Board

Part of our role is to advise the ACB on matters relating to Aotea and the park. On 11 February 2019 a joint meeting and workshop was held between the board and ACPAC at Okiwi facilitated by the DOC Partnerships team. There was a remarkable consensus in the room around the top 3 issues facing the island. They were (in no particular order):

- A pest free Aotea
- Resolution of the treaty settlement for Ngati Rehua Ngatiwai ki Aotea
- Marine protection.

The group urged the department to be braver in tackling these issues. We are looking forward to working with the Auckland Conservation Board on these and the other priorities. These include in particular, kauri dieback, biosecurity, visitor strategy and a timeframe for the review of the Auckland region CMS which covers the park.

We again reiterate our invitation for you to visit Aotea in the near future. There is simply nowhere like it and we need your support to restore and protect its treasures, both within and outside the Conservation Park boundaries.

Ngā mihi nui,

Kate Waterhouse, Nicola Macdonald, Judy Gilbert

Founding members

Aotea Conservation Park Advisory Committee

September 2019

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