



"Human beings are animals, biological beings that are as dependent on clean air, clean water, clean soil, clean energy and biodiversity as any other living organism. In fact, all life on Earth inhabits that thin layer of air, water and soil that is called the biosphere"

- David Suzuki

Welcome to Issue 35 of the newsletter of Awhitu Peninsula Landcare, in which we ponder some of the bigger issues confronting us today.

NASA's stunning images of earth highlight



the diversity, fragility and beauty of the place we call home. Commander of International Space Station Chris Hadfield talks about how he would

welcome visitors: "... the first thing I would do would be to take them to the big window so that we can truly see our Earth" he says. "To understand the magnificence of it, the inevitable power of it, the size, the rolling beauty of it, but also the inherent fragility..."

Left: our protective atmosphere layer is very thin.

Is anyone listening?

We read with delight in the 2011 Local Board plan that Franklin residents had identified that: 'protecting the beauty of the natural environment in which we live and taking steps to enhance and improve areas' was a foremost priority. And so it should be. Many of us live here precisely because it offers such a wonderful natural environment, close to the amenities of Auckland central. We are proud of our special part of the country.

City dwellers and tourists wishing to experience what this country is famous for - being clean and green - are visiting our area in increasing numbers year by year. These visitors provide a tangible and immediate boost to the local economy.

So when the Local Board produced its draft annual plan for 2013-14 (protecting and enhancing our natural environment still listed as first priority), we were surprised to note that less than one third of one percent of the operating expenses total budget (\$31,000 out of \$12.2 million) had been committed to the 'Local Built and Natural Environment'.

We attended a community meeting to address this apparent anomaly with Local Board members directly. They advised that there would be some expenditure committed at a regional level, which was not included these figures.

Now, bear with us, there is a purpose in publicising this to a wider audience.

We are certainly not trying to criticise Local Board members, they do a very difficult job on our behalf, and we have already voiced our concerns to them directly. But we are concerned that an emerging pattern is being repeated in this country. Lip service is being paid to the importance of our natural environment, but the commitment to any public funding support is simply not there. Our question is - is this what New Zealanders want? Public funding - from both Council and Government - is there to spread the load and enable those projects judged to be most important in our democracy, affordable. Are we happy that the funding available for our environment is reducing?

There are a few helpful resources available for local environmental projects but these tend to be variable and scattered, with frequently changing requirements. Merely completing the paperwork in order to comply requires a dedicated worker. Finding a reliable, long term source of funding for any ongoing environmental work is the biggest challenge. Many people remark on the longevity of Awhitu Peninsula Landcare - one of the oldest surviving environmental groups. Next year will be our 20th continuous year in operation. We've stuck it out through thick and thin, but it has never been easy and is getting even harder.

Below: Our clean green image is extremely valuable. Is it being given the attention it deserves?



The emerging pattern

As we said before, the lack of commitment to public environmental funding appears to be being repeated frequently. Is New Zealand's most valuable message to the world - its clean, green, 100% pure, brand - being given the attention it deserves?

Has anyone else noticed the subtle change in emphasis in Auckland Council planning documents? No longer is the 'Environment' a category on its own. Instead it refers to the Built and natural environment, stating: "The Council aims to protect and enhance Auckland's natural environment by seeking to minimise the effects of development and pollution in the region's air, land and water resources and ensuring world class urban design in our built environment." No bold statements about increasing biosecurity measures to cope with the grow-

ing number of pests, extending native habitats and increasing biodiversity. Despite the fact that over 70% of the landmass within the Auckland Council is rural, with 2000km of coastline.

The draft Auckland Unitary Plan (open for consultation until 31 May) will guide this region's development over the next 30 years. We urge you to take time to consider this, and attend one of the many Local Board meetings organised in Franklin on 27 April and 11 May.

One thing is certain, if we don't make our voices heard now, we can't expect our needs to be met in the future. Franklin has a relatively small population base. The more we speak up, the more notice might be taken. We need to be supporting our Local Board in this, they are the ones who can deliver a community message on our behalf.

And now for the good news

Luckily, we have a most distinguished kiwi - in fact, the current Kiwibank New Zealander of the Year - who is speaking out with her strong, learned voice in support of 'looking after our beautiful land'.

Dame Anne Salmond, who has been referred to as one of the most true-hearted people we have in this country, points out that most of our wealth is based on the land and sea, through tourism as well as food production. In an increasingly polluted and crowded world, she argues that our food, wine and tourism should be at the premium end. But for this to happen, the 100% Pure NZ brand has to be real. Dame Anne goes on to say: "it is not just cynical, but economically stupid to keep on destroying NZ's biodiversity and degrading waterways, soils and harbours in the pursuit of short-term profit". (NZ Herald archives her full



articles)

In a recent study of 179 countries, New Zealand had the highest ratio of indigenous species in danger of extinction. It doesn't require a masters degree to recognise that a society which destroys the environment which sustains it will fail.

Dame Anne is doing more than just writing articles. She has a plan for the greening of New Zealand - one river bank at a time. There will be no finger pointing, she plans an inclusive approach with the overriding aim to improve the state of our environment. "The idea is to do something genuinely world-leading, to make the 'NZ - 100% pure' brand real. Not to sit around bemoaning what's going on but to get in there and do something that has a lot of good, practical consequences".

Sounds like a woman after our own heart.

Woolly Nightshade spreading quickly

Woolly Nightshade - also known as tobacco or flannel weed or kerosene plant - is rapidly spreading throughout our community. Whilst all parts of the plant are poisonous to us, birds adore the yellow berries. Luckily it is one of the easier weeds to kill - pulls out easily when young, and older plants succumb quickly to relatively environmentally

friendly herbicide gels such as Vigilant. A cut to the trunk, and apply the gel within 30 seconds of cutting before sap stops flowing. The good news

is that a lacebark bio-control agent released on the Awhitu Peninsula two years is doing well... we just wish it could breed faster...

