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Report to the Wellington Regional Council
From Councillor Chris Laidlaw

Wellington Conservation Board Meeting - 16 February 2001

I attended the meeting on 16 February which, to the delight of the members who had become accustomed to a lunch consisting of a piece of bread and some Petone water, was held at the Regional Council where the catering arrangements were considerably more fulfilling.

Several points of interest arose.

1. The Board had asked DOC for an outline of its land ownership and disposal regime in the region. There had been concern expressed about reports of some parcels of DOC land being sold off along with esplanade reserves or marginal strips and it was explained that these consisted almost entirely of land which had no conservation value and which had been the subject of river course changes.
2. DOC land comes in various guises including Reserves Act lands, DOC estate, some freehold land administered by DOC and "parcels" of land administered by other agencies such as Queen Elizabeth Park. Very little land had been disposed of recently. The Minister had instructed DOC to freeze all significant disposals until any Treaty settlement obligations are clarified. DOC may well be waiting for Godot here. It has a schedule of land parcels for disposal (copy for Landcare staff) but no action is envisaged.
3. It was noted that discussions were proceeding with WRC on East Harbour, Lake Wairarapa and Whitireia which may involve some disposals in the near future. In reality the local conservancy is keen to divest itself of obligations in such areas as

it simply does not have the budget to do justice to prospective park areas that demand ranger services and the like.

4. The Board also received a briefing from DOC on its concession policy (papers copied to Landcare staff) which is similar to that adopted by WRC and efforts will be made to make it more consistent with WRC policy in future. The Conservator explained that DOC was not experiencing any particular pressure from potential concessionaires and that there are limits to the number of concessions that DOC wants to administer. One wonders if this policy is entirely realistic.
5. It was explained that DOC's continuing effort to resolve its Kaupapa Atawhai policy on relations with Maori was continuing (as it has for the last decade) and that a set of principles for the working relationship between the department and Iwi are slowly being negotiated. These are expected to be released "soon" and they will be open for consultation thereafter before being finalised by the Minister. Whether it will be this minister, the next one or the one after that remains to be seen.
6. There was another discussion on the desirability of a regional walkway plan and it was agreed that WRC would be approached for assistance in a compilation exercise designed to identify the existing network, and work towards harmonisation of plans by the various authorities concerned. Landcare staff are assisting this process.

CHRIS LAIDLAW
Councillor

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