

## **AGM 2024 Chair Report**

### **Introduction**

This has been a year of both consolidation and expansion in various areas of our environmental efforts. Built on the foundation of a cohesive, committed and conscientious voluntary committee who support our fantastic group of wider volunteers, we have seen positive developments in all areas of our mission, as you will read below.

### **Harbour Edge Restoration**

Two sites were significantly progressed this year. Both Hetherington reserve and Tukere road plantings are now well established. There are some gaps to be filled, but generally the plants are doing well. This is due to the fantastic efforts of a team led by Phil Hitchcock who have been constantly battling strong weed growth which at times have threatened to overwhelm the plantings. At Tukere a small team of local residents are doing the nurturing work. So a big thankyou to both teams of volunteers.

We must also record thanks here to the Thames Coromandel District Council (TCDC) Parks and Reserves team who have been helping greatly with plants and other tangible support.

### **Backyard trapping**

A recent study concluded that anywhere in New Zealand, we are no more than 50 metres from a pest like rats or mice. You may have seen media coverage of the attempted pest eradication efforts on the Mirimar Peninsular, with thousands of traps sited every 50 metres across urban and reserve areas. We don't have such grand plans at this point, but we are keen on getting good coverage of traps and bait stations across our township. Already we are approaching 100 sites due to the energetic efforts of coordinator Lyn Norris. We are getting great feedback particularly about the amount of bait being taken by pests and we are keen to see further growth in this initiative.

We note that we have received invaluable practical support from Predator Free 2050 NZ for these efforts.

### **Perimeter traplines**

The tireless efforts of Roselle Gould, ably supported by husband Dave Beatty, have seen our traplines in the reserves and bush areas surrounding Whangamata grow from 12 to 20 over the last 12 months. This has involved effective fundraising, purchasing, placing and geo locating the actual traps, and then finding, training and supporting volunteers to actively monitor and maintain them. There is a lot of effort going into this area and we are hugely indebted to those volunteers who check the traplines weekly, fortnightly or monthly, depending on ease of access and volunteer time availability. We are seeing incredible rates of success in recent months, with the 12 month totals to March 31 being ? stoats, ? rats, and ? other vermin killed. Plus of course the numbers undoubtedly stopped from further prolific breeding by the bait consumed in our bait stations. Reports of Tui and Fantail numbers are up around town, and endangered Australasian Bittern have been sighted in swamps on the outskirts north and south of town.

### **Wading Bird High Tide roost**

The situation of the wading birds that flock to the extensive mudflats in our harbour and estuaries, including Godwits from Siberia, has been of concern for years. The issue is that at high tide they need somewhere to roost that is safe. Currently, due to mangrove expansion and urban development the only area they have for this is the sand area adjacent to the Beach Rd reserve. During summer large numbers of birds can be observed there. The problem is that it is currently a dog off leash area and dogs like nothing more than to chase birds. These frequent disturbances deplete the bodily reserves these birds are attempting to build for their long return flights. We are actively exploring the technical and financial implications of an artificial roost in the middle of Patiki Bay, but in the meantime we have support from TCDC to put up a significant and informative sign to raise people's awareness of the issue, and hopefully modify their behaviour. We also plan to raise awareness through local media when the sign is erected, which will hopefully be before the migratory birds return. We currently await a response from the Community Board for funding of the sign.

### **Harbour edge spring clean**

We instigated and organised a waters edge Spring Clean last september?? Interestingly, the beach front yielded small amounts of rubbish, with the majority of the depressingly large yield being from the Otahu and Moana Anu Anu estuaries. We hope to repeat the exercise again this coming spring, in conjunction with several other community groups.

### **Mangrove seedlings**

As usual, the issue of mangrove expansion has been wrestled with. The current terms of the Waikato Regional Council (WRC) consent are onerous and inefficient. Some hope resides in the draft WRC Coastal Plan which may become fully operational early in 2025. It allows for seedling removal basically as of right, including the use of battery powered weed eaters, although the requirement to remove cuttings to landfill remains. We will be making submissions when the hearings on the draft plan are held, and remain hopeful that this loosening of bylaws and WRC oversight will make next year's efforts easier. In the meantime we are having working bees to address what has been a peak year for mangrove seeds and seedlings, and trying to follow the consent conditions as best we can. We are also aware of many mangrove 'fairies' who are doing their own thing. While they are in breach of the WRC consent, Harbour Care neither condemns nor condones these efforts.

### **Sedimentation monitoring**

Sediment build up is a significant issue. All parties agree that the sediment is a result of poor land management practices in the surrounding areas, and this is what allows for mangrove expansion. They thrive on mud build up and in places around the harbour the build up is deep. As a result of Cyclone Gabrielle, WRC is giving belated attention to how much sediment is actually arriving and settling. You may have seen the pegged out concrete plates that have been located in various parts of the harbour. We continue discussions with WRC to provide assistance if wanted, and separately to explore other more efficient ways of monitoring the situation over time.

### **Financial stability**

As a result of some generous donations and new sponsors the organisation is in a healthy position. But we are by no means awash in funds and various possible major initiatives are well outside our means. We continue to need sponsors and generous benefactors as we continue to broaden our approach to preserving and enhancing the natural environment that we are so blessed to live amongst.

### **Conclusion**

I must register my fulsome gratitude to the members of the committee and our wider pool of volunteers, many of whom have put untold hours into various projects. The passion and commitment of everyone is not only encouraging but essential if Harbour Care is to achieve its goal of Whangamata being an environmentally friendly and sustainable place to live and play. However, we need more volunteers to come on board and are seeking to raise our profile locally, and to be more specific about our needs, going forward.

Also a big thanks to our sponsors, trusts and generous benefactors who have supported us. Without them, we would have gone backwards this year. But again, efforts to increase wider awareness of our goals and needs will be required as we seek to increase the financial support required.

So in retrospect, we believe we have seen a year of positive achievements by Whangamata Harbour Care.