



Reflections on a Strategic Approach to Indigenous Biodiversity of the Bay of Plenty

Presented to Regional Biodiversity Strategy Symposium

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Presentation Overview

- How we value indigenous biodiversity and what drives our passion to protect it.
- Observations on the state of indigenous biodiversity in the BOP.
- How community action and partnerships have contributed to better indigenous biodiversity outcomes.
- Vision for the future and ways that the strategy could help deliver that vision.



How we value indigenous biodiversity and what drives our passion to protect it

- My fundamental driver is to try and make our world a better place, generally in many small ways.
- For me, interest in nature started very young: our parents were focussed on education and support, and our rural primary school (in the 1960s) provided 'nature study' classes and Forest and Bird 'field trips'. As rural children, we saw and experienced things that are now not usual, e.g. clean swimmable lowland waterways (streams and canals) on the Rangitāiki plains, and matuku hurepo/bittern were relatively common.
- It must be acknowledged that ecosystems and species have intrinsic values and rights.
- However, people are an integral part of the ecology of Aotearoa, and have been for centuries, and biodiversity protection and enhancement goals and actions are set and implemented by people. As such, I'm not driven by a goal to return to a 'pre-human' state, which is unrealistic.
- 'Valuing' of indigenous biodiversity, for me, is based on a sound understanding of what our landscapes used to look like, combined with a good understanding of what now remains in our landscapes, and pragmatic, cost-effective options for restoration (on many different scales, from gardens to many thousands of hectares).



How we value indigenous biodiversity and what drives our passion to protect it (cont.)

- Context is important:
 - To see what ‘primeval’ lowland Aotearoa looked like you need to go to places such as South Westland (especially the Haast Plain), Waitutu, or Rakiura.
 - 10% is now significantly disturbed habitat (cities, towns, infrastructure); 63% of land is farms, plantation forests, settlements, roads; 27% is indigenous habitat – mostly invaded by exotic pests.
 - Habitat loss of 60-80% is a critical threshold for species extinctions and we are at that threshold.
 - Greatest changes have been in the lowlands - where most people live.
- Even in highly developed landscapes there are still remnants of natural areas and processes :
 - Gully systems and streams in cities.
 - Rivers and streams flowing through primarily dairy or horticultural areas; drains with native fish.
 - Small degraded wetlands on farms and in urban areas.
 - Small patches of kahikatea on alluvial plains, scattered native and exotic trees that provide bat roosts.



Observations on the state of indigenous biodiversity in our rohe

- BOP is hugely information rich and we know a lot about what used to be here and what is left, for almost every part of the region. We also have an outstanding knowledge base, including matauranga Māori/indigenous knowledge, and awareness of issues.
- Nevertheless, despite this knowledge and substantial protection and restoration effort, our generation has ‘presided’ over a period of ongoing ecological degradation:
 - Deteriorating lakes and lowland streams/rivers.
 - Land use intensification and associated incremental losses.
 - Serious and expanding weed and pest animal issues.
 - Large areas of wild backcountry are not under active management (or even adequate monitoring).
 - A patchwork of remnant degraded geothermal areas and wetlands.
 - Numerous smaller grazed degraded forest remnants.
 - Weed infested coastal environments that are continuing to degrade.



How community action and partnerships have contributed to better indigenous biodiversity outcomes

- When I started work as an ecologist there was almost no active ecological management other than control of pest browsers – by agencies and private commercial hunters - and limited control of environmental pest plants.
- Over the last few decades there has been a dramatic change in wider societal attitudes to nature: we now want it where we live as well as in ‘wilderness’ backcountry areas.
- This has led to a huge increase in action on the ground by community and iwi groups, and agencies, with many projects across the region, although there are obvious geographic gaps. Selected examples include:
 - Raukumara Pae Maunga.
 - Ngā Whenua Rahui management of eastern kawenata.
 - Ōhiwa Headland Sanctuary Project.
 - Whakatāne Kiwi Project.
 - Omataroa Kiwi Project.
 - Ngāti Whare/DOC management of Whirinaki Conservation Park.
 - Te Pua o Whirinaki Regeneration Trust (returning 600 ha of plantation forest to indigenous forest).
 - Lake Tarawera pest control (since early 1990s).
 - Ōkere Falls Care Group.
 - Maketu Ongatoro Project.
 - Kaimai Mamaku Project (and DOC Mokaihaha).
 - Plus hundreds of other community, iwi, and landowner initiatives.



How community action and partnerships have contributed to better indigenous biodiversity outcomes (cont.)

- Agencies and people working on the ground have a ‘symbiotic’ relationship:
 - Agencies have largely changed their formerly somewhat patronising attitudes towards community/iwi groups – agencies know that they have limited physical capacity and they need to enable action by others.
 - Community, iwi, and landowner projects require resources and help to provide the justification for agency budgets (and staffing levels).



Vision for the future and ways that the strategy could help deliver that vision

- Good relationships are essential, between agencies and landowners, community, and iwi groups.
- Farms, towns, cities need to embrace indigenous plants and fauna.
- Indigenous biodiversity must be an integral part of sustainable land management, not some geographically separate activity.
- Where very significant losses have occurred, we need to re-establish natural ecological processes, indigenous vegetation and habitats, and indigenous species in their natural place(s) in our landscapes.
- For larger remaining natural areas: increase the geographic extent of threat management to protect and enhance ecological processes, vegetation, habitats, and species.



Vision for the future and ways that the strategy could help deliver that vision (cont.)

- To set goals we need to understand what we are dealing with: ecosystems (landforms, geology, vegetation, soils, and other biota) and key natural processes.
- Increase support for people who are actively caring for indigenous biodiversity, at a range of scales, from very small to very large. Some great projects in the BOP have come from very small beginnings that were initially thought (by some in agencies) to be a waste of time.
- Good strategic approaches and plans are required, e.g. linking mountains to the sea, using catchment-based planning.
- Options for 're-wilding' are important, e.g. return some waterways to natural courses, low-lying farmland to wetlands (estuarine and freshwater).



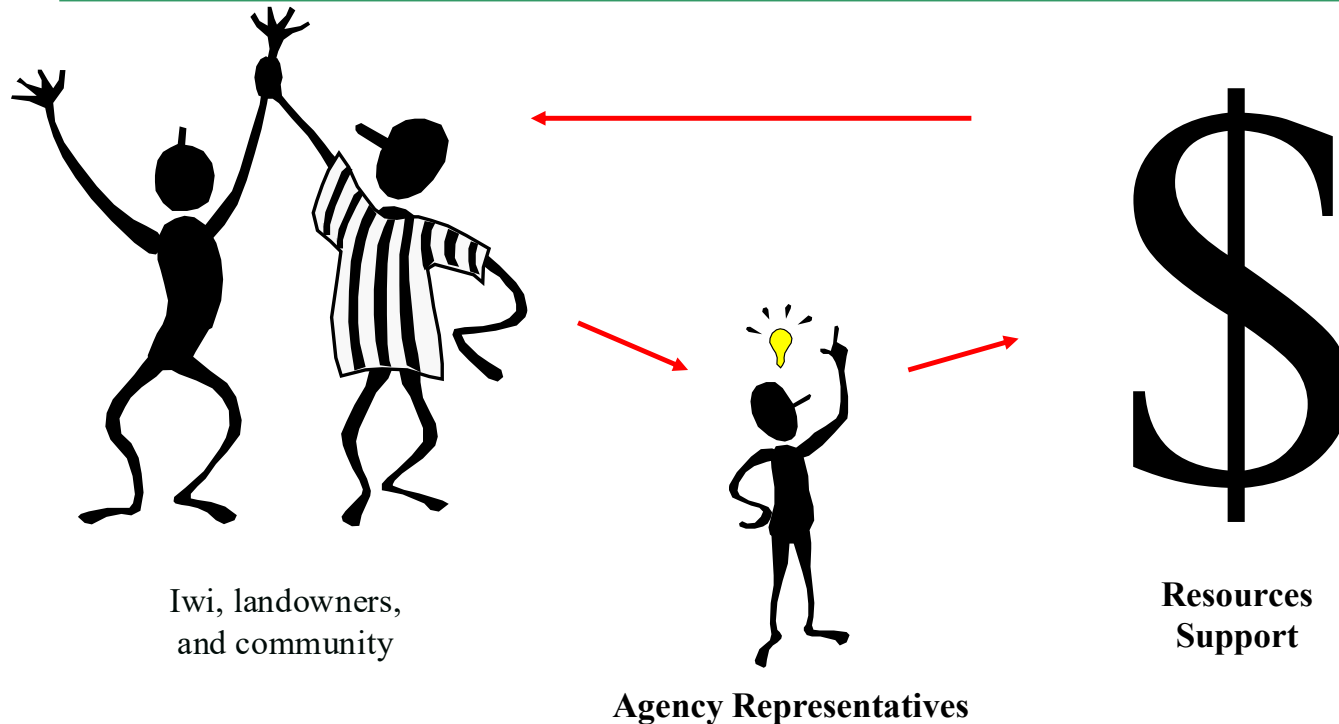
Vision for the future and ways that the strategy could help deliver that vision (cont.)

- We need integrated, flexible, multi-generational, and culturally-based approaches that include education (integrated with schools and even ECE), funding, technical support, and a diverse range of tools to support those on-the-ground.
- We must take a long-term view. This is not a five- or 10-year process. It is going to take a very long time, so the strategy needs to provide a blueprint for a way of life, not a 'sprint' to some idealistic 'endpoint'.
- A vision statement should start with recognition of the central role of people:

People are inspired and supported to protect, enhance, and restore nature across the Bay of Plenty



Sustainable Management of Natural Heritage and Indigenous Biodiversity



A SHARED VISION



Ngā mihi nui
Thank you

