

Kuaotunu Biosphere Group

Notes from meeting 14/3/21 at Kuaotunu Community Hall

Attendees

Joe Davis (JD) Ngati Hei
Brent Page (BP) – Kuaotunu Ratepayers Association
Chris Severne (CS) – Opito Bay Ratepayers Association
Cameron Fleming (CF) – Otama Ratepayers Association
Nick Kelly (NK) – Department of Conservation
Kate Nielsen (KN) – Kuaotunu Ratepayers Association
Paul Cook (PC) – Opito Bay Ratepayers Association
Dean Glen (DG) – Otama Ratepayers Association

Also NgH – Ngati Hei, DoC – Department of Conservation, KP – Kuaotunu Peninsula, CP – Coromandel Peninsula

Introduction

Agreed that there would be benefits from some formalisation of structure, to improve communication, accountability and follow up / progress monitoring.

CS suggested that BP should be elected chair, supported by all. BP agreed to take on the role in this initial phase and asked PC to take on role of note taker.

DG asked for awareness of agreed aims, and avoidance of group being hijacked by particular interests or individual agendas. Also need to be aware of implications of RMA in developing activities and proposals.

KN reinforced need to keep common goal in mind and avoid being sidetracked.

CS talked about the environment being under huge stress – this group has knowledge and understanding of what needs to be done. The organisations represented have been working on projects independently, now recognize the opportunity to take action on a larger scale. The group is committed to taking responsibility through NgH to take actions to restore the environment. Important for the group to acknowledge issues re land ownership and interests of private landowners. Our focus should be on the government estate.

KN commented that progress does not need to be more, bigger, better – have to look at new ways to bring sustainability into focus.

NK has seen conservation issues used as a lever for other things – we need a clear vision and purpose, better not necessarily bigger. Important to be respectful of other ideas and opinions. Noted that DoC has identified peninsula as a priority place to be predator free.

BP stressed need to clarify and reinforce vision. Start with accepted Definition of Biosphere region – suggestions:

- *A terrestrial and coastal ecosystem which promotes solutions to reconcile the conservation of biodiversity with its sustainable use*
- *All existing & proposed human activity must clearly demonstrate a positive environmental impact*
- BP also referenced Hauraki Iwi plan *“My vision is that we have a sustainable environment, but we have also to be concerned that people have to survive/thrive within that”*

Doing what we have been doing is not good enough – we have lots of groups doing good things but overall the environment is deteriorating. Is there a need for a new governance model for this piece of land? NK quoted Lord Howe island – where bylaws have been changed to support agreed environmental objectives.

PC advocated the need to look at the situation “bottom up” as well as top down – the group needs to demonstrate that current initiatives can be improved through co-operation and communication, as well as developing and communicating the vision.

CF commented on the opportunity to demonstrate benefits through low hanging fruit – for example the scallop Rahui has already demonstrated the power of working together.

PC noted we need to get the messaging right – talk about the benefits of good environmental management rather than sacrifices that need to be made.

JD stressed the need to preserve kiwi culture. Changing demographics from immigration policies will affect us, and it will be important to make sure people understand kiwi way of doing things.

CF talked about Omaha activity around trying to put in place protection for the foreshore and the need to educate people about sustainable practices.

NK stressed the need to communicate rules and expectations for people to understand. PC talked about opportunity for signage to communicate “welcome, here are the rules”. Also refer to history and culture. JD talked about ways to deliver the message – particularly for young people and other cultures – not just traditional words on signs. Technology opportunity – e.g. when you enter the Peninsula your phone beeps and delivers a range of information and guidance.

The geographical area under consideration was discussed, and JD noted that Councils have a different perspective from iwi rohe. Suggested demarcation line in the first instance is the main road from Wharekaho.

BP summarized the discussion – we all agree KP is a special place, and the group is intended to “turbocharge” activity to protect and restore it. We need to achieve a balance between people and environment, growth and sustainability. Noted that we need to understand Ngati Hei view of that balance.

JD commented that people are not properly aware of the history of the peninsula and the associated archipelagos. There is great leverage available reinforced by the links to issues such as the proposed Hauraki Gulf marine park. The place is ripe to demonstrate leadership, with a lot of Kaupapa to leverage off, and stories to be told.

CS noted the historical significance of Sarah's Gully and other areas — this is where Aotearoa started.

We need to understand how the group fits in with Ngati Hei positioning in respect to issues such as legislation and cogovernance arrangements. JD noted there is discussion in progress at a number of levels - talking to WRC, TCDC, DoC etc. We need to be aware of those political moves.

There was caution voiced about the implications of taking government money for funding. Forest & Bird and Legasea were mentioned as examples of non government funded organisations who were able to work around central and local government.

There was discussion around the “quick wins” philosophy – important not to sacrifice or lose sight of the greater vision in the pursuit of short term gains.

Proposal for Hui with appropriate groups / organisations

BP suggested a Hui inviting every environmental group on the peninsula, inviting them to present their Kaupapa, and use the Lord Howe Island to understand how we can learn from it.

NK said DoC wants CP to be the next “predator free” target zone – but they have been concerned about the proliferation of community groups operating in the area and the difficulty of dealing with particular interests – e.g. anti 1080 groups.

It was noted that we would need to have a structure for the Hui – not just a talkfest but aimed at mutual education and understanding. Need to impose a constructive format. Limit time, give structure, seek areas of co-operation, learning. Also need to keep the wider community involved and informed.

BP noted there was a surprising amount of unanimity when the Kuaotunu community was surveyed. Can't resile from human development alongside environmental pillars – need to recognize the elephant in the room. How much human activity is right for balance of biodiversity? Need to be aware of TCDC and their potential to do things contrary to community demands. BP believes this is an opportunity to do something different.

NK talked about Taranaki community and Iwi working together under the designation of a Significant Natural Area. Noted that some form of designated area such as Biosphere may present an opportunity to establish top down guidelines / regulations.

DG – commented that If we go too high level or ambitious there is a risk of failure or veto. We need to keep an eye on the goal but start small, get wins. Once change starts it keeps

on. An example is the Scallop Rahui – if we started talking about Marine Reserves, people would get concerned (we want to fish). But if we demonstrate the gains from the Rahui we can build on it. Take manageable bites, start redirection in a way that brings people with us. People are not good at taking big steps, dealing with major change.

It was agreed that a Hui was a good first step. Don't need to impose a fixed agenda, let people come together and talk. Use Lord Howe to tie things together at the end.

BP – should we commission someone to start drafting aspirations from communities, iwi, Doc. Agree an overall target, under which initiatives can converge. Reinforce that individual rights come with responsibility to our community. Felt that it is maybe too early to do this, but should be kept in mind. We will need to find someone with the skills to develop a vision that all the groups can subscribe to.

JD referenced The Haidagwai Document (Canada) – which has been guiding JD in developing NgH model over the last few years. Link to that document here <http://mappocean.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/HGMP-WEB-2015-07-08.pdf>.

Preparation for Hui.

The group need to understand Iwi thinking. What are Ngati Hei aspirations with developments underway – land return, co-governance.

Don't want to take away the mana of the small groups – don't want them to think we are going to take over.

Possible aspects of Biosphere Group – Facilitation, Collaboration, Communication, Fundraising, Representation

DoC – want investment ready projects, and a unified community.

Would be good to table Rahui as an example of what the group can achieve. JD reported on progress with the Rahui – he has sent a letter to minister and had follow up talks with officials etc. One aspect is trying to get the crown to buy quota, which could neutralize opposition from commercial fishers. JD noted he has had good support from the Hauraki Maori Trust Board with the Rahui, and it was also noted that Waiheke and other areas had adopted a similar approach.

PC raised Monday meeting with TCDC Events Manager – group agreed with proposed position saying we need to rebrand the Whitianga Scallop Festival in light of the Rahui.

BP will forward the link to the document tabled on CP Iwi environmental thinking.

Target date for Hui – end of May – BP will prepare a draft invitation setting out the initial vision of the Biosphere Group and the objective of the Hui, for circulation to the Group.

Meeting closed 12:30

