

Action plan and strategies defined for 2003

The Advocates of The Tongariro River Inc. committee met for a planning session on February 1st to work out a strategy and action plan for the coming months in order to effectively implement the objectives of the Group. The meeting was held at Bridge Lodge in Turangi.

Finding the most effective ways to achieve the Group's desired outcomes was the general thrust of the meeting, with all committee members contributing to the framework of a working plan, which will be the blueprint for further action in months ahead.

Two main prongs to the Advocates' strategy were identified. First, the need for the Advocates to support the Virginia Church Submission to the Parliamentary select Committee for Local Government and the Environment as it sums up succinctly many of the key concerns about the degradation of various areas of the Tongariro River. Having this Submission heard by a Select Committee would be a major step forward in allowing the Advocates' concerns aired to central government. (See separate article on the Virginia Church Submission below.)

The second aspect of the strategy is to work for the establishment of a river management plan for the Tongariro and for the Advocates to have a say in the development of that plan. It was decided that the Group would liaise closely with the designated authorities empowered to produce such a plan and ensure the Advocate's views were

represented in its formation. The approach in this area will be active, participatory and persistent, as the development of a river management plan will be a pivotal part in achieving the Advocates' goals.

A media strategy will also be developed to ensure wider public attention is brought to critical issues the Advocates will raise in the months ahead.

Other matters discussed were the need to grow the membership base as quickly as possible. Further action to promote the value of Advocates' membership will be made in the months ahead with North Island fly fishing clubs and recreational user groups targets of immediate focus. The meeting also acknowledged the considerable work already done by committee members in building the current membership base to around 100 members.



Mark Cosgrove

Advocates' Chairman Mark Cosgrove believes building the membership base is a critical objective in the short term to ensure the organisation has enough critical mass to have a strong voice in the decision making process.

"While we have a talented team driving things forward and many enthusiastic members supporting us, we need to build our base to a higher level given the challenges ahead. I would invite members to canvass their friends who have an interest in the Tongariro to also become members. It's a small outlay for a potentially large return for all those who care about the river," says Mark Cosgrove.

Further committee meetings will keep track of the plan's progress.

The Virginia Church Submission - the goals of the Advocates in microcosm

For members not familiar with the Virginia Church Submission to the Parliamentary Select Committee for Local Government and Environment, the Submission was in support of a petition presented to Parliament on behalf of some 600 people representing local Maori, landowners, residents, recreational users, fishermen, tourists, tourism operators and public who are concerned at the present state of the Tongariro River.

The Submission is in two parts, the first describing the present state of the Tongariro River with focus on the damage occurring in the lower half of the river, below the State Highway One bridge.

The Submission outlines the Maori landowner concerns, particularly those affecting the Church whanau. Over 200 acres of arable land (including burial grounds) are now underwater with much more land under threat from erosion and flooding. It details how much of this damage is man made, stemming from controls imposed on the river as a result of the Tongariro Power Scheme constructed some 35 years ago. The Submission outlines the fact that 45,000 cubic metres silt are flushed down the river each year, with river flows (controlled by Genesis) inadequate to flush much of the silt into Lake Taupo. The negative effects of silt build-up impact on the trout habitat and spawning

areas, not to mention damage to the Delta wetlands and associated flora and fauna. The build up of the riverbed from silt has also increased the likelihood of flooding and damage to property and the banks of the river.

The fact that dead willow trees lying in the river are choking river channels and destroying trout fishing pools, and an over abundance of live willows is slowing river flow and increasing silt build up, is also highlighted in the Submission.

The Submission goes on to identify the negative impact of the above on tourism and recreational users and touches on the negative financial implications for the Tongariro community and country as a whole.

The second part of the Virginia Church Submission outlines the remedial action required to address the present problems and request immediate action be taken.

At present the Advocates Group is waiting for confirmation from Government as to whether the Submission will be heard by the Select Committee for Local Government and Environment. We will advise the outcome to members in forthcoming newsletters.

Those interested can obtain a full copy of the Virginia Church submission by writing to Advocates of the Tongariro River Inc., PO Box 335, Turangi. The full Submission will appear on the Advocates' website soon.

WELCOME TO OUR FIRST ISSUE!

With the Advocates of the Tongariro River now officially registered as an incorporated society, it is timely we now issue our first newsletter to inform our members and interested parties about the Group's activities and intentions.

The focus of the Advocate will be on reporting and highlighting issues relating to the Group's key objectives - the protection and enhancement of the river environment and world-renowned fishery, the active fostering of sensible river management strategies and preserving the health of the river for the benefit of all users and visitors.

As you will see from the activities and events reported in this inaugural issue, a lot of work has already been done in getting the Group established and undertaking the initial actions required to ensure members have a 'voice' in any future decisions made about the Tongariro.

This newsletter will also strive to be a forum for member's views and opinions on how best we can move forward as a Society, so any positive contributions will be well received. We look forward to reporting on progress in the months ahead.

WORK IN PROGRESS - WHAT HAS BEEN DONE SO FAR

Over recent months the committee has been working behind the scenes on a number of fronts. This list summerises the most significant work done to date :

- Virginia Church Submission - help with the submission and follow-up and correspondence with central government.
- Exposure in two TALTEC newsletters covering local fly fishing club membership.
- The creation of a web site and promotional support material.
- Registration of The Advocates group as an incorporated society.
- Riverbank visits with Environment Waikato and ongoing discussions with Genesis, including attendance at their Open Day.
- Ongoing meetings and correspondence with Department of Conservation in Turangi.
- Submission at EW Hearing on Mighty River Power application for Lake Taupo Resource Consent.
- Membership flyers inserted into Wellington Fly Fishers Club newsletter, together with editorial coverage.
- Discussion and correspondence with the Turangitukua Conservation Group and Tuwharatoa Trust Board and the Tongariro-Taupo Conservancy Board.
- Funding applications to potential donor organisations.

Meet the Committee



In October last year The Advocates elected a committee to run the organisation for the next 12 months.

The committee (pictured left to right) is Tuatea Smallman, Heather McDonald, Ernie Sharp, Arthur Parish (Historian/archivist), Mark Cosgrove (Chairman), Bob Appleton, Gill Osborne (Secretary), Robin Parish (Treasurer) and Bob Duckworth. Absent: Helen Elliot and Robert MacDonnell. The first task of the committee was to draw up a constitution as part of the process of becoming an Incorporated Society. Members are invited to receive a copy of the constitution by writing to The Advocates at PO Box 335, Turangi. This too will appear on the website as soon as possible.

ASKING THE HARD QUESTIONS

At recent meetings with key authorities and organisations associated with the Tongariro River, committee members have made some satisfying preliminary progress in establishing relationships and presenting the views of the Advocates. In addition, the group is beginning to receive responses from these organisations, which is critical for future planning and strategies.

In an attempt to forge a working relationship with key organisations, letters outlining the goals of the Advocates have been sent to the Taupo Fishing Advisory, Lake Taupo and Waterways Group, Genesis, DoC, Tuwharatoa Trust Board, Turangituka Conservation Group, NIWA, Professor David Hamilton, Waikato University, Freshwater Anglers, Morgan Williams, Minister of Fisheries, Conservation and Environment, NZ Fish & Game Council and Turangi-Tongariro Community Board.

Follow up meetings with DoC and Genesis allowed committee members to have a greater insight into these key organisations’ positions with respect to the river.

The committee had a meeting with DoC’s John Gibbs, Taupo Fishery Manager and Glen MacLean, Technical Manager. Discussion centred on consents for water diversion and flow levels, which affect the fishery. For the

present consent process, DoC via its own research came to the conclusion that the higher the flow the better, and opposed an alternative view that a lower level would better enhance the river’s role as a trout nursery.

Glen MacLean and DoC Scientist, Dr Michel Dedual disagree with the NIWA model. For promoting the growth of young trout a higher, faster flow increases the likelihood of the young trout reaching 9mm in length, the size they need to be to survive in the lake. Their research suggests “flushing” the river, by increasing the flow for a limited time would be beneficial. These flushing flows would assist in clearing the river of silt and nuisance weed like periphyton. A small technical group is to be set up to fine tune the proposed flushing flows.

At a separate meeting, Dr Michel Dudual further expanded on what constituted optimum conditions for trout. He believed the conventional IFIM (Hydrographical Model) based on the ratio of number of trout to relative space did not appear to apply to the Tongariro River, where the ratio between trout numbers and food was a more appropriate benchmark. The Taupo DSIR had also carried studies in this area and came to the same conclusion i.e. that the limiting factor is food. Dr Michel Dudal believes the best way to keep the river clean and free of longer nuisance weeds that limit bigger insects important for trout growth is by managed fluctuations as proposed in the Genesis agreement.



Delta Blues

It is over two years since local and central government politicians were appalled at the state of the lower Tongariro and Delta, following a tour of the area organised by concerned Turangi locals. Unfortunately, very little has happened since that visit on the part of the designated authorities who have responsibility.

Those who have fished the Delta for many years are concerned about its present state. Ten to fifteen years ago there were regularly two rips at the first mouth, two at the “hook” and several at the main mouth. These rips could facilitate fishing for about 30 boats in the mid-1970s (Tony Jensen’s “Trout of the Tongariro River”).

The present situation sees the great mouth of the hook dried up and vanished. The first mouth still runs but rips reaching the drop off have become quite rare in the last few years. Even the main mouth seems to struggle to hold its power to the lip reducing fishing opportunities.

In addition to the river mouth problems, upstream clogging of pools by dead Willow trees, loss of walking tracks and unchecked flooding and erosion contribute to the degradation of what was once a healthy and vibrant gateway to the Tongariro River.

The accompanying photographs underpin the need for a management plan and prompt action to restore damage, which has been essentially the result of neglect.



WE’D LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU

Members are welcome to write to the Editor with any contributions, points of view and suggestions with respect to issues raised in this newsletter or about the Advocates of the Tongariro Group. We would be delighted to receive from members any old or new photographs of the river, or any news or information related to the objectives of the group. Where possible these maybe published in future issues of The Advocate.

Let it flow

River flow is a fundamental issue relating to the heath and wellbeing of the river. It’s been a controversial one ever since the Tongariro Power Scheme was begun on the mid-1960s.

Following on from the Resource Consent Hearings in 2000, the Department of Conservation threatened to take Genesis to the Environment Court over water diversion and flow issues adversely affecting the Tongariro. This year agreement between the two parties was finally reached without litigation.

The following is a chronology of events affecting river flow including details of the DoC/Genesis agreement.

1924 The mean flow of water recorded at the Main Road Bridge in Turangi was 53 cumecs per second. The lowest flow recorded was 21.5 cumecs.

1958 The Authority to use the Tongariro for hydro power production was gazetted on 30 October 1958.

1963 Assurances given by Ministers of Marine and Internal Affairs which guaranteed adequate flow in the Tongariro - a mean flow of 27.9 cumecs and the removal of sediment during tunnel construction. At public meetings, authorities promised that 50 percent of Tongariro water would be retained in the river. In 2002 only 41 percent is retained (less in summer).

Circa 1972 The Kirk Amendment - The then Prime Minister, Norman Kirk made a separate agreement to reduce the levels spilled at the Poutu Diversion to 11.3 cumecs (down from 14 cumecs). In addition a mean flow of 27.2 cumecs was to be maintained at Turangi. If the flow reduced below this figure then the flow had to be increased the following day.

The basis of the Kirk Amendment in reducing the flow is not to be found in any of the government departments at Turangi or Taupo, nor in any of their district head offices and warrants further investigation.

1973 The mean flow of the Tongariro is reduced from 56 cumecs to 27 cumecs as the Poutu intake and Tokaanu project come on line.

2002 Agreement between DoC and Genesis has been reached on the following:

1. Commencing 2003, there will be monthly flushes down the river (except mid-summer), to help clean the riverbed and encourage trout to run.
2. Minimum of 16 cumecs to be spilled below the Poutu intake.
3. 0.6 cumecs to be spilled down the Poutu Stream reducing to 0.3 during the spawning season. No gate testing during the spawning season.
4. Flow at Turangi to be 22 cumecs, based upon Power Scheme records, which show a daily mean flow of 20 cumecs per day over the last 20 years.
5. DoC to be given money by Genesis to improve fishing access in the lower Tongariro Delta area.

As both independent reports (Tonkin & Taylor 1999a) and Genesis's own publications confirm, river diversion and subsequent flow reduction increases sediment deposition, which has an adverse effect on the lower Tongariro.

These “concessions” go someway to redressing river flow issues, however, the jury is still out on how effective they will be in improving the Delta situation. It is also disappointing that the threat of litigation has been required to achieve them.

JOIN THE ADVOCATES OF THE TONGARIRO

Become an Advocate member for just \$10 or make a larger donation. Your support is vital for the Tongariro’s future.

Surname: _____

First Name: _____

Postal Address: _____

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Email: _____

Cheque enclosed for: _____

Mail this coupon and cheque to:
Advocates of the Tongariro River, PO Box 335, Turangi.
For more information, email cosgrove@reap.org.nz