

Extract from the Chairman's Report Motuihe Trust AGM 23 August 2002

Peter Whitmore Chairman

On 16 June 2000 Ronnie heard informally through a DoC contact that an American-based group was also interested in working on Motuihe. It transpired this was an organisation called Terra Nature, a New Zealand-based trust set up by expatriate Graeme Woodhouse, now resident in the USA. Terra Nature had a counterpart board and advisory council in California, and planned to tap into US sources to fund work in New Zealand. Motuihe had been chosen as an ideal high profile project to help get the trust established.

The arrival of Terra Nature created major difficulties. Now the Department had two groups interested in restoration work on Motuihe. Which one should be given the go-ahead, or was there any way of combining the strengths of both organisations?

To try to resolve this situation several of our members met with Graeme Woodhouse and another Terra Nature trustee on 12 December 2000. Graeme was adamant that in order not to jeopardise its charitable status Terra Nature needed control of the whole island, and that there was no role for our organisation.

We were not convinced by Graeme's arguments. Our trust had strong links to people on the ground and to volunteers while his was weaker in this area. His funding concept, although interesting and creative, was unproven. Our information indicated that the US laws on charitable donations were not as limiting as regards our participation as he suggested. And beyond all this we had already put in substantial work that we were reluctant to simply abandon.

From here on our trust, Terra Nature and the Department entered into period of essentially deadlock. The Department was loath to simply choose one trust or the other, and Terra Nature seemed to be intransigent in its insistence that it alone should be granted permission to work on the island.

A further meeting between trustees from the two trusts was held on 13 February 2001. Graeme Woodhouse was not present. The tenor of this meeting was positive and cooperative, but we later learned via a letter from Graeme Woodhouse dated 30 March 2001 that he would not support the direction taken by his trustees, and was maintaining his previous position.

The Department's preferred option remained to have the two trusts work together on the island in some capacity, rather than having to choose one trust over the other. In an attempt to achieve some progress, District Conservator Rob McCallum called two meetings between the trusts and the Department, the first on 24 May 2001 and the second on 25 June 2001.

At these meetings we agreed to set plans for our own trust aside and work with Terra Nature, provided we were given reasonable representation on that trust. Graeme Woodhouse's offer to allow us to add one trustee to his existing ten did not impress us, and hence no resolution was reached.

In a final effort to reach a resolution, Rob McCallum asked David Hill, Chair of the Auckland Conservation Board to mediate between the trusts. However, the process was not successful, as Terra Nature would not agree to the mediation process. Subsequently on 3 Oct 2001 Rob McCallum wrote to both trusts saying that neither of their proposals would be accepted.

In late March we once more contacted the Department and they indicated that they were now ready to start working with us again.

At the meeting of 3 May 2002 we changed the name of the trust to simply the Motuihe Trust. We also agreed to add as trustees Peter Lee, past chair of Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi Inc, and Tony Lindsay with his experience in database management, direct marketing and fund raising. These positions were ratified on 16 May 2002.

Subsequently we did considerable further work on governance and structural issues. This resulted in the production of a document covering corporate governance policies, the adoption of a structure including an Executive Officer and the interim appointment of Peter Lee into this new position, initially on an unpaid basis.

We started with a strong will to achieve something really worthwhile on this island. Despite a protracted and frustrating period during which we were held back by matters beyond our control, we persevered. Now I believe we are virtually at the point where we can expect the Department's approval to proceed.