

## **Interview with Michael Wood** (10 May 2017)

DOC had suggested to Ronnie that the way forward was to form a charitable trust. She approached Michael Wood, a lawyer, for help with the legal documentation, and he agreed. Michael knew Ronnie from visits his firm had made to Motuihe, and Michael also had a background in environmental restoration work in England.

The original trustees were Peter Whitmore (chair), Ronnie Harrison, Terry Gibbons, Hariata Gordon (Ngati Paoa), Mike Lee (then an Auckland City Council councillor), Anne Fenn (Auckland Conservation Board member) and Stephen Jackson (NZ School of Outdoor Studies, involved in youth outdoor training). The Michael was initially secretary for the trust, later becoming trustee, and he remains a trustee for the trust today (2017).

The trust was legally established in September 2000. The initial stage of about 2 years involved numerous meetings in order to set the trust's direction and role, and its governance. Those meetings were held at the then DOC office in Karangahape Road. Particularly supportive at that time were Auckland Conservator Rob McCallum, Manager Community Relations Warwick Murray, and Area Manager Beau Fraser.

Another trust that was formed about the same time was led by a New Zealander living in the USA. He had visited Motuihe and saw the proposed restoration project as an opportunity for US donors to fund through tax deductible donations. Ultimately this trust did not proceed with the Motuihe restoration.

In 2002 the Trust name was changed from Motuihe Island Restoration Trust to "Motuihe Trust" to avoid confusion with Motutapu Island Restoration Trust. Also at this time the maximum number of trustees was increased from 8 to 12.

It was obvious to any visitor to Motuihe that nothing could be done until the rabbits were dealt with. Ronnie remarkably managed to obtain a resource consent from Auckland Regional Council for a rabbit eradication programme. Auckland Conservator Rob McCallum had also visited Motuihe and was very concerned it was in such a degraded state. It was through his support that DOC funding became available for the rabbit eradication programme.

In 2002, with John Laurence as chairperson, things started to happen. The World Wildlife Fund donated \$15,000 for setting up the nursery. Funding was also received from Sky City to purchase the tractor and Mobil Oil made important donations in the first 3 years to get the project off the ground.

John Hawley, a landscape architect, worked with the trust to develop a Restoration Plan incorporating the overall vision for the island, and the details of the proposed restoration. The trust consulted on the Restoration Plan, and it was ultimately approved by DOC in February 2005.

Ronnie and Terry had wanted to keep the stock on the island, with fences used to protect parts of the island as they were planted. However it became clear that this would not be practicable in the long term, as the fences were difficult to maintain, so that stock managed to break through and damage the newly planted trees, and pugged the paddocks allowing weeds to take hold. The last of the cattle were removed in 2005.