

Mangere Matters

December 2014

Move to Puketutu a time to look back as well as forward

Machinery is purchased and in place, staff are readying the site, and trials are under way for the next step in Watercare's ongoing environmental restoration work around the Mangere plant: the rehabilitation of the former Puketutu Island quarry using treated biosolids from the plant process.

Watercare has purchased the island from the Kelliher Charitable Trust and transferred ownership to a Trust made up of local iwi representatives. It will now lease the operational area back from the Trust.

Wastewater operations manager Mark Bourne says using Puketutu Island rather than an alternative site will reduce operating costs by up to \$22 million in real terms over the 35 year life of the project, including the upfront costs involved in purchasing the island and preparing the area.

"At the same time, it provides Watercare with an environmentally sustainable way to dispose of biosolids from the wastewater treatment process and an opportunity to develop an outdoor recreational area for all Aucklanders that recognises and preserves the unique history of the area," says Mark.

Mark says while the future is exciting, the move to Puketutu is also an opportunity to look back, marking as it does the end of biosolids placement on the reclaimed land south of the Island Road causeway.

Formerly part of the oxidation ponds, the 445,000 square metre site has over the past decade been transformed into an oasis of native bush. 20,000 specimens were planted out during the past autumn alone, including a variety of grasses around the bird roost.

Mark says plans to make the area available for public use are on track to be completed within the next three years.

"As we complete the biosolids placement, work is under way on covering those areas with cleanfill from excavation works elsewhere on site," says Mark.

"That will then be covered with a layer of topsoil in preparation for the next round of planting in May."

Mark says a further 18,500 native plants have been ordered for this year, and the growing diversity of specimens is becoming increasingly visible to passers-by.

"In the beginning, around 80 percent of the plants were flaxes, which we used to create a natural shelterbelt for the other plantings. The older-established plants are now beginning to show themselves above the flax shield, and as time goes by the proportion of flaxes will continue to drop to less than 20 percent of the total planted each year," he says.

Mark says while the transformation of the area has been a great success, it has not been without issues, particularly in the last year as placement sites got closer to the plant's neighbours.

"Odour issues have cropped up from time to time during this work, and while we've done what we can to minimise the effects, I'm sure some of our neighbours will be pleased to see this phase of the restoration work come to an end," he says.

"Once again, we are very grateful for their support."



Decision not to review consent the right one



A long-time advocate for the Manukau Harbour says Auckland Council's decision not to review the consent conditions governing Watercare's Mangere plant is the right one. Former ARC Councillor and Manukau Harbour Protection Society President Paul Walbran says the Mangere plant is delivering results in line with what was envisaged when the consents were drawn up.

"You'd only want to review the consent if you weren't getting the outcomes you expected, or if you decided the outcomes you were getting were no longer acceptable," says Paul.

"The consent conditions governing Mangere set out some very clear outcomes – and a very extensive monitoring regime," says Paul.

"So if someone had got their numbers wrong when the consent conditions were drawn up, the monitoring regime would show that: that's what it's for. But no matter which way you look at the available data, it shows the health of the Harbour is improving in line with the expected outcomes."

Paul says the thoroughness of the process underpinning the development of the consent conditions reassures him the conditions are still highly appropriate.

"I've been involved in a number of resource consent processes over the years, and the process around the Mangere plant was probably the most rigorous," says Paul.

"Anyone who had a concern was invited to take part. Everybody's view was on the table: that to me is why the end result was so robust."

"The other thing to remember is that conditions don't guarantee the outcome. It's compliance with those conditions that does that, and Watercare's compliance record at Mangere, while not perfect, is excellent," says Paul.

"The consent governing the Mangere plant sets very high standards – amongst the highest in the world – and of the very few breaches that have occurred, none have related to human health outcomes. In light of this, the not insignificant amount of money that a review would entail could achieve far more if applied to addressing other far more pressing water quality issues in our harbours."

Paul has had a life-long involvement with the Manukau Harbour: as a boy growing up on Waikowhai Beach, as an enthusiastic fisherman and sailor, and as someone whose concerns for the health of the harbour pushed him into local politics as an Auckland Regional Councillor.

"It was around the time that people were proposing to improve the health of the Manukau by relocating the outfall. To me, that was just shifting the problem rather than solving it," says Paul.

"Wastewater 2000 [the consultative process that preceded the major upgrade in treatment quality at Mangere] set up an idealised situation as a yardstick, rather than aiming for incremental improvements," says Paul.

"Watercare has embraced that approach and continues to deliver excellent outcomes for the Harbour and the community."

Introducing Paula Steinmetz



Watercare project engineer
Paula Steinmetz and Floyd

Why work at Watercare?

Because what we do really makes a difference. We've lived in countries where the water gave us giardia or the toilets were sheds on stilts built out from the sea shore. Think long bench seats with cut out holes – gave communal a whole new meaning.

What are you working on at the moment?

I've been at Watercare for just over a year working on the Puketutu Island Rehabilitation Project.

Where do you live, and what do you like about it?

Proud to be Onehunga born and bred; love the mix of people and the central location. Cornwall Park for a walk, Dresssmart for a bargain, Zookeepers for a drink, Ristretto for a coffee, Mt Smart for heart exercise supporting the Warriors. But most importantly a house across the road where my mother lives – vital when you've had four kids in five years!

Any hobbies or interests?

Running: I took it up two years ago to do my first fun run – a marathon. Came in sub 4 so decided I didn't need to do another one; Music: listening to my eclectic record collection (the kids tell me vinyl is back in again); Family: this is what my life is all about. We don't try and keep up with the Jones's, we keep it real, and we try to be kind to people – pretty simple way to live really.

