

## BANKS PENINSULA CONSERVATION TRUST REFLECTION PROCESS FINAL REPORT (February 2013)

### BACKGROUND

The Executive Committee endorsed the suggestion of an informal survey of key collaborators and uninvolved landowners with the aim of

1. identifying how the Trust is perceived
2. identifying perceptions of and recommendations for the Trust's evolution and future

### METHODS

The Executive Committee and Trust staff suggested a long list of potential interviewees which covered the following sectors:

- Statutory bodies and community representatives (CCC, ECan, DoC, Community Board)
- Conservation bodies (Joseph Langer Trust, Rod Donald Trust, QEII, Hinewai Reserve)
- Ngai Tahu
- Covenanters, local businesses, and local landowners
- Other interested individuals

The long list was then shortened to a contact list of 37 key individuals.

At time of writing, 24 people had been individually contacted (two-thirds of the original contact list). They were first telephoned and this was followed up with an email describing the nature and intended scope of the survey, together with some background information summarising the Trust aims, activities and achievements.

A list of guide questions was developed and reviewed, and this list was used in all interviews. The interview covered four broad areas – background understanding of and engagement with the Trust; the aims of the Trust; lessons from and impact of the Trust; and the future of the Trust.

Interviews were undertaken by David Miller and lasted from 30-60 minutes. At time of writing, 20 people had contributed to the survey – a response rate of 83 percent.

### KEY FINDINGS

This report focuses on key themes emerging from the interviews. Responses are *not* prioritised.

#### I. AIMS OF THE BPCT.

**Has the Trust been successful in its aims?** Most agreed the Trust has been successful in its aims, particularly in securing covenants and in providing high-quality public education and information. The Tui project was also noted as a signal achievement in enhancing biodiversity.

**Should the Trust be aiming to do more or less?** The trend of answers was that we should focus on what we do well – namely, covenanting. Some (particularly statutory conservation partners) suggested focussing more on *quality* of protection and on demonstrating how our covenanting adds value in enhancing biodiversity. Some suggested marine conservation as a future area of activity; some said we should be focussing more on staff welfare; two respondents suggested that we should be focussing more on reducing dependence on government, and increasing our links to corporate sponsorship and individual philanthropy.

**How do you see the Trust linking to your own (organisation's) aims?** All those offering answers to this question saw positive ("symbiotic") collaboration under the general conservation umbrella. It is clear the Trust is seen as a key implementing partner and, by some, as indispensable: "If the Trust wasn't doing what it does, it wouldn't be done." For this symbiosis to be maintained it was suggested there needs to be some alteration to the relationships – e.g., by enhanced emphasis on demonstrating the quality benefits of covenanting, and demonstrating *how* we prioritise what we do.

## II. LESSONS AND IMPACT.

**What gives the Trust added value – what unique contribution does it make?** The added value of the Trust lies in local farmers working with local landowners, and being a credible builder of enduring partnerships in the broader community: "People like the personal relationship with the trust. The tight group's ability to relate to other farmers [and other partners] has gained them respect and trust. They are seen to be living their words." "I can't imagine the Peninsula now without the Trust."

**What lessons do you take from the Trust's first ten years?** Key reported lessons from our first ten years include the following:

- The importance of local engagement by local Trust members
- Outstanding negotiation of the political landscape and of coordination of key partners in maintaining the conservation vision
- The difficulties that can come from having too many constituencies pulling us in too many different directions
- The importance of having effective internal management
- We sometimes appear to be taking on too much.

**What makes the Trust successful?**

- It is a community initiative with landowners talking to landowners
- Our apolitical stance and capacity to advocate without polarising people
- An outstanding team (Rachel, Marie, Brooke and Elise) and the *continuity* of our relationships with locals – we have created trust and goodwill across the board.

For the majority of respondents, success is measured by the number of covenants, the breadth of community support for BPCT, continued (and growing) funding, and this: "Tuis are the sound of your success".

**What needs to happen to ensure the Trust's continued success?** Opinions and suggestions included:

- Stay focussed and stick to the basics (covenanting and education/information)
- Stay apolitical, and avoid creating unrealistic expectations
- Continued consultation (with key partners over priorities) and recruitment of new perspectives
- Form proactive relationships with schools (including those in Christchurch and perhaps further afield) and optimise educational outreach
- Keep raising the Trust's profile locally and nationally with a strategic outreach programme
- Complete the website and iron out data inconsistencies
- Move to reporting on outcomes – particularly quality indicators linked to covenanting (demonstrate how we are adding to biodiversity) so we can make it easier for funders to make the case for increased funding of the Trust
- Professionalise management and fundraising/marketing
- Ensure we have sufficient administrative mechanisms so we can keep good staff

### III. THE FUTURE OF BPCT

**How do you see the Trust evolving in the next ten years?** There were three broad areas of response:

- i. **The way we work:** becoming more professional; strengthening our marketing via newsletters, media; developing our collaborations with Maori; developing and publicising a strategic direction and having professional management to implement it.
- ii. **Possible new directions:** evolve into an environmental trust with covenanting- and multi-agency collaborations for monitoring and maintenance; link more effectively with biodiversity and conservation groups *not* landowner-focussed, including university groups, which may be helpful in, e.g., environmental audits and research; develop a focus on quality of maintenance of covenants; ensure pest control becomes as important as covenanting.
- iii. **Other:** Focus on developing reliable funding structures.

**What risks do you see for the Trust in the coming years?** Answers came under two broad headings:

- i. **Internal issues:** Continued funding vulnerability; succession and organisational evolution needs to be planned for; cliques in governance and management; not conforming to our HSE obligations; burnout of staff and volunteers.
- ii. **Strategic issues:** taking too much responsibility from the main agencies – overreaching because of a lack of strategic overview among statutory bodies; getting diverted by chasing funds; becoming instrumentalised by being co-opted into the political agendas of donors, and subject to political division over specific issues – e.g., paper roads, access, recreation, rural subdivisions; creating unreachable expectations.

**What opportunities do you see for the Trust in the coming years?** There were many ideas offered with three broad areas emerging:

- i. **Education/information dissemination:** developing a schools and visitors education strategy (perhaps with MOUs and partnerships); more walks and workshops (and charging more for them); strengthening our use of digital media.
- ii. **Strategic outreach:** Developing a strategic outreach programme to foster engagement with schools, universities, urban peninsula constituencies (Mt. Herbert and Lyttelton); engaging with emerging opportunities, e.g., funded projects through the Canterbury Water Management Strategy.
- iii. **Strategic development:** protection of the marine habitat, waterways and foreshores; in partnership with Maori, creatively exploring further covenanting options such as *Arahui* – temporary protection as needed via temporary covenants; future-proofing the Trust financially by raising our profile to engage corporate sponsorship, working for tax advantages for covenanters, etc.; developing a strategic plan using agreed indicators for demonstrating our added value to biodiversity on BP, clarifying our decision processes and illustrating quality outcomes.

### DISCUSSION AND NEXT STEPS

It is interesting to note the relative homogeneity of responses to some questions. For example, the Trust is viewed unanimously as a valued and highly successful initiative that is appreciated, respected and trusted. Its activities command a similar level of respect and appreciation – covenanting, information dissemination and educational events. Individual members and staff were regularly mentioned for their extraordinary and beneficial contributions, especially in navigating political agendas and maintaining a cohesive convening role.

The Trust is also seen by many as having vulnerabilities as its responsibilities (i.e., land under protection, and community expectations) grow. Not least of these is its financial foundations and sheer capacity to manage what it has started.

That this process attracted open and candid responses – and a wide variety of opinions and suggestions – indicates that the Trust is seen and trusted as a vital element of and the opinion leader in any discussion about conservation and its future on Banks Peninsula.

The first decision for the Executive Committee is whether additional interviews are required. At this point, the underrepresented groups in the original 37 respondents are ECan and local business owners. The issue is whether this study is approaching a point of diminishing returns for effort expended. Also, time is an issue – further interviews now cannot be undertaken until mid-April.

The multiple opinions given by respondents do give some options for action (if we agree with them!) Initial broad options include:

- i. **Demonstrating our quality and added value to key collaborators and funders.** If we are aiming to illustrate the beneficial impact of our covenanting and, in the process, provide data to current statutory funders that makes it easier for them to maintain and increase their funding to us, we might consider:
  - Agreeing impact indicators to be used with key partners
  - Proposing (as a collaborative program) an impact audit in selected covenants (e.g., as a research collaboration with Lincoln)
  - Where necessary, clarifying the decision-making processes that lead to our priority interventions (i.e., why we covenant specific areas).
  
- ii. **Strengthening our marketing.** We might aim to increase our visibility to our constituencies and to potential donors. This is being reviewed internally, of course, but suggestions/considerations coming out of this project include:
  - The central importance of having an active (and proactive) membership programme, with subscriptions, linked to
  - A coordinated and proactive volunteer activity programme and
  - An updated website free of input inconsistencies and well-maintained
  - Developing a strategic outreach programme (a) to enhance Trust visibility locally and nationally and provide a qualitative (as well as the current quantitative) evidence-based platform for funding drives, and (b) for schools locally and perhaps regionally to develop support and engagement from the next generation.
  
- iii. **Internal professionalization of Trust management and staff processes.** The issues raised by interviewees essentially reflect what the Executive Committee is currently discussing.

Grateful thanks to the Executive Committee and staff of the Trust for all the kind assistance they have given in support of this process, and especially to the interviewees/respondents who gave their trust, time and experience so willingly.

**David Miller**  
**14 February 2013**