

ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 1987.

Overview

It has been a difficult year for many ecologists in New Zealand. Most of us are directly or indirectly funded by government and if not disrupted by departmental restructuring, then we are upset by the continuing unintelligent application of the user-pays principle to research.

The restructuring has resulted in a Department of Conservation which is to manage and protect all of the nation's natural and historic heritage from the mountain tops to the 12-mile offshore limit, and a Ministry for the Environment that is to ensure a 'balance' between conservation and development. The DOC has been given a research arm strong in wildlife and archaeological expertise but with insufficient personnel in botanical, earth science and marine biological fields to fulfil the department's responsibilities. More serious is the physical separation at central office, of DOC's natural resource managers from research staff which our Society, in its submission to the Hon. Russell Marshall (14 August 1985), saw as essential to avoid if wise and scientifically sound management was to be achieved.

Meanwhile our financial managers, and others who believe that the benefits of ecological science can be marketed like butterfat or wallboard, continue to insist on unrealistic charge-out rates for clients who are often not easily identified or cannot pay. Competition is replacing co-operation, information exchange is being stifled, the revenue-earning potential of projects is taking precedence over their scientific merit, and first-rate scientists fritter their time becoming second-rate commercial managers. An avalanche of paper buries productive work at depths that make such work look like an interesting archaeological horizon, and the question of what ecological work needs to be done in the national interest is decided by 'market forces'. When will somebody convince treasury officials and politicians that solutions to environmental problems cannot be commissioned in the way one can commission a painting, a sculpture or a piece of music? When will they realise that all we can sell are data based on our current (often inadequate) understanding, an information asset that was built from decades of work and which is only renewable in circumstances that foster basic ecological investigation?

All this is made worse by the fact that the report of the Ministerial Working Party on Science and Technology ('Beattie report'), by far the most significant statement on research in New Zealand during the past 50 years, appears to have been largely ignored by Government. The harmful effects of applying the user-pays principle to research that should be done for the good of the country are well documented in Europe and America, and are addressed in this report. Sir David Beattie's committee also specifically asked for an extension of time to address such matters as the research capabilities of the new environmental organisations. Government's failure to respond in any comprehensive manner gives a clear message: science counts for little in New Zealand.

On a happier note our Society completed its list of what we see as the important national priorities for ecological research in this country during the next 10 years (see Appendix below). It was a nationwide co-operative effort and I thank again all those who contributed. The fact that so far nobody appears to have taken any notice of the list should not deter us - there will be plenty of opportunities to remind those who should know, that there is a consensus of informed opinion that considers certain things need to be done, and the sooner the better.

We should not be afraid of having our work scrutinized and having pressure put upon us to become more accountable. The challenge is to convince our politicians that there is more to research than cost-effectiveness if we are to advance understanding of our environmental problems. We must remind them that serious ecological mistakes are usually more costly to society than either doing the necessary research to avoid such mistakes, or taking notice of information that already exists. We must draw their attention to ecological research that we think has positively influenced human affairs or attitudes in the past and we must reiterate that the continued use of natural resources in a non-sustainable manner will permanently reduce the quality of the environment in which we and our children will live. How can you contribute to this endeavour?

Ian Atkinson
President

Membership

The Society membership at 31 March 1987 was 436. There were 17 new members (11 full, 5 student, 1 introductory) and 27 resignations during the year. There were 162 subscribers to the journal (68 in New Zealand and 94 overseas).

Council Activity

The council met 6 times during the year. All meetings were held in Wellington with the exception of that prior to the AGM which was held at Lincoln. The following appointments were made by Council: Dr Nigel Barlow, Editor; Dr Murray Williams, representative to the Member Bodies' Committee of the Royal Society; Dr Jonet Ward, representative to the New Zealand Committee for Water Pollution Research; Dr Matt McGlone and Dr Judith Roper-Lindsay as Newsletter Compilers. Convenors of subcommittee were: AGM and Conference organiser, Dr Mike Butcher; Awards, Dr Carol West; Conservation, Dr Rod Hay; Education, Mrs Pam Williams; Nuclear Issues, Dr Ian Atkinson; Society Records, Mrs Margaret Leslie.

Editor's Report (Nigel Barlow)

The transition to new printers, 'SwiftPrint Centre Ltd' in Palmerston North, was smooth although the journal was still a little late. Twenty five papers were received, rather more than in previous years. Ten were rejected or returned for major rewriting and four of these were resubmitted for the next volume.

I thank the sub-editors John Gibb, Peter Johnson and Dave Towns, and the referees, for their heroic efforts in keeping the work flowing in such chaotic times.

Newsletter Compilers' Report

(Matt McGlone, Judith Roper-Lindsay)

In looking back over the last year's issues, the Newsletter Team takes some quiet satisfaction from the fact that members of the society are providing more items for the *Newsletter*. As we have repeatedly stressed, the primary function of the *Newsletter* is communication between members. We thank our correspondents for their efforts.

Our set target of 4 issues a year, on time, has yet to be achieved but we will get there. In the coming year we hope to have a special issue devoted to the impact and implications of the environmental organisation upheaval.

Other changes affect the cost of the *Newsletter*. It is unlikely that free typing will continue to be provided, but on the other hand, we could start to charge for advertisements of a commercial or fund-raising nature. Ah! the double-edged sword of user-pays....

Report of the Royal Society Member Bodies' Committee Representative

(Murray Williams)

Perhaps the major contribution of the Royal Society to the welfare of science in New Zealand during the past 12 months was its support of and submissions to the Ministerial Working Party on Science and Technology (The Beattie Report). The role of science within New Zealand is seen by many to be at a crossroads; the application of government's user-pays principle to and revenue earning requirements of state-funded science have raised many questions about the perceived role of science and technology in the future development of our nation. Both the N.Z. Ecological Society and the Royal Society, in the submissions to the Ministerial Working Party, highlighted the problems for strategic research within these new economic restraints and the Ministerial Working Party has also seen fit to voice its concern. But what is of even more concern has been the total lack, until now, of any government response to the Ministerial Working Party's report. The message that science and technology has a fundamental role to play in the future development of New Zealand seems not yet to be appreciated by politicians, even despite the title of the Ministerial Working Party's report - 'Key to prosperity'.

Given this, it is perhaps very timely that the Member Bodies' Committee should have recommended to the Royal Society Council that it sets up a standing committee on public understanding of science. Its role should be to seek ways and means of raising the public's perception of science. Clearly, without a greater public appreciation and support of science and scientists, the funding base, for science in New Zealand could become critical.

We now face the arrival of freshwater marron crayfish, brought into the country against the advice of the Government's own experts. The need to take heed of an ecological perspective on such problems is nowhere better illustrated than the debate about whether or not myxomatosis should be introduced to control rabbits. It is to be hoped that proper assessment procedures cover proposed importations of

exotic biota and become part of the law as soon as possible. Related to this is an examination of pest control and administration at a seminar in July at which the Society was represented.

Submissions on protected areas did not form such a large proportion of our activity as in previous years. Nevertheless, we contributed to the volume of material considered by the Secretary for the Environment's working party on West Coast forests in support of important new reserves in that area.

Work was also done on a number of other issues including packaging in the New Zealand environment, nuclear impacts and the spread of possums into Northland.

The Royal Society continues to maintain its role of advising government on matters of science and science policy and it continues to support scientists by means of its award schemes.

New Zealand Committee for Water Pollution Research and Control

(Jonet Ward)

In August, 1986, the 20th annual conference of the New Zealand Branch of the Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy was held in Rotorua. NZCEPRC sponsored the session on 'Effect of Mining on Water Quality' chaired by Mrs Helen Hughes, Commissioner for the Environment.

NZCWPRC will sponsor the Water Microbiology section of the combined Australian/New Zealand Microbiology Society meeting in Auckland in May, 1987.

There are plans by Professor Earle, Biotechnology Department, Massey University, to hold a mini international conference on Oxidation Ponds in Palmerston North to coincide with the Water in Society, Water Conference to be held in Dunedin in August 1988.

Society Records (Margaret Leslie)

The sorting of the various records and other material stored in the Ecological Society's cupboards at Ecology Division, DSIR Lower Hutt was completed. From now on it should only be necessary to maintain the system established. There are three sections of material.

The first section comprises stocks of published material: (i) Proceedings - remaining stocks 1954-1977 (in process of being reduced to a maximum of ten copies per year) and (ii) Journals - all remaining stocks from 1978 to present.

The second section, the Records, are stored in 12 different files: Administration; Books; Conservation and Correspondence; Education and Public Relations; Finance; General Matters - not dealt with by sub-committees; Journal; Meetings - e.g. Conferences; Newsletter; Proceedings; Royal Society Member Bodies; and Sub-committee - which contains those not warranting a permanent category of their own. Lists of material in each category are available.

Nuclear Issues (Ian Atkinson)

Earlier in the year the society distributed over 1500 copies of its publication 'The environmental consequences to New Zealand of nuclear warfare in the northern hemisphere' to schools at a nominal price per copy.

In the latter part of the year the New Zealand Planning Council instigated a study on the impacts to New Zealand of a major nuclear war. The study has obtained interesting and useful information from many sectors such as health, energy, agriculture, transport and communications and consulted nearly 300 people and organisations. The Council intends to present its report to the Minister for the Environment and publish it in September 1987.

Awards (Carol West)

The 1986 student award was won by Wayne Fraser.

A nomination was forwarded for Fellowship of the Royal Society of New Zealand.

The Marsden Medal, Scientists Research Medal, and Hamilton Award were considered but no suitable nominees were available.

Conservation (Rod Hay, convenor, Colin Ogle, Janet Owen)

A year of great change in the 'environmental' arena has provided plenty of scope for activities for the conservation sub-committee. Unfortunately, so beset were most members by the effects of such change it was not always possible to do justice to every issue which came to our attention. We concentrated on three main areas; government policy and procedures, exotic biota and protected areas.

In submissions to the Environment Bill, Conservation Bill and proposed Environmental Assessment Procedures, the Society made a strong plea for recognition of the intrinsic value of New Zealand's natural environment. Our attitude, combined with that of like-minded agencies and individuals, has brought about much needed changes

to drafts of these documents. Our submission to the Working Party on Science and Technology and a submission to the Minister of Finance on the likely environmental implications of the new State-owned Enterprises carried what we felt were important messages on behalf of the natural environment and on our understanding and use of it.

A series of submissions and some publicity about proposed and actual introduction of new species of plant and animal has illustrated the need for more work to ensure that full consideration is made of the potential hazards of such introductions. It seems that little has been learnt from past disasters or from recent episodes such as that with chinchilla.

The third section consists of a card index to matters in the Category Files and in the Minutes of Council and General Meetings.

In addition a handbook for use of President and Secretary has been compiled which gives quick reference to Rules and practices and precedents established by previous Councils.

Obituary - Count Kazimierz Antoni Wodzicki

Dr Wodzicki died at his Wellington home on 5 June 1987 at the age of 87. He was born in Poland in 1900 into an aristocratic land-owning family. Dr Wodzicki took his degrees at the University of Krakow on agricultural subjects. He studied the reproduction biology of domestic poultry and horses and developed a special interest in agricultural archaeology. One of his main loves which he brought with him to New Zealand was bird watching.

He came to New Zealand as Polish Consul-General during the Second World War. During that time he and his wife, a Countess in her own right, were very active in resettling Polish refugees in New Zealand. At the end of the War, Poland was under

communist control and was no longer an attractive place in which to live. The then Prime Minister of New Zealand, Peter Fraser, knowing of Dr Wodzicki's scientific interests, asked the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research if it could find a position for him. It did and thus began the survey of introduced mammals which led, in 1950, to DSIR Bulletin 98 'Introduced Mammals of New Zealand' which is still the authority in that field.

The survey of New Zealand's introduced mammals led the DSIR to establish the Animal Ecology Section, now the Ecology Division of DSIR. Dr Wodzicki remained as its Director until 1965. He directed many years of work on the biology of rabbits but his most celebrated personal work was on the gannets on Cape Kidnappers and the birds of the Waikanae Estuary. After he left the DSIR the 'Doc' continued to do active research for 20 more years, mostly on the ecology and economics of rats in the Pacific islands.

Dr Wodzicki was a founder member of this Society in 1952, although he never stood for office. He was made an honorary member of the Society in 1984 to mark his many years of service to New Zealand Ecology (see N.Z. J. Ecol. Volume 8). He was awarded the OBE in 1978, he was a Fellow of the Society of New Zealand and was granted an honorary Doctorate of Science from Victoria University.

Dr Wodzicki's diplomatic and aristocratic manners were very much a hallmark of his personal relations. To some, this was a source of consternation especially when allied to the Doc's enormous determination when he decided upon a course of action. Even in New Zealand's relaxed Society, very few addressed him other than as Dr Wodzicki, but among colleagues there was only one person known as 'the Doc'.

Mike Rudge