Chairman's Report – October 2013

The passing of Peter Walker

I would like to acknowledge the sad passing of Peter Walker, a great supporter of Waterfront Auckland and of the Vos Project, classic yachts and marine history. Peter was an architect and worked closely with Bruce Farr and was highly respected by Grant Dalton, Sir Peter Blake and Sir Tom Clarke. He had been involved in yacht design since the 1970’s and his close association with the Round the World challenges and the America’s Cup contestants was as a friend and a colleague. He was a champion of all things nautical. His support of Sea+City and Waterfront Auckland was as a close working partner and someone who saw the benefit to Auckland and New Zealand in what we were doing. On behalf of Waterfront Auckland I have extended our sympathy and support to his family. His daughter Frith is our placemaker at Wynyard Quarter.

Three Waters

Following on a nautical theme, I want to draw the attention of the Board to the excellent publication commissioned by the Committee for Auckland and the Executive Director, Heather Shotter, on the three harbours of the Auckland isthmus - the Waitemata, the Manukau and the Kaipara.

The Waitemata is the queen of harbours in New Zealand. It is simply superb and with the magnificent gulf and the island that stretches both East to the North, it is one of the great harbours of the world.

The other two are less known but are still in my mind important in the future of Auckland and the Supercity. The Manukau, which is often considered the forgotten harbour, has had a new lease of life since the removal of the wastewater ponds and the removal of the Westfield freezing works in the 1980’s and the industrial areas which poured unrefined waste into the harbour for 100 years or so. There is still much to be done and I will discuss this later. It’s still a magnificent stretch of water. The Kaipara is the second largest harbour in the world and relatively unknown and underutilised.

I would like to applaud the Committee for Auckland for the publication and the thought that has been carefully brought together to set a course and to urge the new Council to consider the concept of a spatial plan for the structure and strategic thinking in the next decade. The Committee for Auckland believes that with the Unitary Plan now in place, it’s time to set the scene for an Auckland vision of the three harbours. It should be a partnership between Auckland City and Central Government and we should, without fear or favour, examine the opportunities and the challenges that these harbours offer the new Auckland. I read this publication with real anticipation of a document that sets a course for this Council. Board members will recall that we contributed to the research to make it possible.

The Waitemata

We owe much of the history of the Waitemata to Ngati Whatua who lived on the headlands and the beaches for around 500 years. They were probably interrupted by the eruption of Rangitoto in the last 800 years, and so there is a distant connection which has been lost, but footprints in ash on the Gulf Islands would indicate that Maori lived and thrived while Rangitoto was erupting.

The European exploration was by the renowned French navigator Dumont d'Urville, who was one of the giants of navigation and was highly regarded by all sea navigators at the time of Bligh and Cook. He had captained the ship that brought the Venus de Milo which had been unearthed on the Aegean island of Milos in that year. In 1822 he served on a voyage around the world and returned to France in 1825. His next mission took him to the South Pacific, where he searched for traces of explorer Jean-François La Pérouse, lost in that region in 1788. On this voyage he chartered parts of New Zealand and visited the Fiji and Loyalty Islands. After his voyage to the Antarctic he returned as a hero to France and to retirement but unfortunately he became a victim of one of the first railway accidents in a tragic fire of an early experimental train. He chartered the Waitemata all the way up to Riverhead and to Herald Island.
owe much to his writings for our understanding of the Waitemata in the early part of the 19th Century. The Waitemata still has a wide and sustainable habitat and even though there is a large city around its shores, it still has abundant fish supplies and so recreational fishing is very important to its future.

The Hauraki Gulf is also vital to the harbour and the islands and most of the Gulf contains the maritime park and extends all the way to the Firth of Thames and to the Coromandel Peninsula. With Auckland’s projected population of 2 million by 2031, it is now important to bring together a cohesive plan for maritime activities on the Waitemata and the Gulf. As the report says, there are many issues to be dealt with both tensions and tradeoffs as the Council manages Auckland’s maritime history.

The Manukau and Kaipara

The report makes no secret that the Auckland Council and Central Government need to set up urgently a committee to review current governance arrangements to better manage the Kaipara and the Manukau harbours. The Manukau has already an extraordinarily good support base around the Onehunga area. This is generally from enthusiasts who now want to see the wastewater outflows removed and managed sustainably. Right now they are not and when I met with the Manukau Preservation Society in Onehunga last month I was very impressed by their concerns and strategic thinking on how they can work with Watercare to reduce these outfalls.

I think in the future Waterfront Auckland should extend its sphere of operations to the Manukau, the port and the land around this harbor, and bring our thinking and our management skills to assist all the stakeholders in a plan of consideration and administration effectiveness. The Manukau, which used to have many boating and yacht clubs, now sees literally hundreds of small boats owners using it annually as the density of domestic dwellings increases around its many estuaries. We are also seeing more recreational boat users that ever before and the Committee for Auckland believes that a cohesive marine spatula plan needs to link the Manukau and Kaipara with the agencies such as the Gulf Forum, the Ministry of the Environment and the Department of Conservation.

The Kaipara offers a real complexity of issues. Aucklanders rarely visit this massive harbour which reaches almost all the way to Auckland.

At one stage in Auckland’s history, there was talk of linking the two harbours of the Waitemata and the Kaipara at its narrowest section which is at the top of the Riverhead estuary. It was decided that a rail link between Auckland and Helensville was a more viable settlement than a series of locks. All of this was going to cost $58,644 but the engineer in chief William Weaver decided that the Kaipara line costing $10,000 less would be the goer and it was.

This harbour has remarkable potential although a scheme to put huge water power wheels has not been what I would think one of the best suggestions. The Three Waters report suggests a number of clear alternatives that could be developed. They are to identify the recreational and customary fishing use, develop more boat ramps and to explore the harbour resources, aquaculture and to manage settlement. Tourism is very small but the potential could grow and certainly Helensville could do with more attention as its now part of the Supercity and not the forgotten side of Rodney District.

The report makes three strong recommendations. That is: that there is a real need to look at our marine future and that includes the Ports of Auckland expansion, inform the debate and develop a spatial plan for the three harbours and to look at resources and the economic futures of our harbours.

Personally I am delighted that they have raised the issue and with the Board papers I have asked Richard to distribute a copy of Three Waters, Auckland as a Maritime City.

Sir Bob Harvey KNZM QSO
Chairman