

# Over the Fence



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## WETLANDS WHERE ONCE THERE WERE NONE

New Zealand was blessed in its very recent past with a proliferation of magnificent ecologically virgin wetlands. Unlike much of our dry land, they escaped Maori fires and so were intact when the European farmer arrived. Using 'western' technology and driven by economic opportunity they were massively drained. First of all, the technology used was simply shovels and horse scoops powered by muscle power, but after WW1 the heavier tasks were taken over by power shovels and draglines, and after WW2 tractors and later hydraulic diggers. It is estimated that up to 90% of original wetlands have gone.



Today we are striving to rehabilitate what remains, the Pekapeka Wetland being the most obvious local example. But there is another opportunity and it does not involve rehabilitation, rather the ecological enhancement of entirely man-made water bodies. I mean farm dams. Here is a huge potential for ecological development through stock exclusion and the planting of their margins in appropriate species, perhaps after having been cleaned out with a digger. (The deepening of a silted up dam in the days before diggers involved first siphoning out the water in the summer and letting the mud dry somewhat, hoping that in the meantime it didn't rain, which it usually did. Then a bulldozer would endeavour to do the job without getting bogged, which in my experience was about 50% of the time. The digger operates from dry land so there is no hassle at all.)

One just needs to look out the left hand window of a flight to Wellington early on a sunny morning and see the twinkles from all the farm dams to appreciate what the potential is. Nearly every dam is unfenced and stock have 24/7 access to them.

So would the dam fulfil its original purpose of providing stock water? Well, maybe it is that the dam has been superseded by a reticulated system, capitalising on one of the most unsung technological developments in farming (and horticulture) since WW2 – polythene pipe. Or it could be that the dam provides water by gravity to a down-stream trough. But another alternative is a gap of 2 or 3 metres in the fence, with rails to prevent stock entering the margin, and a pad of rocks or old concrete posts lain down to prevent pugging.

What would the result be?

1. Better quality water, which is filtered as it enters the dam, and no stock pugging of the margin;
2. Greatly reduced siltation, and therefore much longer dam life;
3. No loss of stock through misadventure;
4. A picturesque wetland that adorns the farm;
5. Better habitat for wetland fowl, with maybe the first Saturday of May in mind;
6. The flora around the margin providing habitat for native birds;
7. Habitat for eels, there for your Maori mates.

This is pretty compelling stuff. The Regional Council should promote it vigorously!



*A partly fenced-off dam built in 1977, with a stock-excluded margin planted.*



*An old dam originally built with a horse scoop, but topped up by bulldozer, failing in the 2009 drought.*

## **JAFFAS**

The other night on Close Up, the guy – I can't think of his name – the guy who roughs up his hair before entering the studio, said in relation to the cock-up in developing the so-called party centre on the Auckland waterfront to cater for the Rugby World Cup: "Why can't Auckland get out of its own way?"

He's got that right in one. This was prompted by a last-minute change of direction due to the Historic Places Trust's call for the preservation of the two cargo sheds slap bang in front of the most accessible part of Auckland's waterfront. Auckland Regional Council Chairman Mike Lee agrees that the sheds are a heritage worth saving. He said that they are 98 years old. (It just so happens that a month or so ago I was sitting at a café devouring an ice-cream and contemplating the sheds, and thinking how drab they look. Actually to me they looked to be classic WW2 vintage, but who am I to argue with the Regional Council Chairman, and the HPT?) One must be mindful that it is easy to dismiss something old as not being worthy of preservation – saving post-earthquake architecture here didn't seem very compelling once – but I can't see a case there. Auckland's got one of the world's most fantastic inner city harbours, but they have yet to fully exploit it downtown.

Anyway, time is running out on Auckland to get its act together for this event that stands to offer so much to New Zealand. There seems to be a real conundrum here. Auckland's multiplicity of governing bodies frustrates rational decision making, so that's likely to be greatly improved by the super city. But it will come too late for timely decisions for this event. And it does not bode well between now and the election with the leaders there increasingly in electioneering mode.

Three mayors are vying for the position. John Banks, a shrewd operator, but he's the 'Auckland City' mayor and that will count against him, and what of his bizarre idea that Auckland host the 2020 Olympics? Manukau mayor Len Brown looks at this stage to be a front runner, but not helped by an emotional melt-down over his credit card spending. And North Shore mayor Andrew Williams! God help us!

## **I FELT AFFRONTED AS A KIWI**

I read recently on the *Melbourne Age* website a column by Gerard Henderson entitled New Zealand Puts Nation First, War Second. It opened thus: "New Zealand may be a nation of warriors when it comes to football codes. But such courage does not extend to elected politicians in Wellington, whether they be conservative or social democrats". The gist of it was that we are not pulling our weight in this war. Regardless as to what one may think of this adventure, now America's longest war and no closer to victory than ever, this was an affront to this nation's

courage and loyalty as an ally. It gave me no pleasure to read this in a reputable Australian paper.

I needn't have worried. At last count there were 167 comments in response. In trawling down a fair number of them I spotted just one upholding the writer's view. The remainder were – to a greater or lesser extent – admiring of this country's stand on this war and other defence matters. Overwhelmingly they were from Australians.

Mr Henderson did not strike a sympathetic note on that one.

## TREES OF HAWKE'S BAY

### *Eucalyptus globulus*

Hastings District Council is currently going through a plan change involving heritage protection. Nothing too earth-shattering here, except for one thing: the enormous *Eucalyptus globules* in front of Havelock North's St. Columba's Church. This is a specimen of majestic stature, in good health and I know of no older exotic tree in Hawke's Bay, although of course there may well be. It is indeed a landmark. St. Columba's wants its current protected state removed in the plan, as indeed they are entitled. Entitled to request it, that is. To remove such a status is a matter of some seriousness and subject to democratic determination. They claim that the tree's continued existence frustrates their interests, and that may well be so.

But removing a heritage protection is not to be taken lightly. (As I'm writing this I'm thinking of my comments above regarding those Auckland cargo sheds!) If the tree's protection is upheld then HDC should consider compensation. This I suspect they will balk at, as it will create a precedent. So? If a tree (or structure) on private land is a cost to the land owners, but deemed a public asset then it is nothing but common justice that the public compensate.



*The huge Eucalyptus globulus in front of St Columba's Church, Havelock North.*

## GETTING THE FACTS RIGHT

One keen observer of the published word is Chris Geddis. This is understandable given his heritage, the Geddis family being long-time owners of Napier's *Daily Telegraph* (published 1871-1999). He's quick to spot an error, as I occasionally find out, and to offer a correction. This is as it should be because, as he states, these errors become accepted facts. My comment on the construction of the railway viaduct over the Matahorua Gorge prompted him to point out that *Hawke's Bay Today* had stated that it was "the largest in the Southern Hemisphere" which, as anyone who has travelled the road will know, obviously was meant to apply to the Mohaka Viaduct. Chris brought the mistake to their attention, but saw no correction. I've had the same experience much more than once.

I have noticed that overseas papers, obviously who are secure enough to recognise their fallibility and at the same time want to see that facts are put right, have a 'Corrections Column'. Thus anything they have published that is notified as being in error, no matter how trivial, is formally corrected. This is appropriate and New Zealand papers should do the same.

As a matter of interest, Chris had this to say about the wooden scaffolding used to build the big one:

"Scaffolding for the Mohaka Viaduct came from Gum trees in that old State Forest that borders/ runs through Alec Olsen's (the property now owned I think by Pan Pac). The logs were carried by truck to the rail siding by Munns Bridge on Taupo Road (by Peter Paine's house) and carried carefully by train to Mohaka. Alec's dad (Joe Olsen) told me how it was a slow trip by train as the length of the logs gave them trouble on corners and in tunnels and they had to keep adjusting the loads to negotiate those obstacles. They did not want to cut the logs and thereby lose height on the scaffolding."

## WELL SAID

A guy was in a posh theatre sprawled across three seats. The usher told him that he would have to sit up and confine himself to one seat as that is what he had paid for. The guy just ignored her. So she got the manager, who adopted the same approach, equally without success, even when he said that he would summon a policeman.

So the policeman arrived and said to the sprawling one, "Okay buddy, what's your name". "Tom", murmured the bloke. "Where you from, Tom?" asked the policeman.

The guy groaned, "the balcony..."

## LAST WORD

If this issue has whet your appetite for more, there is plenty to read on my new website. Take a look at [www.overthefence.org.nz](http://www.overthefence.org.nz).

Cheers  
Ewan Mac