

REPORT

SEACHANGE 05 – OCEANS & COASTAL MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE AUCKLAND 21-22 NOVEMBER 2005

Introduction

The conference was initiated by the Environmental Defence Society to encourage all-party progress on stalled development by the government of oceans and coastal waters policy.

The Society's major success was in attracting a "Who's Who" of interested parties in the face of national and international inertia.

The Players

Government agencies including Ministry for the Environment, Ministry of Fisheries, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Department of Conservation, Ministry of Transport, Treasury, Biosecurity New Zealand, Ministry of Maori Development, Ministry of Justice, Crown Law Office, Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, NIWA, and Statistics New Zealand.

Environmental activists like Environmental Defence Society, World Wild Life Fund International, Greenpeace New Zealand, NZ Conservation Authority,

Sir Peter Blake Trust, Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society, ECO, and Enfocus Limited.

Marine services like the Aquaculture Council, Te Ohu Kai Moana, Centre for Marine Policy, Seafic, Watercare Services Limited, Ports of Auckland, Sealord Group, Challenger Scallop Enhancement Company.

Local authorities including regional councils (Wellington, Auckland, Canterbury, Bay of Plenty, Northland, Waikato) and district and city councils from the northern half.

Universities including Victoria, Massey, Otago, Waikato.

Other agencies including the Insurance Council of New Zealand, Opus, Beca Carter Hollings & Ferner, Russell McVeagh, Hill Young and Cooper, Sinclair Knight Merz, Tonkin and Taylor.

The Background

New Zealand's approach started in the mid-1990s with huge enthusiasm for safeguarding the health and resources of the seas and coastal waters, increasingly centred around a "mountains to the sea" approach.

New Zealand has the fourth largest exclusive economic zone in the world, covering 4.2 million square kilometres, and with a wealth of unexplored and/or untapped resources.

Our country is among those at the greatest risk from uncontrolled exploitation.

National triggers for action include:

- increasing land-sourced sedimentation of coastal waters
- increasing land-sourced pollution
- a fragmented coastal planning approach
- an increasingly fragmented legislative framework*
- some inflexible management tools (i.e. regional plans can take up to 10 years to become operative)
- no system for addressing environmental impacts of fishing activity
- no controls on organisms arriving on vessel hulls (70 percent of new marine species estimated to arrive on hulls)

(* separate maritime legislation is in the hands of the Ministry of Transport, Maritime New Zealand, Department of Conservation, Ministry of Fisheries, and Regional Councils)

The international goal is biodiversity conservation but there is:

- no oceans management policy
- no monitoring system
- no national State of the Oceans reporting system
- no system of regular independent reviews

The Conference

Over-shadowing the conference was the sheer scale of national and international inertia but it was a great learning experience.

About 140 delegates heard from 18 speakers over two days and these are some of the key points:

Prof Richard Kenchington, Centre for Maritime Policy, University of Wollongong

Forty percent of the worlds waters are in exclusive economic zones – with the remainder open oceans – "and that's like a big donut with a large hole in it".

Managing oceans falls into three categories – fisheries management, multiple use management, and marine protected areas.

At national level, the key to the systematic delivery of marine biodiversity is Marine Protected Areas.

"The key movers and shakers are in local government because they have to live with the consequences of reality!"

Phil Burgess, Marine Division, Department of Environment & Heritage, Canberra

In Australia, regional marine plans are seen as the primary implementation tool for integrating diverse Federal and State legislative requirements, recognising regional development opportunities, and achieving ecologically sustainable development.

When regional marine plans first got off the ground in the late 1990s they promised too much too soon "and the strongest agencies inevitably won" in terms of agenda setting.

The lesson was learned and under a new approach agreed by Australian government in September, the goals will be to develop bio-regional plans based on environmental and economic goals.

Phil had just returned from attending a "very frustrating" United Nations meeting on the development of a High Seas Biodiversity programme covering deep oceans. The one goal everybody could so far agree on was to protect tuna as a food resource!

Dr Rick Pridmore, Chief Executive, National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research

The effects of sedimentation, including toxic pollutants from stormwater, "have increased dramatically over the last 20 years" with algal blooms being the most obvious manifestation of effects.

Less visible are the reductions in diversity through reduced coastal water quality at a time when New Zealand is unique in having 10 percent of total global marine species in its waters (an estimated 20,000 species)

Physical coastal hazards include the increasing likelihood of storm surges, floods, tsunamis, and insurance payouts as climate change starts to bite.

Raewyn Peart, Senior Policy Analyst, Environmental Defence Society

Tracked the history of the international oceans management framework and New Zealand's response (copy of speech available – worth reading).

Critical of catchment management regime in New Zealand, saying management of RMA plans "weak at managing cumulative effects and diffuse discharges" and that there is an "uneasy relationship between regional and district councils."

She proposes an investigation into coastal planning under the RMA, at both regional and territorial authority levels, "to identify reforms to increase both the effectiveness of coastal management planning" and improve the ability "to respond quickly to changing information and circumstances."

Within New Zealand's territorial waters there is a comprehensive environmental regime but no such regime for the bulk of the marine area outside the 12 mile limit.

This includes oil, gas and mineral exploration and the possibility of offshore wind farms, marine farms, and energy structures. No current proposals to fill the gap but MfE looking at "voluntary initiatives."

New Zealand has no dedicated marine biosecurity strategy and just one example is that around 70 percent of new marine species arrive on ships hulls.

Around the coast she proposes a revision of the statutory framework for special marine management areas to address fragmentation caused by nine separate pieces of legislation and managed by 10 different bodies.

Shane Jones, MP and Chairman of Te Ohu Kaimoana and Waitangi Fisheries Commission

The alternative point of view!

Very little confidence that an Oceans Policy would have any appreciable effect because it wouldn't be enforceable and extremely doubtful that such a policy would "make a sparrow's fart of difference."

The "welter of laws around the marine environment are almost impenetrable and the fear is that any move to broaden protection will be derailed because we cannot agree on exactly what we want."

Proposed "single clear law that everybody can understand".

Chris Ryan, Chief Executive, Insurance Council of New Zealand

With increasing storms and floods, insurers believe that if they cannot provide property insurance at a reasonable cost there may be a "managed retreat" and it will be up to property owners to fully fund their insurance.

One solution is for local government to restrict property development "on the margin" (particularly on the coast) and take a more vigorous educational approach in discouraging development in areas vulnerable to climate change.

Dr Simon Cripps, Director, Global Marine Programme, WWF International, Switzerland

Couldn't make the conference and speech read by Dr Sian Pullen.

Key points were that climate change is already coming through in the marine environment and "there are no change adaptation strategies."

In New Zealand less than one percent of its coastal environment is protected by 28 forms of marine protected areas and he proposes a more effective representative network by 2010.

Summary

The point was made by several speakers that too much was tackled too soon by well-meaning legislators and interest groups, leading to confusion of priorities and lack of concerted direction.

Coming through from the conference was a back-to-basics approach and getting some runs on the board by tackling projects which are achievable and generate the public support necessary to encourage political action.

Chris Turver
Councillor