Understanding the conservation expectations of Aucklanders

SCIENCE FOR CONSERVATION 172

Bev James

Published by
Department of Conservation
P.O. Box 10-420
Wellington, New Zealand

Science for Conservation presents the results of investigations by DOC staff, and by contracted science providers outside the Department of Conservation. Publications in this series are internally and externally peer reviewed.
This report was prepared for publication by Science Publications, Science & Research Unit; editing and layout by Geoff Gregory. Publication was approved by the Manager, Science & Research Unit, Science Technology and Information Services, Department of Conservation, Wellington.

ISSN 1173–2946
ISBN 0–478–22023-5

Cataloguing-in-Publication data
James, Bev, 1954-
Understanding the conservation expectations of Aucklanders / Bev James. Wellington, N.Z. : Dept. of Conservation, 2001.
1 v. ; 30 cm. (Science for conservation, 1173-2946 ; 172)
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 0478220235
1. Conservation of natural resources—New Zealand—Auckland Region—Public opinion. I. Title. Series: Science for conservation (Wellington, N.Z.) ; 172.

CONTENTS

Understanding the conservation expectations of Aucklanders

Bev James

P.O. Box 5564, Wellington, New Zealand

A B S T R A C T

This report contributes to the development of a community relations strategy for the Auckland Conservancy of the Department of Conservation (DOC). Information was collected from nine focus groups: four of DOC stakeholders (agencies, iwi, NGOs, and supporters) and five general public groups (older people, young people, parents, urban Maori, and Pacific peoples). It presents results on people's identification of conservation issues facing Auckland, their awareness and views of DOC and involvement in conservation.

Conservation issues were identified in four main areas: pollution, urban sustainability, parks and reserves, and threatened species and habitats. Factors inhibiting conservation outcomes were also identified. The views expressed about DOC were generally positive or neutral. The general public focus groups lacked knowledge of DOC's role. All groups identified education and information dissemination as key DOC roles.

Participants were involved in a range of conservation activities. They stressed personal, social and cultural motivations, not simply desired environmental outcomes, as reasons for involvement in conservation.

The community relations strategy needs to address: DOC's low profile, Aucklanders' conservation concerns, conservation education and information, clarification of DOC's role, consultation and communication, and community involvement. The results of this Auckland study raise wider issues for DOC's community relations.

Keywords: community relations, public perceptions, conservation expectations, focus groups, Auckland.

James, B. 2001. Understanding the conservation expectations of Aucklanders. *Science for Conservation 172*. 36 p.

1. Introduction

This report contributes to the development of a community relations strategy for the Auckland Conservancy of the Department of Conservation (DOC), by helping DOC to understand the range of conservation concerns held by Aucklanders, and public perceptions of the role and functions of DOC. The community relations strategy will act as a framework for public awareness activities and campaigns designed to increase the involvement and commitment of Aucklanders to conservation and, therefore, assisting the Auckland Conservancy in meeting conservation outcomes. With approximately one third of New Zealand's population living within the Auckland Conservancy, the strategy is critical to assisting the Department as a whole in meeting its conservation outcomes, not only in Auckland but nationally.

Information was collected from nine focus groups on conservation awareness, and awareness and expectations of DOC. The focus groups were made up of four groups DOC defines as stakeholders and five 'general public' groups differentiated on the basis of age and ethnicity.

While the report focuses on conservation awareness and expectations, it must also be acknowledged that a much wider range of issues emerged in the research. Focus group participants were not constrained by the research aims, and raised issues that they considered important for them in their relationship with DOC. Several of those matters are included in discussion of the research findings, as they are relevant to a broader understanding of the public's and stakeholders' awareness of DOC.

A previous survey of 309 Aucklanders' knowledge and opinions of conservation provides a backdrop to this research. That survey targeted selected groups including tertiary students with a knowledge of conservation biology, a group of tertiary students with minimal education about conservation, two secondary school classes, a group of indigenous people, a conservation group, staff of the Auckland Conservancy, and the office staff of a food factory. Findings included: a strong public interest in conservation; limited knowledge of conservation; an identified need for education and information; and a preference for ecosystems programmes over species programmes. The highest ranking issues identified in that survey were: management of introduced species, the influence of public opinion on conservation, and value for taxpayers' money (Craig et al. 1995).

2. Research approach and methods

Because the Conservancy had not undertaken an exercise like this before, it was decided that using focus groups would be the most effective way of gaining information on the nature and scope of views on conservation awareness and expectations. A focus group methodology is well suited to a piece of exploratory research, such as this project. Focus groups enable the range of views, understandings and insights to be identified and sensitive issues to be explored. A survey is limited for obtaining 'rich' information on complex issues and attitudes and values, whereas group-based discussions enable a small number of key themes or questions to be examined in some depth. The group dynamic also plays a part, with participants responding to one another's ideas. While the group dynamic can influence discussion in certain ways, the group can also provide a comfortable environment for people to articulate their thoughts in the company of others with whom they have something in common. It is not the objective of focus group methodology to construct a representative sample of a population, and this research does not purport to attribute the views of any focus group in any statistical sense to the Auckland population as a whole, or to sections of the Auckland population. Information gained from focus groups is not amenable to generalisation (Tolich & Davidson 1999; Patton 1987; Morgan 1988). Nevertheless, information from this research provides clear indications of the nature and scope of views of some identifiable social groupings within the Auckland population. Information from the focus groups would be a crucial input if a survey of Aucklanders' conservation awareness and expectations were to be developed.

The aims of the research are to:

- collect qualitative information on the conservation awareness and expectations of selected groups of Aucklanders;
- identify whether there are any differences in conservation awareness and expectations on the basis of age, ethnicity, or awareness of DOC; and
- identify issues arising from the research that need to be considered in a community relations strategy for the Auckland Conservancy.

The composition of the nine focus groups was discussed and agreed with Auckland Conservancy staff. Four groups were made up of representatives of organisations that have an interest in DOC's activities and who may work closely with DOC on certain conservation projects. These 'stakeholder' focus groups consisted of:

- Community/NGOs. Four people representing Auckland Central Forest and Bird Society; Project Jonah; Federated Mountain Clubs; NZ Trust for Conservation Volunteers participated.
- Iwi. Three people participated. Two attended a meeting, and one was interviewed by phone.
- Agencies. Originally intended to consist of central and local government agencies, the meeting also included two people from voluntary organisations and

academics/researchers, as well as representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Ministry for the Environment, the Historic Places Trust, Auckland Regional Council and Auckland City Council. Nine people participated.

- Supporters/conservation board. Seven people participated, including two conservation board members. They were involved in a number of 'hands-on' conservation projects including work on Little Barrier, Tiritiri Matangi and Motuora.

Five focus groups sought input from members of the general public who were contacted by the researchers through local groups and networks that would provide access to people in the age and ethnic groups required. While individuals agreed to participate, they were not selected on the basis of any clearly identified interest in conservation. Attempts were made to obtain the participation of a 'person in the street'. The final mix of the general public participants included a few who were actively involved in conservation and who were familiar with some aspects of DOC, as well as those who knew very little about conservation and DOC. These focus groups consisted of:

- Older people. Six people over 60 years of age participated in the focus group. They were contacted through Probus, an organisation of older business and professional people. Participants in this focus group reside in Henderson, Mairangi Bay, Mt Eden and Howick. Some of this group are or have been involved in conservation.
- Young people. Six people aged between 19 and 23 years participated. All are tertiary students and have lived in Auckland for at least five years. Two have pre-school children. They live in Manurewa, Avondale, Orakei and on the North Shore.
- Parents. Seven women in their 30s participated. They have children at preschool and primary school, and live in the Freeman's Bay area.
- Urban Maori. Seven people aged from 30 to mid 50s participated. They included people working in education and in recreation/community services, and one tertiary student. The group included one person with affiliation to Ngati Whatua. The rest were originally from outside of Auckland, but some had lived for many years in the city. One person had recently returned to Auckland after 30 years of living overseas.
- Pacific peoples. The term 'Pacific peoples' is recommended by the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs to describe the wide variety of people living in New Zealand who have migrated from the Pacific Islands or who identify with the Pacific Islands because of ancestry or heritage. It encompasses a range of ethnic, national, language and cultural groupings (Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs 1999). Because the conservation awareness and expectations of Pacific peoples is a relatively un-researched area, a background understanding was first gained by speaking to two people with in-depth knowledge and experience of Pacific communities in Auckland. A focus group of 11 people was held at a Pacific Mental Health Centre, which provided access to community members. Participants included Tongan, Samoan, Niuean and Cook Island peoples, both island-born and New Zealand-born. They included community workers and health workers. Appendix 1 provides some background information on Pacific peoples in Auckland.

The research has been constrained by time and budget from including a wider range of focus groups. Missing are focus groups of business people, new immirgant communities (e.g. from Asia) and farmers and rural residents, although some participants have a business and/or rural background. An effort was made to obtain a balance of women and men in the focus groups. While this was achieved for some of the groups, women predominated in the parents, urban Maori, iwi and young people' groups. Men predominated in the agencies, older and NGOs groups. Within the focus groups covered, some representatives were unavailable on the day.

DOC arranged the stakeholder group meetings, which were held in the Auckland Conservancy office. The general public focus groups were organised by the researchers and held in venues that suited the participants. Each focus group lasted between one and two hours, and was run using a semi-structured conversation format. Appendix 2 provides examples of the questions used in the focus groups. Topics covered were:

- Conservation issues identified by participants
- Conservation activities participants were aware of
- Personal involvement in conservation
- What DOC roles and functions participants were aware of
- What participants want done about perceived conservation problems
- Views and expectations of DOC

Because of the nature of focus groups, conversation ranged widely. As discussion progressed, additional questions were included to cover issues relating to the concerns of each focus group.

Information from the focus groups has been analysed by identifying key themes and issues, with attention to whether there are any distinctions between the 'stakeholder' and 'general public' focus groups, or differences based on ethnicity, age, the extent of awareness and/or involvement in conservation activities, or awareness of DOC.

Information was also obtained from 12 Auckland Conservancy staff on issues they were aware of concerning the public's conservation concerns and expectations of DOC. The staff were involved in advocacy, historic heritage, planning, technical support, community relations, recreation, Kaupapa Atawhai Manager, and the Information Centre. No Area Office staff were involved.

3. Conservation issues facing Auckland

Participants were asked what they thought were the most important conservation issues facing Auckland today. They were asked to consider all issues, not just ones that they thought might be the responsibility of DOC. It was important to take this broad approach, in order to identify how people defined conservation issues. Participants identified a wide range of conservation and environmental issues, which fell into two broad categories: of substantive conservation and environmental issues, and of factors inhibiting conservation outcomes.

Conservation and environmental issues

Four clusters of issues emerged. All focus groups highlighted pollution of various types, and urban sustainability. Most groups also identified issues concerning parks, and four groups highlighted threatened species and habitats.

Factors inhibiting conservation outcomes

As well as identifying substantive conservation issues, participants identified several other matters that they considered to be barriers to achieving conservation goals. Those matters were also deemed to be conservation issues. All groups emphasised that a paramount issue is the lack of environmental awareness among the public. Concerns were also expressed about resourcing conservation, confusion about the conservation roles and responsibilities of governmental and non-governmental agencies, the lack of a holistic approach to conservation, lack of community involvement in conservation, and DOC's low profile. All except the last two are discussed in this section. DOC's low profile is discussed in section 4 and community involvement in Section 5.

3.1 POLLUTION

Pollution was the most talked about issue in the general public focus groups, and also a major issue identified by the stakeholder focus groups. A number of pollution issues were consistently bundled together, including:

- sewage and stormwater runoff
- water pollution
- coastal and harbour pollution
- agricultural runoff, particularly from dairy farms
- rubbish disposal and recycling
- air pollution, including pollution from traffic.

Concern over sewage and all forms of water pollution was particularly high. The general public focus groups were especially concerned about these matters, and mentioned areas such as Otara Lakes, the Manukau Harbour, Okahu Bay, Pt Chevalier and Massey streams:

Sewage, that's what I hear about as far as Auckland goes. I don't want to go swimming. I don't want to try and get seafood. Lots of people talk about it. It's the main concern that affects us daily. (Younger group)

There are dirty streams at Massey. The mangroves are not healthy. I'm concerned about swimming in some beaches, because it seems to be polluted. (Pacific group)

Some people talked about noticing the loss of marine life over the years and attributed this to a decline in water quality and increasing pollution:

I saw the creek change from a flounder habitat to [a place where] you couldn't swim in it. (Older group)

I remember as a child 50 years ago picking kina on the Auckland beaches. They were plentiful. Now there's nothing. (Pacific group)

Several participants mentioned rubbish pollution, particularly of the coastal area and along motorways. Problems with rubbish disposal were raised by the Pacific focus group. They noted a lack of recycling facilities in some areas, and a lack of information for Pacific peoples on how to dispose of rubbish in an environmentally safe manner. New Pacific migrants to New Zealand are often not used to dealing with the proliferation of bottles, plastic bags and other non-biodegradable packaging typical of the 'throw away' society. Burying rubbish in the backyard is a common way of coping with disposal.

Other participants were concerned about the waste disposal practices of industries, and impacts on waterways. The need for better recycling was also raised in this context. Although air pollution was raised as an issue by only two of the focus groups, it was raised in relation to traffic congestion, and linked closely to other concerns about urban development which are discussed below.

3.2 URBAN SUSTAINABILITY

Urban sustainability was closely associated with two other issues raised: pollution, and the preservation of parks and reserves. The impacts of a fast-growing Auckland population, not only on the natural environment, but also on lifestyle and the urban environment were of major concern to all focus groups.

It's population density and trying to preserve green spaces. (Parents group)

An explosion of population is really coming to Tamaki. It's going to take more land … we want to retain our green belt. (Urban Maori group)

The vulnerability of the land, population pressures, the dynamic changes of urban society. (Supporters group)

It's a broad topic, urban environmental issues, everything from transport, to the whole range of sustainability issues. (Agencies group)

The main urban sustainability issues identified were:

- Inappropriate subdivision, with participants singling out problems in the coastal area, an increasing number of lifestyle blocks, and 'urban creep' into rural areas.
- Traffic congestion, proliferation of motorways, and lack of public transport were particularly mentioned by the urban Maori and younger groups.

- The need to retain green spaces was highlighted by the urban Maori, Pacific, parents and NGOs groups. It was seen as especially important to retain natural features within city areas.
- The NGOs group identified potential problems from tourism if natural areas were used without any thought to environmental ethics. That group suggested DOC should be more active in promoting eco-tourism, and advocating environmental standards for tourism businesses. The urban Maori and young people's groups also expressed concerns about the potential environmental impacts of big events such as the Americas Cup.

3.3 PARKS AND RESERVES

Participants were concerned about a range of issues relating to parks and reserves. These included access to such areas, the need to retain and even increase the number of natural areas close to cities, the maintenance of walkways and other facilities, and particularly for Maori, the need for appropriate interpretation of natural and historic features.

> *The native bush in Tamaki, Waitakere is central … we want to retain the green belt.* (Urban Maori group)
>
> *… a balance between housing and green areas. We need more green areas.* (Pacific group)
>
> *The government has failed Auckland over many decades in not acquiring parkland and open space.* (NGO group)
>
> *These are areas where DOC can present their story in the Auckland area.* (Older group)

Encouraging public access to parks and reserves was seen as an essential part of raising people's awareness about conservation. However, some participants commented that they did not know how to find out about parks and reserves. It was also apparent that many in the general public focus groups had no idea which parks or reserves are administered by DOC (see Section 4.3).

> *I've been really impressed with the tracks, but it's hard to get information on them.* (Parents group)
>
> *I found out about the Waitakeres by accident, only because someone took me there.* (Younger group)
>
> *I have heard of bush walks being offered, but I don't know who offers them.* (Urban Maori group)
>
> *I take lots of walking groups and have written on walks on the shore. People don't know about the little reserves.* (Older group)

Several participants who were concerned about access to parks and reserves also pointed out that some of the most popular, such as Leigh Marine Reserve, the Waitakeres and gulf islands, were not easily accessible. There were suggestions for the development of more open spaces in local communities so that more people could experience natural areas.

> *What DOC land is there at Freeman's Bay? … A lot of people would be interested in local opportunities – going out to Tiri would be a hassle … Have a*

project in an urban area to educate schools and communities. Make it accessible for people. (Parents group)

There was a widespread perception of crowding problems in some popular parks and reserves such as Leigh Marine Reserve, Maungawhau, and Maungakiekie. Participants in the parents, younger people, urban Maori, and supporters groups expressed concern about the potential damage to the environment and loss of enjoyment of those and other areas. Some were concerned about a lack of environmental monitoring and agency presence in some areas. Others pointed out that encouraging access was an important way of promoting conservation, despite possible damage.

Providing the conservation estate for people to get the experience. You can't be too precious about people coming on to the estate. But it's a real tension, people barging around disturbing things … the ARC is fulfilling an important role there, the Waitakeres are designed for different experiences … Leigh is over-used … we should be having more marine reserves. (Supporters group)

The NGO and older groups were most concerned about the maintenance of tracks and facilities:

Walkways are the poor relation, down the priority list, in urgent need of addressing. Nothing has been created for years. Where can children go? (NGO group)

3.4 THREATENED SPECIES AND HABITATS

Issues relating to threatened species and habitats were discussed most by the supporters, NGOs, iwi, and older groups. These issues appeared to be less important to the younger people, parents, urban Maori and Pacific groups, which instead concentrated a high degree of concern on the various impacts of population and urban development on the natural environment.

Pest destruction—cats, dogs, stoats, rabbits, possums. The biggest mistake the settlers made. (Older group)

More conservation effort on DOC treasures. More restoration and mainland islands. Less predation. (Supporters group)

Gorse and privet control. (Iwi group)

Weed control seems to have fallen by the wayside. (Older group)

Those participants who highlighted threatened species and habitats as a significant issue stressed the following points:

- the need for greater control of plant and animal pests
- habitat preservation
- support for the mainland island concept
- the need to preserve unique areas.

3.5 LACK OF ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

All focus groups emphasised the need for more public education, information and advocacy about conservation and the environment, not necessarily to be done by DOC. Participants believed that environmental education is especially needed in urban areas because many people are distanced from the natural environment, yet their actions are contributing to environmental degradation. Several focus groups raised concerns about educating the next generation about environmental values, either through schools, or in families.

> *Environmental education and advocacy. Everything is subservient to that. The majority don't give a stuff about environmental matters. People are struggling to get a job, and environmental issues are declining in the public perception.* (NGO group)

> *Bigger than all those [issues] … in the city we're surrounded by concrete. If something happens to the bush, we wouldn't know … education is the biggest way. You need to raise awareness right from an early age, what happens when you cut down a tree … I go out to schools all the time and kids are aware, but only to a certain level. Only when you're directly affected does it hit home.* (Urban Maori group)

> *What individuals are doing in regards to conservation. At school there's hardly any mention… On TV there is so much advertising on smoking, the consequences of drunk driving. If we're trying to keep our bodies healthy, and around us, why can't they do more advertising to let people know [about conservation]?* (Younger group)

> *Education is vitally important. DOC should encourage school trips to Tiri, and encourage schools to get involved in planting. Raise kids' awareness of natural areas … schools are a good way of involving parents in conservation ... stick to education, develop a culture of conservation, educating people about the coastal area and getting kids out into the environment and learning to appreciate it.* (Parents group)

The agencies and supporters focus groups perceived that DOC has reduced its involvement in education activities such as summer programmes and working with schools.

> *What resources has DOC got for education? There is a lack of interpretation and education programmes. Three years ago, DOC said that education is not a core service. I find this is absolutely bizarre. The first line of enforcement is education.* (Agencies group)

> *It's pretty disappointing for so many people and students wanting material. The first port of call is DOC, and they get very little response. The next port of call is Forest and Bird, and it's a heavy burden.* (Supporters group)

Three focus groups—agencies, NGOs and urban Maori—suggested that the environmental guidelines for New Zealand schools (Ministry of Education 1999) should be made a core part of the curriculum. They saw DOC having an important role in advocating for a more central place for environmental education in schools.

3.6 RESOURCING CONSERVATION

Four groups—the older, agencies, supporters and NGOs—highlighted resourcing conservation as a key issue for DOC. It is possible that the stakeholder groups focused on this issue more than most of those in the general public groups, because they were aware of budget constraints facing DOC.

> *The bottom line to a lot of issues is funding.* (NGOs group)
>
> *It's a never-ending conflict. What does it cost to protect? Is it worth doing?* (Older group)
>
> *We all know that DOC is underfunded. The available money is insufficient for what we would like them to do.* (Supporters group)
>
> *DOC people are committed but not backed up with sufficient resources.* (Agencies group)

DOC's capacity to undertake conservation work was also identified as a resourcing issue. Participants questioned whether DOC has sufficient staff and expertise in specific areas to fulfill its wide-ranging responsibilities. They also raised staff recruitment and retention as problems they observed in DOC.

> *DOC is not seen on an equal footing with local bodies. DOC information is not necessarily held in high regard. There is a lack of DOC expertise on some issues.* (Supporters group)
>
> *There is a danger of working long hours and burnout … there is a really good core of dedicated staff [but] a loss of a body of knowledge in the longer term and a loss of a training ground for young graduates.* (Agencies group)

Those who considered that DOC's effectiveness is being compromised by a lack of human resources suggested that this could in part be remedied by greater use of volunteers, and by forming alliances with other agencies to share resources on issues of common interest.

3.7 CONFUSION ABOUT AGENCY ROLES

Several focus groups highlighted widespread public confusion, not only about the respective roles and responsibilities of local and central government agencies working in the environmental and conservation areas, but also about the distinctions between government and non-government organisations. In consequence, the general public has trouble in identifying who to contact if they need help, advice, or information or if they wish to have a say. Participants felt that confusion has arisen, partly because of DOC's low profile in the Auckland area, but also because of the changing face of many local and central government agencies, and a lack of public knowledge of their specific responsibilities.

> *Who's doing what? It's very confusing. Like the marine area, who do the general public contact? The public don't see DOC as accessible to contact.* (NGO group)
>
> *There's been so many changes of departments, people give up! You lose the continuity of contact.* (Older group)

Not everybody is clear about the divisions between councils and DOC. Meanwhile the bush gets bulldozed. (Urban Maori group)

The public don't care whose role or responsibility it is, all they want is an answer. (Agencies group)

Associated with confusion are both a perception that organisations' roles overlap, and a perception that there are gaps in service to the public. A perceived overlap is in the management of public lands. Participants queried whether Auckland parks could be managed by a single body and whether small parcels of public land currently held by DOC could be rationalised by disposing of or handing over management to other parties. Participants also perceived particular gaps in service in relation to weed control, possum control and management of the marine area.

Lack of agency coordination was seen as contributing to confusion. The agencies, urban Maori and parents groups came up with some suggestions for improving coordination among agencies:

- Use the internet to link agency sites, or have a 'one stop shop' web site on conservation.
- Work at developing consistent approaches among agencies dealing with common issues.
- Forward people on to the right agency.
- Provide more information to the public on the different roles and responsibilities of DOC and other agencies.

3.8 THINKING HOLISTICALLY

A final point about conservation issues needs to be made. Some participants thought that the way conservation is understood, not only by DOC, but also by many agencies, is too narrow. They made explicit references to the need for a more holistic approach to conservation. The way that those participants talked about conservation issues showed a lack of differentiation between environmental and conservation concerns, a broad definition of conservation that included environmental, ecological, cultural and social aspects, and clustering of issues under broad categories, such as pollution and urban sustainability.

It is inappropriate to separate urban, cultural and ecological environments. They are all part of ecology. (Agencies group)

4. Awareness and views of DOC

4.1 DOC'S LOW PROFILE

All focus groups commented that DOC has a low profile in the Auckland area. While the stakeholder groups were knowledgeable about DOC, many participants in the general public groups did not have a clear idea of what DOC does and were unaware of land that DOC administers. They did not know where the DOC conservancy office is, nor that there is an information centre in the Ferry Building. Participants in the general public groups used the meetings as an opportunity to ask questions about what DOC does, and where conservation areas are. The researchers answered questions after the focus group discussion had concluded, and left information about DOC and conservation areas with them.

> *{Facilitator – Do you know where DOC is in Auckland?} There isn't one is there?* (Urban Maori group)
>
> *We need more education of what DOC actually do. I didn't think I could contribute to this group because I don't know about conservation. But I am interested.* (Urban Maori group)
>
> *I was told that was public land and didn't know what that meant.* (Younger group)
>
> *For the ordinary person, the DOC image is quite vague.* (Older group)
>
> *DOC is not at all publicised. I don't know where the good reserves are.* (Pacific group)

The general public groups were more aware of DOC outside of Auckland, and perceived DOC as predominantly concerned with bush and endangered species.

> *My impression is that DOC is interested in big tracts of land …my impression of DOC is excellent, but that's based outside of Auckland. I don't think of DOC in the city … I have little idea of DOC land in Auckland, ARC land is much more obvious … it doesn't feature in your day to day life what DOC does, unless you are going on holiday.* (Parents group)

While participants in the stakeholder groups were more familiar with DOC office locations, its role and land it administers, they also gave examples of DOC's low profile. Several identified a lack of continuity in DOC staff that they have dealt with, and a lack of observable field staff on conservation land. They also noted that the public's confusion over agency roles and responsibilities in the conservation and environmental areas contributes to DOC's lack of visibility.

> *DOC is seen as a remote organisation as far as the community goes in the West Coast beaches.* (NGO group)
>
> *The public rings NGOs if something happens, not DOC.* (NGOs group)
>
> *The public doesn't understand the boundaries between agencies and this contributes to DOC's low image.* (Supporters group)

Reasons that participants put forward for DOC's low profile included:

- no large, obvious area of public conservation land in Auckland that the public can easily identify with DOC
- no visible office front
- a decision by DOC to reduce public education and advocacy activities
- a lack of resources to raise DOC's profile.

However, there was also a word of warning from some participants. While they emphasised the need for public information, education about conservation and clarity in conveying DOC's role to the public, they also voiced a concern that DOC should not be spending money on self-promotion. That would be seen as diverting much needed funds away from conservation.

> *The perception is that the money DOC is spending is in PR, promoting DOC … what is needed are genuine programmes with the community … and more involvement in environmental education … we need an honorary ranger programme.* (NGOs group)

4.2 POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS OF DOC

In general, participants did not have negative perceptions of DOC. Participants were more likely to be neutral about DOC, and to mention its low profile, rather than expressing negative impressions. Individuals only identified one issue that they had heard of in connection with DOC which they viewed negatively. This was the removal of baches from Rangitoto. Some relationship problems were also identified, which are discussed in section 5, but again a negative view was not prevalent.

Overall, positive impressions of DOC predominated. Those who were familiar with DOC had favourable views about committed and helpful staff.

> *We have a good relationship with DOC. They are dedicated people.* (Agencies group)
>
> *We rely on DOC for advice … there's a willingness to assist with information.* (Agencies group)
>
> *The people on the ground, the rangers, have been 100% excellent. They show a huge commitment. They're doing DOC core business. The enthusiasm is coming through.* (Supporters group)

Other participants singled out specific achievements or activities for praise.

> *They have done a beautiful job of revegetation on Tiritiri Matangi. That is the sort of role that is good for DOC.* (Iwi group)
>
> *The boardwalk at Rangitoto is tremendous.* (Urban Maori group)
>
> *They've made huge strides in the management of historic reserves.* (Agencies group)
>
> *There's good work going on with endangered species on islands.* (Agencies group)

4.3 AWARENESS OF PUBLIC CONSERVATION LAND

Participants were asked about areas of the public conservation land they had visited. While many in the general public groups could not identify areas of public conservation land, when prompted they nevertheless said they had heard of or had visited a range of areas that DOC manages. The most commonly visited areas were Leigh Marine Reserve and North Head. Other areas that people mentioned visiting were:

- Tiritiri Matangi
- Rangitoto
- Motutapu
- Great Barrier
- Goat Island
- Long Bay Marine Reserve
- Meola Reef
- Otuataua Stonefields
- Miranda.

Participants were surprised that some of the areas they were familiar with were administered by DOC:

> *I've been to Goat Island and read all the information that was there, and I've been to North Head. I was unaware it was DOC. There's no information there compared to Goat Island.* (Younger group)
>
> *Meola Reserve is the best kept secret. It's lovely. I go there a lot. It feels like you're not even in the city. I didn't have a clue it's DOC land.* (Urban Maori group)

4.4 VIEWS ON DOC'S ROLE

Participants were asked what they thought was DOC's role. The general public groups were unclear about DOC's role.

> *{Facilitator – What is DOC's role?} We're left wondering!* (Parents group)
>
> *Are DOC responsible for planning? … who is looking after the middens on top of Cornwall Park?* (Parents group)
>
> *I get confused about what Council does and what DOC does. Like sewerage, who's responsible?* (Urban Maori group)
>
> *It's never clear what reserve is DOC's or ARC's. Are the functions clearly defined? As a casual visitor, it's hard to identify.* (Older group)
>
> *There is generally a low awareness of DOC. You would get DOC confused with MAF.* (Pacific group)

Despite their confusion or lack of awareness, the general public groups, as well as the stakeholders groups had strong views on what they thought DOC's role should be, and emphasised the following:

Education was put forward as one of the most important of DOC's roles by all groups.

> *DOC is the source of education and research.* (Younger group)

Information dissemination was also supported by all groups. Participants wanted information about restricted or prohibited activities, recreational activities and places, and advice on conservation activities such as tree planting and pest control. A full list of information needs is given in Section 6.

> *If we don't know, if we're not informed, then we can't participate … they have to do their job in informing the public … there is a lot of responsibility with DOC and the government to draw more attention to the issues.* (Younger group)

Protection of the environment, including species protection, was emphasised by all groups.

> *Threatened species in the Auckland region is one of the most important roles of DOC.* (NGOs)
>
> *The protectors of our environment … working with society to ensure our natural heritage is looked after.* (Urban Maori group)

The protection of historic heritage was particularly emphasised by the agencies group.

> *There is a need to recognise a hugely man-altered environment – the mix of natural and cultural … there are real concerns about the perceived threat to heritage.* (Agencies group)

Two groups, the older and parents group, defined DOC's role as an **overview** and watchdog one, setting parameters and policies for other agencies, particularly local government, to operate within.

> *In urban areas the role of DOC should be to oversee that local bodies do it … to see that the procedures are there … DOC should have the overview role, see that due process is being done.* (Older group)

The Iwi group saw DOC's role as **giving effect to the Treaty of Waitangi**, in accordance with section 4 of the Conservation Act.

> *They should preserve and protect the national estate on behalf of the nation. Maori are an important part of that nation. DOC was set up to conserve on behalf of us – it gets back to the Treaty.* (Iwi group)

Finally, most groups emphasised the need for DOC to show **conservation leadership.**

> *Someone has got to have the vision.* (Parents group)
>
> *DOC should be seen more as the authoritative voice on conservation … it should be the spearhead of conservation issues nationally for Auckland … it should be more visible.* (Supporters group)
>
> *DOC could take a lead on clarifying and facilitating … it should be seen to take a stand. It is not as obvious in leadership as it should be.* (Agencies group)

Some participants emphasised two roles that they considered were overlooked or downplayed by DOC, but that they nevertheless considered essential. Those roles were education, and the protection of historic heritage.

4.5 EXPECTATIONS OF DOC

Participants' expectations of DOC were associated with their views on DOC's role. They acknowledged that expectations of DOC are potentially huge, wide-ranging, and perhaps unrealistic. Specific expectations were mainly articulated by stakeholders and included expectations related to both processes and conservation outcomes.

Process-related expectations emphasised communication and relationship building. Participants expected DOC to:

- provide education, information and advice
- work with communities
- help, not obstruct
- listen
- value the work done by volunteers
- understand different perspectives
- be consistent in its approach.

That they let you know the work you are doing is important. It's not the impression we get a lot of the time … That DOC be the fountain of knowledge. That's important if they want you to do something. (Supporters group)

That they'll come to the table and talk to us at the same level … that they'll talk about our relationship to the land in a meaningful way. (Iwi group)

Expectations relating to conservation outcomes highlighted DOC:

- protecting natural areas
- increasing the focus on historic heritage and landscape values.

5. Involvement in conservation

Participants were asked about their awareness of conservation, why they were concerned about conservation, and about any conservation activities that they were involved in. While it was expected that the level of awareness and involvement of participants in the stakeholders groups would be high, the level of interest in conservation among the general public focus groups was also high. This was whether individuals were knowledgeable about conservation or not, and regardless of whether they were involved in any type of conservation activity.

5.1 CONSERVATION AWARENESS AND VALUES

There was a widespread concern among participants that the public lacked awareness and understanding of conservation values. Older participants, whether Maori, Pacific or Pakeha, considered that children today are not taught

about conservation and the environment as they were by their parents or grandparents.

> *The value base of young people today is different, a different ethic, I'm not sure what it is … it's a degree of selfishness … I see a lot of kids out there who have no interest in conservation. We've got to recapture the hearts and minds and I don't think we're doing that.* (Supporters group)
>
> *Kids can't go along the stream these days because (a) the stream's not there and (b) there are safety issues – kids are not allowed to go off by themselves. Yet the kids are interested. It's no use looking at it from our perspective, with the huge amounts of freedom we had as kids.* (Older group)
>
> *It's difficult in Auckland with urban children. They need places where they can go to appreciate nature. The urban child has a lot to learn.* (Older group)
>
> *Some rangatahi do care for the land, but it's not reaching the wider rangatahi … it's up to kaumatua.* (Iwi group)
>
> *It's the values of the family unit. I remember as a kid, if we took more from the sea than was necessary, we got a whack! I tautoko you in terms of education.* (Urban Maori group)
>
> *Second-generation New Zealanders may not know about the traditional conservation practices.* (Pacific group)

The Iwi, urban Maori, Pacific and older groups all talked about traditional conservation values that were part of their background and experiences. Although there were some similarities in the emphasis on learning from elders, developing a respect for nature and the need for a holistic approach, cultural differences were also apparent.

Maori participants talked about their conservation concerns being motivated by a holistic approach to environmental management that involved a close relationship with the land, and a close association between the health of the natural world and identity and mana.

> *{Facilitator – what are your concerns as Maori?} – because they impact on Maori heritage which is very important to us … take away our heritage and people become nothing.* (Iwi group)
>
> *Because it's going back to your roots, association with Papatuanuku … values come from way back … what sort of identity do we have as Maori if our water is being polluted? If we don't look after our surroundings, it will degrade the people. That is where our anchorage is, our power and authority.* (Iwi group)

Pacific participants made the point that their conservation concerns in Auckland were very similar to those others might raise, such as pollution. But they also emphasised a conservation understanding based on their traditional cultural values, and a holistic approach where conservation, health and employment were seen to be related. They were particularly motivated in their conservation concerns by the depletion of seafood observed in the Auckland area. One participant emphasised that Pacific people have a different relationship with the sea, based around its value as a food resource, rather than a recreational resource.

Each person's land is like an extension of themselves. If it's not treated well, then people's esteem and wellbeing suffers.

It's part of your culture and food gathering … it's never taken for nothing, there's a respect for nature. There's a point in time to take things, you don't take it for wanton destruction.

Pacific people don't go to the beach to swim, they go to collect shellfish, at least the older ones do … now there's nothing because of commercialism … we've been disadvantaged because of other people's greediness … don't take more than for your family. Don't take it to waste. Don't take it to sell.

A Tongan definition of health – That feeling of freedom that one gets when one knows that one has fulfilled all of one's obligations to one's family, one's church and one's fonua (land).

Like the older participants, younger participants also supported the need for more education for young people about conservation. But they did not think that young people were necessarily uninterested in conservation. The younger people's group in particular commented on experiencing a growing awareness of conservation issues.

I reckon a lot of young people are concerned. It's just a matter of drawing it to their attention.

I'm at an age where I am starting to think of other things, apart from myself.

Just because we've been brought up in a user pays society, doesn't necessarily make you more selfish, it makes you more aware of what you do pay … there are issues that our parents took for granted that we have to deal with … we are more aware than our parents.

When asked why they were concerned about conservation, the younger participants emphasised:

- They were starting to think about their relationship to others, and in particular aspired to start families in the next few years.
- There was some monetary motivation in recycling and reducing water use.
- A polluted environment restricted their use and enjoyment of recreation and natural resources.
- They were concerned about threats to health and wellbeing.

5.2 INVOLVEMENT IN CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES

Participants were asked about any unpaid conservation activities that they were involved in, and their reasons for involvement or non-involvement in conservation. The definition of conservation activity was left to the individuals, and they included a range of activities, from practices in the home, to community activities:

- Recycling (younger, urban Maori)
- Minimising water use (younger, urban Maori)
- Minimising the use of paper (urban Maori)
- Teaching own children/grandchildren about conservation (urban Maori, parents, older)

- Tree planting on own land (older, parents)
- Picking up rubbish on beach (parents, younger)
- Otara Lake clean up (Pacific)
- Member of conservation or environmental group (older, urban Maori, NGO, supporters)

The reasons participants put forward for involvement in conservation activities tended to stress personal, social and cultural reasons, not simply desired environmental outcomes. Their reasons included:

- recreational opportunities
- personal satisfaction
- skill development
- doing something that would benefit the community
- doing something that would benefit future generations
- preserving heritage.

Participants in the supporters group were very articulate about their motivations for involvement:

> *All are grass roots initiatives, it's seeing that something needs to be done.*
>
> *Conservation organisations have a sense of making the world a better place. They can do something tangible, it's trying to make a difference.*
>
> *I'm in danger of becoming 'passionately proprietorial'!*
>
> *There's deep satisfaction. It's a human need.*
>
> *To put a conservation outlook, to be the environmental voice.*

Some participants who were interested in conservation, but not involved in any activity, explained what prevented their involvement. The most pressing reason was lack of information about opportunities for involvement.

> *I haven't heard of any programmes where people can help.* (Younger group)
>
> *I don't know about opportunities, I don't know who needs volunteers. You hear about clean ups after they happen! Maybe DOC should start letting people know what help they need.* (Parents group)

Participants who were wanting to carry out conservation activities on their own land also identified a lack of advice and practical help as an impediment.

> *DOC could be more active in helping people who want to get rid of ferrets and stoats, make traps more available. I don't see much advertising about what to do about pests.* (Parents group)
>
> *I'd like to get a DOC person come round and advise on what's needed for re-vegetation.* (Parents group)

Participants not only identified a lack of information and advice; they also did not know who to contact to have their say about issues of concern to them.

> *It's the first time I've had a chance to say anything, at this meeting … I don't know who 'they' are, they seem big and unreachable. The only name I know is the Mayor. I wouldn't know who to approach.* (Younger group)

Some of the parents said they were too busy to take on more at the moment, and another participant said that 'hands on' conservation activities did not appeal to

him, although he would consider helping in other ways, such as donating money.

5.3 ENCOURAGING COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The supporters, NGO and agencies groups had a lot to say about encouraging more community involvement in, and responsibility for conservation. They felt that DOC was missing a significant opportunity to involve the community.

> *DOC has a huge role to play in encouraging people, but often people get a negative response and they give up. They're not necessarily looking for money, but looking for knowledge and support … it's the issue for the new century, how do you harness the resources available?* (Supporters group)
>
> *With limited resources, there is a need to develop partnerships with local communities … bring the communities on board, they are the eyes and ears.* (Agencies group)
>
> *DOC is in the ideal position to bring people together with objectives related to conservation.* (NGO group)

The coordination of volunteers was raised as a pressing issue. Several organisations, including NGOs, local authorities and DOC use volunteers. However, the NGO and supporters groups pointed out that volunteer resources are currently being wasted and sponsorship opportunities missed, because of a lack of coordination of volunteers in Auckland. A suggestion was made for a volunteer coordinator within one agency.

> *There is a lack of coordination between agencies and between agencies and volunteer groups. They don't share information, and they have different standards.* (Supporters group)
>
> *Coordinating volunteer resources needs more proactive involvement from DOC. Resources are used in a bits and pieces way …lack of coordination means a lot of potential service is lost. People's time and interests may not fit in with local efforts, but may be able to be used elsewhere.* (NGOs group)

There was a view that DOC is unaware of the potential resources that community organisations can provide. An ARC staff member gave the example of the Council's regional parks service, which has developed a 'partners for parks' programme that involves around 2000 partners, who contribute voluntary labour, money and other resources, and are very strong environmental advocates in their communities.

A representative of one volunteer sea rescue organisation reported that his organisation's involvement with DOC had been very limited, but he saw that they could assist DOC with educating the public about marine reserves and with fire-fighting on islands in the Hauraki Gulf. Another participant suggested that small museums, mostly run by volunteers, could be partners with DOC in conveying conservation messages to the public. These museums were often repositories of important information on natural and cultural heritage.

Participants acknowledged that there were issues to address in working with volunteers, including coordination between agencies and volunteer groups,

compliance with health and safety requirements, supervision, and assisting volunteer groups to build their skills and capacity.

A major issue for some participants was the need to enable volunteer groups to take on decisionmaking and management responsibilities.

> *The key word is empower the community … giving away reserves to local communities could be positive.* (NGO group)
>
> *It's a trust exercise. DOC is finally realising it can't do the whole job itself.* (Supporters group)

As part of encouraging community involvement, participants also emphasised the need for improving consultation and communication with communities.

> *We felt hurt that we weren't consulted on some decisions. It may not have been important to DOC but it was important to us. Consultation is very important, even if it's just picking up the phone.* (NGO group)
>
> *There's a lack of continuity … we are ignored, then DOC gets in contact again.* (NGO group)
>
> *It's not a flowing relationship. They appear and disappear … it's not the staff themselves, it's the procedures and policies that need looking at.* (Iwi group)
>
> *We often get notified about things through the kumara vine, not officially.* (Iwi group)

Participants said that for good communication to occur there needs to be a clear point of contact and on-going communication.

> *We have regular meetings with DOC staff. It's a very good means of communication. DOC is more effective than other organisations in that respect.* (NGO group)
>
> *There is a good flow of information … the main reason is that there are open lines of communication with specific officers.* (NGO group)

5.4 SPECIFIC ISSUES FOR IWI

> *The spiritual ties to the land are still there and still strong.* (Iwi group)

For iwi, consultation is a key conservation issue. Iwi representatives felt that there have been strains between tangata whenua and DOC, especially at the political level. There was a general view that DOC does not understand the unique relationship of Maori to the land, and in particular the struggle facing Auckland iwi as they see a growing population settle on their ancestral lands.

> *They don't have much of a clue as to what makes us tick. They don't have a good feel for Maori aspirations … there is a feeling that DOC will do what it wants to do, and won't explore other avenues.*
>
> *Dialogue is coming along slowly. There have been teething problems.*

Appropriate consultation is a fundamental requirement according to iwi representatives. They emphasised that iwi involvement requires DOC recognising the roles of Maori as kaitiaki and as owners. Many of the issues they raised reiterated their strong ties to land and natural resources.

There are 40 outlying islands legally owned by Ngati Rehua.

The issues for us are interpretation – there was a time when they were writing as if we didn't exist; employment, we want young people to become involved in conservation; concessions; the loss of land which is now under DOC control.

Who owns the seabed and the foreshore? Reclamation of land. Who is monitoring this?

The iwi representatives also questioned why DOC should not pass over responsibility for some areas to iwi.

What makes DOC think it can look after all the things it's supposed to look after? It doesn't get enough funding.

A particular issue for some iwi representatives is having to deal with two conservancies. They have experienced different conservancies using inconsistent approaches in connected areas, such as harbours and waterways, that for tangata whenua require unified management.

The urban Maori group also recognised appropriate consultation as fundamental to building a good relationship. They commented that their impressions of DOC in Auckland were influenced by their experience of DOC's relationship with iwi in their home areas. That relationship varied.

Does DOC want to know? Each one of us have come in contact with what DOC have done. In some areas DOC have raruraru with iwi. It may come down to the process of consultation. (Urban Maori group)

I'm aware of DOC's involvement with [iwi] regarding whales. DOC's not doing too bad … they're in the process of taking their [iwi's] ideas on board. (Urban Maori group)

Some participants in the supporters focus group considered that DOC is working hard at fulfilling its Treaty of Waitangi responsibilities. They also pointed out that how well or badly DOC does in its relationships with iwi could affect relationships between iwi and volunteer groups about conservation projects in reserves that may become part of Treaty of Waitangi settlements.

5.5 SPECIFIC ISSUES FOR PACIFIC PEOPLES

We've got the networks and we want to be involved.

Pacific communities in Auckland are diverse, in their language and culture, in their patterns of migration to New Zealand, and in the history of their country of origin's relationship to New Zealand. Further differences are apparent between island born and New Zealand-born people. However, there are some experiences that are common for Pacific peoples in relation to their involvement in conservation. These include:

- A low level of awareness of DOC and a tendency to confuse the Department's roles and responsibilities with those of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, and the Ministry of Fisheries.
- The enduring importance of the sea as a food source, and the desire to maintain that connection with the sea in Auckland.

- The strength of continuing links with their Pacific countries of origin. Frequent trips from New Zealand to the islands and back may involve the transport of cultural treasures such as whale teeth, produce from the islands such as flowers for ceremonial occasions, and plant materials used for traditional cultural purposes. Participants in the focus group expressed a preference for using island, rather than New Zealand materials for cultural purposes.
- The need for information, particularly on rules concerning recreational fishing and marine reserves, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of wild fauna and flora (CITES) and rubbish disposal.

Participants in the Pacific focus group identified the need for information as a key issue:

> *We need education on what is endangered species. They are not endangered back home.*
>
> *There is a lack of information on the amount of fish to take. There needs to be more visible signs, and in island languages.*
>
> *I have taken shellfish from a marine reserve, because I didn't know.*
>
> *They don't want to break the law, all they want to do is maintain their traditions.*

Pacific participants emphasised the need for appropriate people to work with Pacific communities on conservation issues, and for the use of local media that are popular with Pacific people, such as Radio 531 PI, Access Radio, Mai FM, the Tagata Pasifika programme and Triangle TV.

> *You need Pacific people working with Pacific groups and churches to make people more aware. If you're looking after the beach, it's better to have someone related to the locals.*
>
> *You have to have somebody with credibility to talk to the community, the right person to give out the message.*
>
> *It is a concern to get it into the right languages … you need a proper translation. It's easy to offend people if the translation is poor and they won't read it again. Then the education's gone.*

Participants suggested that Pacific people employed by DOC should be asked for their advice on how to involve Pacific communities in conservation. This approach is important for acknowledging a source of expertise within DOC, and providing those people with an opportunity to contribute their knowledge.

5.6 SPECIFIC ISSUES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

The two major issues identified by the younger people's focus group were pollution (particularly coastal and marine pollution) and environmental education. Most of the group had never heard of DOC, or had only had slight contact with DOC outside of Auckland, or, in one case, through an iwi hui.

The younger people's group said they were concerned about conservation because of the adverse impacts of environmental pollution on themselves and others. Their relationship with natural areas was expressed mainly as a recreational one, with a strong emphasis on the coast.

They were aware of the potential of 'user pays' approaches to define relationships between people and the environment, and cited financial motivations affecting their own behaviour, such as reducing water use. They also thought that user pays prompts people to think more about the value of a resource.

The younger people's group expressed interest in hands on conservation activities, but with a strong youth focus. They suggested that young people need incentives to get involved in conservation. These incentives need not be financial, but focused on socialising, recreation and enjoyment. For instance, young people could be encouraged to get involved in conservation through a clean-up event involving a fun day, perhaps with a band. The group also suggested that a youth newspaper on conservation issues in Auckland would be attractive to young people.

6. Discussion and conclusions

6.1 ISSUES FOR A COMMUNITY RELATIONS STRATEGY

This research, although based on a small number of focus groups, suggests that Aucklanders are not neutral about conservation. Nor are they passive receivers of information. They want dialogue about issues that concern them, and some want involvement, to a high level, in hands-on conservation work and decisionmaking about protected areas.

Some distinctions were apparent between the stakeholders and general public focus groups in regard to their identification of conservation issues, their level of knowledge and awareness of conservation issues and of DOC, their expectations of DOC, and their involvement in conservation. These differences are brought out in the discussion below. It should be noted that although members of the general public focus groups (except the older group) did not know much about conservation or DOC, they made it clear that they do have an interest in conservation, they do care about the environment around them, and they do want to be informed.

The key messages from the general public and stakeholder groups about DOC's focus, effectiveness and credibility are:

- DOC's conservation focus is perceived as narrow, rather than holistic.
- DOC is considered to do some things excellently, while other areas are seen to suffer from a lack of resources or priority. On the positive side, DOC is seen to have committed and helpful staff, and achievements with island revegetation, historic reserves, and endangered species were highlighted. In contrast, participants considered more effort should be made around conservation education, information provision, interpretation and supporting greater community involvement.
- DOC's credibility is seen to suffer due to a lack of resourcing and a lack of profile.

Overall, participants considered it essential that DOC takes a lead in Auckland as an advocate of conservation, and in particular that DOC influences the decisions of local government.

These findings suggest the following areas that the community relations strategy needs to address:

- DOC's low profile
- Aucklanders' conservation concerns
- Education and information
- Clarification of DOC's role
- Consultation and communication
- Community involvement.

DOC's low profile

The community relations strategy should address DOC's low profile in the Auckland region as a matter of urgency. Most participants identified the lack of public awareness of DOC as a major problem for DOC. This was seen as:

- reducing DOC's effectiveness and credibility,
- contributing to public confusion about agencies' respective roles and responsibilities in the conservation arena, and
- affecting DOC's ability to promote conservation messages.

Addressing DOC's low profile in the Auckland region may require consideration of a range of issues including:

- conservation leadership
- a visible shopfront
- education and information provision
- promotion of achievements
- clarification of the distinctive DOC role.

Care must be taken that in generating a higher profile it is not simply seen as DOC 'self-promotion'. In that respect, working with communities and other agencies on conservation projects may be particularly effective.

Aucklanders' conservation concerns

The four main conservation issues that participants raised were concerned with pollution, urban sustainability, parks, and threatened species and habitats. The general public focus groups were particularly concerned about pollution, especially water pollution, and about urban sustainability. The stakeholder focus groups were both more diverse in their identification of conservation issues, and also more focused on issues that could be seen as core DOC business, such as threatened species and pest control on public conservation land.

The community relations strategy needs to consider:

- How DOC can link its conservation objectives to the conservation issues of concern to Aucklanders.
- Conservation issues that are of high priority in terms of DOC's objectives.
- Conservation issues that DOC should take a lead on.

- Lower priority areas where DOC could encourage other agencies to take a lead.

The community relations strategy should particularly address participants' concerns about the range of organisational, management and process matters that they define as conservation issues, in addition to environmental or ecological problems.

Education and information

All the focus groups strongly highlighted the need for more conservation education. Participants saw DOC as having a key role in conservation education, but it was not necessarily seen as the only agency that should be involved. Participants also considered that local government, voluntary organisations, families and schools should also be involved.

Participants identified the following information needs:

- Advice on pest control
- Advice on tree planting
- Recycling
- Marine reserves
- Rubbish disposal
- How to get involved in local conservation initiatives
- Interpretation
- Tracks and walkways
- What DOC does.

DOC does not have a role in meeting all these information needs, as in some instances they relate to the functions of local and regional authorities. But DOC does need to be aware of the range of information requirements that the public has, and where there is confusion about agency functions and responsibilities. The public's information requirements affect their expectations about what DOC can provide. Findings from the focus groups suggest that DOC needs to focus on providing information about:

- DOC's role
- DOC parks and reserves
- How people can contribute to conservation efforts
- Regulations and restrictions, such as those concerning marine reserves.

Clarification of DOC's role

The focus groups highlighted widespread public confusion about the respective roles and responsibilities of central and local government agencies and non-government organisations working in the environmental and conservation areas.

Clearly, it is not DOC's responsibility to sort out public confusion over who does what. However, the community relations strategy will need to consider how to address that confusion by identifying:

- In what areas the public lacks information on DOC's roles and responsibilities.
- Important DOC activities that the public should know about.

- How the public can easily access DOC when required, and publicising this information appropriately.
- In conjunction with other agencies, developing a process for ensuring the public gets clear directions about where to go for help when approaching any one of them.

Consultation and communication

Consultation and communication were important themes raised in all focus groups. Consultation was a key issue identified by the iwi, urban Maori, supporters and NGOs focus groups. Participants stressed the importance of early consultation, and consultation over things that DOC might not think are important, but that are critical to the groups concerned.

Participants identified that for effective communication, it is important to have clearly identifiable contact people, and on-going communication processes between DOC and community groups. Communication also requires consideration of the appropriate communication methods to use, and how they need to be tailored to different audiences. The focus groups provided some guidance to the community relations strategy:

- The Pacific focus group emphasised the need for appropriate people to work with Pacific communities on conservation issues, and supported the use of local media that are popular with Pacific people.
- The younger people's group suggested that young people could be encouraged to get involved in conservation by emphasising the fun aspects of conservation and by providing incentives. They also supported the establishment of a youth newspaper on conservation issues.
- The iwi, urban Maori and supporters groups in particular stressed the importance of interpersonal communication, one-to-one contact, and providing support and feedback.

Community involvement

Several focus groups felt that DOC is missing a significant opportunity to involve the community. Although this was a particular concern of the supporters, NGOs and agencies groups, the general public focus groups also echoed these concerns in their comments that they did not know how to become involved in conservation activities.

Facilitating greater community involvement will require DOC to be proactive with resources and efforts to develop partnerships with other agencies, community groups and iwi.

6.2 WIDER IMPLICATIONS

The results of this Auckland study raise some wider issues for DOC to consider in developing community relations in general. They include:

- There is low awareness of, or confusion about, DOC's role. There is a need for clarity about DOC's mission and role, and consistent communication of them to the public.

- Public and stakeholders expect that DOC will provide conservation leadership and advocacy. They look to DOC for education, information and advice. Nevertheless, there is intolerance of government agencies' 'self-promotion'.
- There is low awareness among the general public of DOC's core threatened species and biodiversity work.
- There is potentially untapped interest in volunteer and hands-on conservation work.
- Co-ordination with other agencies may need attention where there are several government and non-government agencies involved in management of public conservation areas, reserves and natural resources.
- Consultation continues to be a key concern, especially to stakeholders.
- Public and stakeholders tend to have a holistic understanding of conservation that involves environmental, social and cultural values.

7. Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank Shane Edwards for assistance with the research. Shane organised the younger, older, parents and urban Maori focus groups and took notes for all focus groups. Shane provided an important local link, and ensured the smooth running of the project. Thanks also to Moera Douthett, Pacific Island Health Research Coordinator of the Health Research Council, who facilitated contact with people in Auckland's Pacific communities. Moera was most helpful and supportive. The contributions of focus group participants were excellent – their time and effort is much appreciated. Finally, thanks also to staff of the Auckland Conservancy Office who organised the stakeholder focus groups and provided a venue for some of the meetings.

8. References

Craig, J.; Craig, C.; Murphy, B.; Murphy, A. 1995: Community involvement for effective conservation: what does the community want? Pp. 187–194 *in*: Saunders, D. et al. (eds) *Nature Conservation 4: The Role of Networks*. Surrey Beatty and Sons.

Health Funding Authority. 1998: *People in the Northern Region. A Demographic Profile from the 1996 Census.* Health Funding Authority, Wellington.

Ministry of Education. 1999: *Guidelines for Environmental Education in New Zealand Schools*. Ministry of Education, Wellington.

Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs. 1999: *Pacific Vision Strategy. Pacific Directions Report*. Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, Wellington.

Morgan, D. 1988: *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research.* Sage Publications, California.

Patton, M. 1987: *How to Use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation*. Sage Publications, California.

Tolich, M.; Davidson, C. 1999: *Starting Fieldwork. An Introduction to Qualitative Research in New Zealand.* Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

Appendix 1

OUTLINE OF PACIFIC PEOPLES IN AUCKLAND

According to 1996 census data, Pacific peoples constitute 6%, or around 227 000 of New Zealand's population. The Pacific population is one of the fastest growing in New Zealand, projected to grow to around 600 000 (12%) by 2051. The largest group is made up of Samoans, followed by Cook Island, Tongan, Niuean, Fijian and Tokelauan. There are small numbers of other Pacific groups. Over half (58%) of Pacific peoples are born in New Zealand (Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs 1999).

An understanding of the distribution of Pacific peoples in Auckland can be gained from data from the former Health Funding Authority (HFA) districts in Auckland. In 1996, South Auckland had the highest proportion of Pacific peoples of all HFA northern districts, with 54 981. Central Auckland had 41 589, and West Auckland 16 488 (Health Funding Authority 1998). The Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs advises that the second language in South Auckland after English is now Samoan.

The Pacific population is a youthful one. Like Maori, more than one third of their population in Auckland are children aged 0–14 years. Less than 4% of the population is aged 65 and over (Health Funding Authority 1998).

Appendix 2

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

The following are examples of questions used in the focus groups. These were used as guides to develop discussion.

Stakeholders groups

1. What do you think are the most important conservation issues facing Auckland today?
   - As representatives of [NGOs, supporters groups, agencies, iwi] what particular conservation issues are you concerned about?
   - Why are you concerned?
2. What do you expect to be done about these conservation issues?
   - Who should do something about them?
3. What sort of conservation activities are you involved in?
   - Why are you involved?
4. What aspects of DOC's work are you aware of in the Auckland area?
   - What has made you aware of DOC?
5. What is your view of DOC in the Auckland area?
   - What do you think DOC should be doing?
   - Are there things that DOC should be doing differently?
   - What expectations do you have of DOC?
6. What sort of relationship do you have with DOC?
   - What is working well?
   - What aspects of the relationship need improving?

General public focus groups

1. What do you think are the most important conservation issues facing Auckland today?
   - As [young, older, parents, urban Maori Pacific] people do you have any particular conservation issues that you are concerned about?
   - Why are you concerned?
2. What do you expect to be done about these conservation issues?
   - Who should do something about them?
3. Are you involved in any conservation activities?
   - What sort of conservation activities are you involved in?
   - Why do people get involved in conservation?
   - Why don't people get involved in conservation?

4. What aspects of the Department of Conservation's work are you aware of in the Auckland area?
    - What has made you aware of DOC?
5. What is your view of DOC in the Auckland area?
    - What do you think DOC should be doing?
    - Are there things that DOC should be doing differently?