STATUTORY RESPONSIBILITIES AND BARRIERS TO ACTION

Guy Salmon
Ecologic Foundation, Nelson
guy@ecologic.org.nz

Guy has worked as an environmental policy specialist in consulting, policy advice and research roles. He leads the Ecologic Foundation, a think tank which focuses on the challenge of integrating economic and environmental perspectives in decision-making. His research on environmental decision-making in the Nordic countries has contributed to the recent focus in New Zealand on collaborative policy-making. Guy is a member of the Land and Water Forum

ABSTRACT
Looking at the context of current policies and institutions, this presentation will explore possibilities for enhancing the effectiveness of control actions for lake weed and wallabies.

TRANSCRIPT
It is a great pleasure to be back with the LakesWater Quality Society which is an inspirational organisation for me; it would be wonderful to see some of its attributes picked up by environmental groups in other parts of the country because there is so much to be learnt from the success story here. The Society gave me quite a broad brief and essentially it is this. We want to step up to a new level of ambition and performance in controlling lake weed and wallabies and sort out the barriers to actually doing that. I have tried to boil this down into three questions.

The first is to look at the statutory responsibilities of all the different agencies in this area and ask if there are too many outfits, too many cooks spoiling the broth? Is co-ordination good or are things in a bit of a muddle?

Secondly, looking at the toolbox that we have to solve problems, the science and technology, are there gaps here? Is there a lack of energy and commitment behind it all?

Thirdly, are the communities themselves properly engaged with these issues? Or have they got the wrong mental picture about some of their problems, and for that reason have become complacent?

This is a big field to cover very quickly. I make some hasty judgements based on phone conversations with various people and a bit of knowledge of the area. But it is intended as a discussion starter.

Slide 1 shows the list of organisations, which have all sorts of statutory responsibilities. But it is worth saying that some of the most important influences are not statutory organisations. The LakesWater Quality Society or Professor David Hamilton (who is sort of an institution in his own right) should perhaps be on the list. Some of the statutory players are a little understated. The Te Arawa Lakes Trust has ownership of the lake beds, but that seems a bit of an understatement of its role in this community.

Slide 1

Another significant point is that there are some funny splits of responsibility. For instance, a weed is growing on a lake bed owned by one party, but the control of that weed in the water column belongs to another party and there are two different outfits involved with that control. One of them does harvesting and another does spraying - which looks like a real muddle.

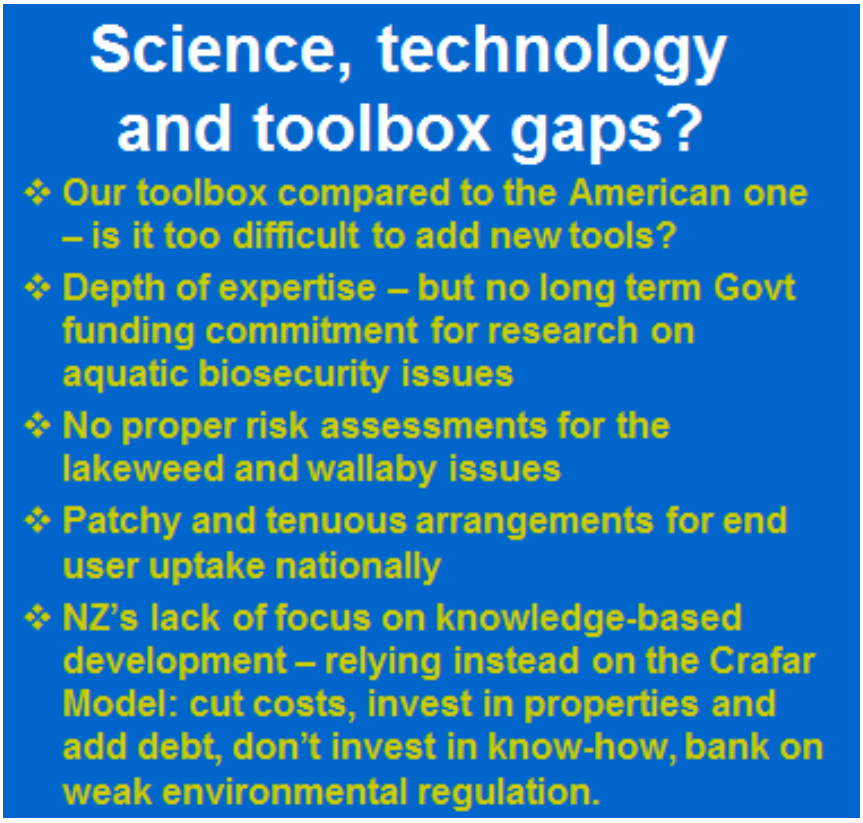
In phone discussions to suss out whether this works, I got the contrary impression to what I had expected. People told me that coordination was reasonably good with everyone more or less pulling their weight. 'This is not a muddle, we've all got clearly defined roles and it does work', they said. I gathered no evidence to make me feel it was not working. There appear to be no barriers to moving ahead on these issues that would be solved with New Zealand's favourite remedy of 'restructure everything'. Maybe we can just tune up what we have already and make it work better.

Then I looked at the science and technology and the toolbox that we have; those who have attended this Symposium would come away with a vivid sense of existing uncertainties and unresolved problems. But in a way that is not the question; the real question is do we have a science team, an establishment and a nexus with the policy community that is sufficiently strong and expert to solve those problems and narrow the uncertainties over the next few years. Overall my impression, a little bit qualified, is that we are strong in the science and technology area.

Having said this, we have all seen some excellent people producing excellent stuff. However there are still a few issues that we ought to think about. Clearly there is a difference between the list of chemicals, for instance, which is in the toolbox for use in New Zealand and the list for North America. Talking with people, I find that part of the reason is that it is quite difficult to get a new tool added to the toolbox in New Zealand.

Perhaps the procedure for doing this does not have a strong enough sense of the benefits of adding these things and is too focussed on the disadvantages or costs. This is an area with the Environmental Protection Authority, and perhaps it needs more attention.

Slide 2



Another disconcerting factor is that, while we have very good scientists in NIWA working on this, they do not have a permanent government funding commitment. They are operating off a cross subsidy within NIWA plus earning a bit of commercial money on the side. There is a certain insecurity about this scientific establishment and workforce. This signals lack of political commitment and recognition that this is a big, long term issue for New Zealand. We need to talk to the politicians. They need to know that this temporary way of funding is only just working OK, but we ought to put it on a permanent, long term basis and expand it.

Why do we find it difficult to get this long term commitment? Possibly part of this comes down to a lack of robust risk assessments. One of the striking things about the United States Environmental Protection Agency is the way they do enormous risk assessments to understand the situation. They ask, 'if this trend continued uncontrolled or if this invasive species arrived in the country, what sort of scenarios could we construct and what are the cost implications of reversing or controlling it?' Considering the issues of the lake weed and the wallabies, we do not have proper risk assessments for either of them.

Supposing that the wallabies spread across the Rangitaiki River and into the Ureweras or the Mamakus and Kaimais and progressed up those chains of mountains. Do we know what would then happen? Do we know what the cost would be in terms of environmental damage? Do we know what the cost would be in terms of trying to reverse that problem? Are we putting sufficient weight on the risks of wallabies continuing to spread? The same kinds of questions can be asked about lake weed. As a South Islander I am very

conscious of the fact that we are not yet grappling with some North Island pests but they could easily get there.

I believe that this lack of awareness of risk, and lack of propensity to properly study risk and look at risk scenarios, is underpinning a failure of national commitment to put adequate funding into biosecurity research, in particular aquatic biosecurity research. This is a problem that needs to be looked at in the large picture.

When I was a director of Landcare Research for 6 years in the early to mid 1990's one of our rather dubious duties was to reduce the science research effort in soil conservation; this happened because the funding was cut off. When pressed for reasons why the funders said, 'Well, nobody is taking up this science. You have produced all sorts of solutions which farmers could use to stop their soil eroding on the 5 million hectares of North Island soft rock hill country but nobody much is using it. Regional Councils don't seem to be interested in taking the lead on this work, so why are we funding the science?'

That is a problem for science in the biosecurity field. We rely very much on the regional councils to use this science, but the uptake is quite patchy. There are some councils like the Bay of Plenty - blessed with an extremely profitable port investment - which is able to do things that other regional councils cannot do. Then there are some quite poorly-funded regional councils that nonetheless are very aware of aquatic biosecurity issues, like Northland. The great majority of councils however, are just not using this science, and they need to be galvanised. They are the same councils that need to be galvanised on almost every other environmental issue as well.

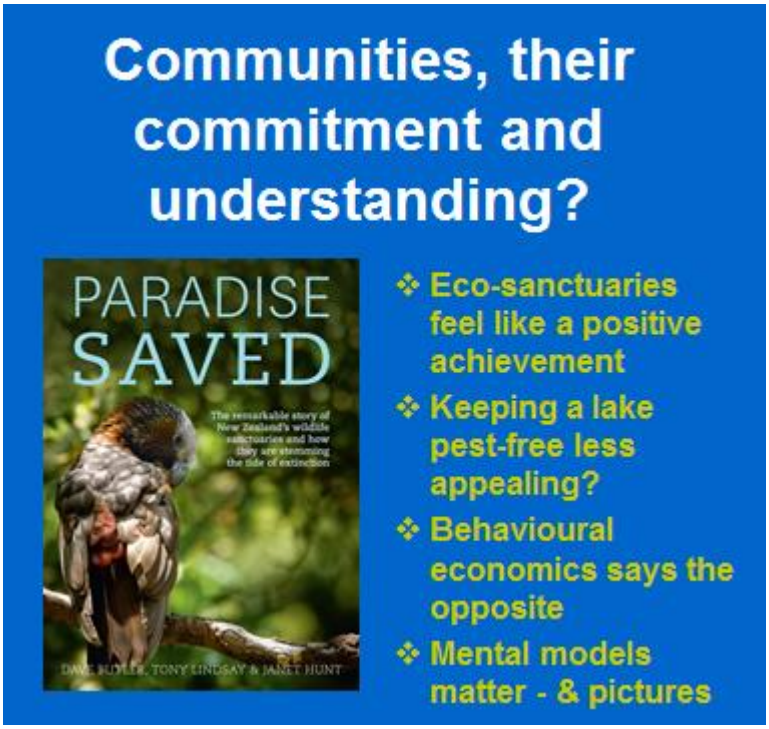
So there is a problem out there which can be driven partly by local environmental activism, gingering up the councils, and perhaps partly by more national policy statements and national environmental standards out of central government, which would force the regional councils to do more about these issues. Until we strengthen the regional councils and their role as our main environmental managers we are always going to have insecurity around the funding of the science and technology tool kit and the workforce in this area.

That leads me to my last point on this slide, which is perhaps a little general for this meeting, but it is something we need to think about. As a society we undervalue knowledge generally, and it is increasingly obvious that we are differing more and more from other small wealthy countries in the OECD in this regard. Looking at comparable countries like Finland, Singapore or Israel, they spend 2, 3 or 4 times as much as a percentage of their GDP on research and development as we do.

New Zealand has become trapped in a way of thinking about our national development which I call the Crafar model. Thus it is all about cutting costs, investing in more properties, building up more debt, non-investment in knowhow, and dependence on weak environmental regulation; we know where all that got the Crafars. We should not follow that model. There are better models out there, and taking a closer look at Singapore, Denmark or Finland we could learn something that is important about knowledge-based development. That is a lesson we can learn and it would benefit a whole lot of other things like the problems discussed in this Symposium.

My third question asks how committed are the communities to these problems? What is their understanding of the issues? Have they got some mental models which are not helpful and can we change those, how can we engage with them?

Slide 3



I was struck recently by the book *Paradise Saved*[1], which is a premature title unfortunately, but a lovely vision. It is a story of more than 350 community initiated eco-sanctuaries that have been established around New Zealand by local groups; it is amazing how this really has taken off in the last decade. People are aware of some of the high profile projects like the Maungatautari Sanctuary but there are so many others and it is such a popular thing for people and communities to do. When talking with these people, they feel so positive about their achievements; putting up a fence, running a trap line, bringing a whole lot of birds back into the community.

But thinking about the slightly different issue of biosecurity, it is the other way round: prevention of a bad thing happening, and the realisation of how important it is that the asset is not lost. So this question about communicating a clear vision about the risks that we run, building some mental awareness in the community, is really important.

Behavioural economics has important things to tell us about this. There is experimental evidence to show that people are much more concerned about losing something they already have, and much less concerned about getting something additional. In a sense, the huge enthusiasm for eco-sanctuaries is probably just the tip of an iceberg of enthusiasm in the community for protecting assets like lakes, for instance. We need to seriously consider the work that Mary de Winton presented to us today about myths held in the community. It is a big part of the challenge ahead: how to turn around the mental models held within our communities.

The members of the Land and Water Forum have pioneered and achieved respectability and a revival of collaborative problem solving methods in this country. At the national level, it is part of a wider movement, very strong in the United States, which might be called 'place based community management'. Where the risks to a resource like a lake are recognised and the local community springs into action to protect it. There is a terrific

[1] Butler, D., Lindsay, T. and Hunt, J., 2014. *Paradise Saved: The Remarkable Story of New Zealand's Wildlife Sanctuaries and How They Are Stemming the Tide of Extinction,* Random House, NZ

amount to be gained by tapping the willingness of communities to be mobilised to do constructive things in the space. We now see a number of examples in New Zealand which tells us something about the possible potential.

I live in a little place on the coast not far from Nelson where there is a marine reserve; we have to deal with people who come into it and grab the abundant fish. If they come in a boat, DOC's hotline gets plenty of calls from people with binoculars identifying the boat. If they start fishing off the shore, locals talk to them and tell them, 'Look you can't fish here this is a marine reserve'.

There is a strong community sense which could also work in the Rotorua area for people arriving with a boat with weed hanging off it. If weed was a threat in the area where I live, the community would be down there stopping people launching boats and looking closely at their trailers. This community engagement is something to foster a lot more.

I was working a year ago with a community group in the Mackenzie Basin and there was an important issue which needed outside funding to solve it. A member of the group was the operator of the local ski field and he said, 'I'm going to set the ball rolling on this by giving all my customers an opportunity to make a donation towards the Save the Mackenzie Fund. We can get the private sector mobilised to put money into this and attract some co-funding from the Department of Conservation.' It is now gathering momentum and shows there are opportunities to tap into community groups as well.

We still face the fact that new weeds are going into lakes and wallabies are spreading. There is a long way to go in building up the community awareness, tapping sources of funding and building the contribution which the community can make to address these problems. That is a key way forward. The Bay of Plenty Regional Council are currently writing their 10 Year Plan and new Pest Management Plan. The Rotorua District Council and Department of Conversation could contribute and perhaps fund some facilitators to work with communities or co-fund initiatives which communities themselves want to start.

I come back to the reality that we are in an era in which there are so many threats: water quality decline, climate change, invasive species. We are at a stage in history where every environmental asset that we have in this country needs a community group alongside to look after it. We need to take that challenge seriously, empower those community groups, give them the knowhow and guidance they need and help them go forward.