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## **Session Five : Ecological Health of the Catchments**

**SESSION CHAIR** – Mayor Steve Chadwick, Rotorua Lakes Council

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF RESTORING THE ROTORUA LAKES**

**Mayor of Rotorua, Hon Steve Chadwick, JP**

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*Steve is the Mayor of Rotorua, a New Zealand city that is world renowned for its Maori culture, geothermal and spa heritage; and for its forests and lakes. Previous to being elected as the Mayor of Rotorua, Steve was a Member of Parliament in the New Zealand Government (1999-2011). During this time, she held the portfolios of the Associate Minister of Health, Minister of Conservation and Minister of Women's Affairs. One of her proudest achievements during her time in government was securing funding (\$72 million) to undertake a water quality improvement programme for the Rotorua Lakes. As Mayor of Rotorua, Steve is driving an ambitious programme that will ensure that Rotorua reclaims its status as a world-leading health spa, resort and recreation centre based on its natural environment, and creative spaces.*

#### **TRANSCRIPT**

Tena tatou katoa nga mihi nui kia katou and good morning. It is a thrill to have been invited by LakesWater Quality to address the Symposium because I have never done this before. It is lovely to be here with Regional and District Councillors because we do this together.

In November last year the Rotorua District Council resolved to change our trading name to Rotorua Lakes Council. This was passed at Council and caused a stir; everything I do seems to cause a stir because we did not consult the wider community. In retrospect I still believe it was the best decision to keep at the Council table.

This was deeply significant and is already proving to have a positive impact. The tourism marketing sector love it and slowly the change is being accepted. The nay sayers, and there were many of them, could not work out why. Why bother with it! That could be accused of being stuck in the mud. Slowly they are starting to understand that we are the lakes district of New Zealand. They are not yet embracing the change, but slowly over time they will understand it.

The rural sector was not slow in telling us that they again felt dropped off the Council radar and devaluing of their contribution to the wider district and economy. You, the science community, and lake side dwellers gave the most support as evidenced during the latest round of ratepayer and LakesWater Quality AGMs. The name is purely symbolic and it is a better description of what we are – a lakes district of many lakes; 14 that are all connected within a catchment in a volcanic caldera. What a sense of place that is internationally when you Google Rotorua. Rotorua District Council did not tell you much but Rotorua Lakes Council tells you about geothermal and water.

My first impression when I came back here from our OE in the United Kingdom in 1975 was a place of incredibly deep beauty. We explored and walked the edges of the lakes, looking for historical rock art, waterfalls, walking tracks and learned the historical tribal links with the lakes. I love the early artists' impressions of Rotorua, Rotoiti and Tarawera

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and collected images of Burton photographs at Okere Falls and the pink and white terraces; such was my love of the place aesthetically. We enjoyed a bit of boating and skiing with friends and visitors but we are essentially land lovers. We hated the algal blooming of the lakes and I loathe trout flies. Paul East was our MP and he was attempting to gain national interest in the science of the district from a catchment perspective. I then became a councillor and lauded the bardenpho system of wastewater spraying in the forest and now I am in charge with finding a solution to that challenge.

Then along came Ian McLean who was the Chairman of the LakesWater Quality Society when I was first an MP in 1999. He was deeply troubled and worried as was the society about the water quality and he introduced me to the facts of the tipping of the quality of our lakes' waters. Council at that time was not that responsive to the science and the ecology of the lakes, but in response to Ian's call we decided that Graham Hall then as the Mayor, John Cronin as the Regional Council Chair and Anaru Rangihuea, Chair of Te Arawa Maori Trust Board, and I would go off to Wellington to propose a collaborative programme to be part funded by the Crown, Regional and District Council. Minister Marion Hobbs, my friend, sent us packing and told us not to return until both Councils could work together. It was quite wise really, quite schoolmarmish.

Since 2002 we have all learned together how to gain the attention of the Crown and that was the start of the \$235 million programme. I now see the lakes quite differently from that aesthetic lens and understand the complexity of this wonderful district in which we live. My experiences are not unique, the chance to enjoy our lakes is open to us all and we know that our lakes contribute to our sense of place and our economy. Our city and a number of communities are built around our lakes. When we opened an ideas shop at the end of last year there are some city dwellers that cannot get out to the lakes and asked for more bus services. They want to get out and enjoy the lakes. One young mother talked about wanting to take her child out to the lakes and have koro teach her child how to catch a fish, but as a solo parent she is unable to do that. There is a bit of disconnect between the city and the lakes.

We promote ourselves to the rest of New Zealand and internationally as having outstanding places to play and for our commitment to sustainability. We have set up a sustainability portfolio led by Janet Wepa and she is charged with a very big job ahead of her. We have restructured Council to support a councillor led portfolio on sustainability and watch this spot at the Local Government Conference. Rotorua more than most cities of our size contributes to the world's perception of New Zealand.

In preparing for this 2015 Symposium I was reminded of the 2001 Symposium 14 years ago. I particularly remembered the paper by Gerard Horgan on the social and economic importance of the Rotorua lakes. Gerard used trout fishing as an example of the economic value of our lakes. He estimated that at the time trout fishing primarily in the lakes was estimated to bring in some \$25 to \$35 million. Even today these are huge numbers and this was quite an eye opener for us all back then. It is interesting how you take something for granted that is simply amazing sitting right on your door step. For a long time that was the case with many of us on the lakes.

In 2015 we know that the restoration of our lakes is hugely important to our sense of peace and our local economy. We have reached another landing place, there is so much more that we have to do especially with the unfunded lakes and we need a restoration plan for Tarawera and Mamaku which we have flagged in our long term plan.

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But there is an even greater debate to be held to consider the value of water. In 2013 the International Water Management Institute produced a report on water, agriculture and food security which stated that while there remains a great uncertainty as to how climate change will affect any given locality it seems likely that it will have a profound effect on water resources now and in the future. Agriculture and food security depends on managing water, a finite resource, but variable in time and space. I believe that is the next national debate. Water underpins sustainable development and therein lays its value.

There are really innovative initiatives underway in our district that we are incredibly proud of. The Te Arawa Lakes Trust is leading a project to develop a Te Arawa cultural values framework to help explain why water is important to the Te Arawa tribes. Sir Toby Curtis said publicly that the project is aimed to make sure that everyone is included in the right to water. Since 2012 we have another wonderful collaborative effort between Ngati Rangiwewehi, Te Arawa Lakes Trust, Bay of Plenty Regional Council, Fish and Game, Department of Conservation and NIWA and the Hamurana Springs Incorporated Society. It has led to a restoration plan to further prevent the decline of the koaro, a native fresh water whitebait species. This is the way we want to work in our community in the future.

A few weeks ago I attended a hui, along with 50 others, all with an interest in our Puarenga Stream and its upper tributaries. Councillor Wepa will lead the co-ordination with Regional Council and the community in the development of a plan for the Puarenga. The purpose of the hui was to share information on the health of the stream, acknowledge what has already been done and what is being done to revitalise the stream. They invited the community, Waiariki, stakeholders and other people interested in this stream and upper tributaries to come along and provide comments on their vision of what the stream should be like. To me the conversation that night expressed how we value our waterways in Rotorua and a giant leap from the original focus which was on the lakes only, not on the tributaries feeding into our lakes. It was heartening to see first-hand who attended this meeting. The variety of businesses and community stakeholders who recognise that the health of this stream impacts on themselves, our community, our businesses and our lakes, they understood the complexity of that picture. I think that those who attended the hui came away with a real sense of ownership. I have always worried about our city dwellers getting that ownership of the Puarenga as well as a sense of purpose to facilitate change.

I want to acknowledge Craig Morley from Waiariki who got the partners together for us and he is also the chair of our Keep Rotorua Beautiful. This sort of community action and engagement is a win win for everybody. It is healthy for our waterways and also for the wellbeing of our people. These 3 examples show what can be done through partnership. Partnership is the life blood of this Council. Our role is only one of guardianship. Kaitiakitanga, guardianship is our responsibility, it is a shared responsibility and that is our next journey, *kia ora koutou*.