

Ngunguru Spit and Whakairiora

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Ngunguru spit, the mountain that looks down on it (Whakairiora) and adjoining beaches comprise a pristine coastal region that is significant from many perspectives; ecological, environmental, botanical, visual, archaeological, cultural and spiritual.

The local hapu, Te Waiariki, a tohunga tribe, describe Whakairiora as a place of spiritual cleansing. Souls were prepared for departure from here. It was not a pa site, despite its prominence, because of its special spiritual significance. It was their "cathedral"

Ngunguru spit is the site of a major battle in 1838 between Te Waiariki and southern tribes. Te Waiariki were decimated and subsequently declared the sandspit "waahi tapu" The larger iwi in the region, Ngatiwai, have claims and connections to the Sandspit. It is also particularly sensitive from an environmental perspective. A history of the Ngunguru sandspit is included in the following link - [Ngunguru Sandspit Summary](#).

The spit and Whakairiora have been in private ownership since the 60s and 70s when it was sold by local Maori who had fallen on hard economic times. Some believe that the sale of the spit was questionable by virtue of the manner in which it was transacted and the questionable authority of the people who sold it. A familiar story.

The various owners have been trying to develop the spit for decades and local people have been trying to stop this for about the same period, successfully so far. In early 2005, a group was formed called the Ngunguru Coast Action Group that has been instrumental in raising people's awareness and trying to get protection for the sandspit and Whakairiora.

Landco is New Zealand's largest property development company that has a board comprising some of New Zealand's most powerful businesspeople. Wayne Boyd, Chairman of Telecom, is a director. Todd Capital last year bought into Landco to the tune of \$125 million. Landco is involved in a number of other controversial developments including Mt Wellington Quarry and Long Bay in Auckland.

Earlier this year, Landco bought the block comprising Whakairiora (that adjoins the spit properties) as a means to gain access for development of the spit. Access to Whakairiora had supposedly been granted to the previous owners from members of Te Waiariki. A recent Environment Court ruling had ruled in favour of limited development for lifestyle blocks on the mountain, despite opposition from DOC, local Maori and other concerned groups.

The access rights are in dispute as certain rights were either never granted or conditions pertaining to the rights never met.

Landco have been courting Te Waiariki since 2005 to gain access rights in order to push through development on the spit and at Whakairiora and also to gain their co-operation/support to help get planning approval for development.

We have seen a letter written by Landco to Te Waiariki in April this year, outlining their expectations, that talks of modern partnership between Maori and Business yet it is nothing more than a modern day "blanket and beads" offering, giving them some rights and protection of certain designated areas but very little of substance. It is written in a very arrogant and condescending manner.

Te Waiariki are divided about what should happen.

Many members are very upset about the prospect of development in an area so sensitive and special to them, yet no one is offering them any real alternatives.

Others see the possibility of some economic benefit or are upset by well heeled Pakeha pointing the finger at anything that involves Maori, or development of Maori land, when Pakeha have been doing the same with impunity for years. Many of the local hapu (like much of Northland) are living in substandard housing and are on welfare, with little economic prospects.

At various times DOC (and, I believe, District Council) have tried to buy the land, and at each stage, the owner at the time would put the price up. Wade Doak, who has extensive knowledge of this area and its characteristics, has been advocating the establishment of a Regional Park that encompasses the areas Landco wants to develop, and adjoining areas (from Ngunguru to Horahora estuaries).

There are many many people that are passionate about this, motivated to do something but feel powerless to do anything.

What is happening now

More recently, Landco has upped the ante with a concerted PR campaign via newsletters that they are producing and distributing. An example follows, <http://nz01.terabyte.co.nz/landco/DocumentLibrary/Newsletter2.pdf>

And other media such as magazines such as Coastal Focus which is nothing more than advertorial for developers. For example, the article, An Intricate Balance

The PR is very sophisticated and well thought out, and talks of public consultation and amenity, with clever use of language around sustainability, community partnership and benefits for all.

In the meantime, the bulldozers have turned up at Whakairiora and are cutting tracks in the bush amongst tohunga paths and middens. Members of Te Waiariki are afraid to take legal measures - that is, seek an injunction to stop this because of the threat of punitive action if unsuccessful.

The broader perspective

Developers in New Zealand as you know, now have the upper hand. They are capitalising on exploiting an ever dwindling resource of coastal property and for that matter rural and wilderness areas. New Zealand is now within the reach of anyone as evidenced by the sale of \$16 billion of property by overseas owners last year.

The developers know how to work the RMA and the Environment Courts, they know how to divide and conquer and take advantage of marginalised communities, they know how to fudge issues and manipulate public opinion through sophisticated PR. And the motivation is profit and profit only. The RMA is not working to protect areas like Ngunguru and Whakairiora and big business is prevailing.

At what point do New Zealanders say stop?

We have spent the last 200 years buying and selling and chopping up land. We have built our economy on the sale of land. At what stage, do we say we should put a stop to this and preserve what remains intact and leave a legacy for our children and our grandchildren. We know that there will always be pressure for "a place at the beach" (it is part of our culture) and for coastal lifestyle blocks. But that needs to be balanced against a sustainable future and legacy.

We urgently need a national conversation on this. Wade has mooted a coastal moratorium. Ngunguru and Whakairiora could be the lightning rod for this.

I think that we forget how privileged we are to live here in New Zealand and that we have a responsibility to preserve our treasures, our taonga, our land, our coastline. In many ways this issue is no different from that of our rivers and water resources in the South Island which are now seriously compromised by unsustainable agricultural practices.

But it needs to be a discussion that addresses a wide range of issues. e.g. whether it is Ngunguru or Pakiri, how do we create economic opportunity and sustainability for communities that allow them continue to be custodians of the land without the pressure to put a "for sale" sign up?

As my cousin, Jim Taylor, says "The irony is that we have a Pakeha community that wants to see this preserved, we have a Maori community that wants to see this preserved, we have the basis for a partnership but very little structure or real connections to bring these communities truly together on an equal footing, where there is real understanding, day to day relationships and conversations. That is what the Treaty is supposed to be about".

I hope that you are able to lend support to this.