



Conservation Kills

In April 1994 my wife and I opened the 20-hectare Kowhai Vale Predator Proof reserve on Banks Peninsula. This was the largest predator proof reserve on mainland New Zealand. Around the reserve is a 2.2km long, 2 metre high predator-proof fence.

The focus of the reserve has been the reintroduction of the eastern buff weka. This weka was present in Canterbury until about the early 1920s but has now disappeared. There are substantial numbers on the Chathams where it was taken as a game bird in 1905. On the Chathams weka are hunted as game. The Department of Conservations also kills weka in nature reserves on the Chathams because they are a non-indigenous species.

Getting hold of buff weka from the Chathams required two lots of permits:

- Authority to retain in captivity absolutely protected wildlife.
- Authority to transfer weka from the Chathams.

In early February 1994 we applied for the authorisations. The permits came through in early April 1994. The authority to retain in captivity had an indefinite tenure. The authority to transfer was valid for three months from 5 April 1994.

We brought out 8 birds in April 1994 directly the permits came through. These were all released into a holding area in the reserve.

That winter we had a series of problems including slips, rock falls and cattle damage that either allowed weka to escape or stoats to get in and kill them.

In late October 1994 we requested another transfer permit to bring out 10 more weka. This permit came through about a month later on November the 29th. We thought this was a bit slow. If only we knew what was to come.

In September 1998 we applied for a new transfer permit to bring out another 10 birds. At the time we were hopeful of getting the extra weka within a month or so.

For some reason the Department now put the brakes on. Someone somewhere didn't like what we were doing. On the 4 November 1998 the Department wrote back saying that any transfer needed the support of the Chatham Island Conservation Board and from Chatham Island iwi. (Don't

forget that the weka were all the time at risk of being hunted as game by Chatham Islanders or killed by DOC). DOC advised that it was going to be difficult to get the Chathams Conservation Board to consider the application. Papers had already been distributed for the next meeting. 15 copies of a proposal would be need for distribution following the Department's translocation guidelines (10 page guideline attached Gen5/14336) with such useful items as:

- Predictions of how the transfer will affect the viability of the source population.
- Genetic differences or other measures of variation between different populations.
- Impacts the new species is likely to have on food items (bugs).

"Hundreds weka were being killed on the Chathams by DOC, and we were being asked to conform to bureaucratic procedure and lengthy consultation requirements to transfer 10 birds."

- Transfer methods.
- Role of an Animal Ethics Committee.
- Monitoring and research related to the transfer.
- Contingency planning.
- Detailed budget.
- Public perception.
- Department approval procedure.

The strange thing was that although we had a legal permit to hold weka we couldn't exercise it. The Department could hold out on a transfer permit to block our access to weka.

In November 1998 I wrote to the then Minister (Nick Smith) asking him to cut through the red tape and pointing out that weka were being killed on the Chathams while we were being asked to conform to bureaucratic procedure and lengthy consultation requirements.

In January 1999 the Minister replied saying amongst other things that, "The Conservation Act 1987 requires the department to give effect to principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. Consultation with local iwi regarding species transfers, such as that requested with local Chatham Island iwi regarding the weka transfer is one mechanism by which the department meets these requirements." He had been trapped by his bureaucrats.

In late February 1999 at some cost we went through the charade of putting an application for transfer of protected wildlife as per the Departmental guidelines.

Nothing much happened. We were initially

informed by DOC in late March 1999 that the next Chatham Islands Conservation Board meeting would be in early May 1999. Later we were told it was on the agenda for June 1999.

In early September 1999 we asked DOC what was going on, as we had had no further information.

In mid-September DOC replied saying "progress is being made with the buff weka proposal although there is still some disagreement among Weka Recovery Group members over whether the proposal meets recovery plan objectives."

Getting approval from local iwi and the Chatham Island Conservation Board was just the first hoop we had to get through. Now DOC Head Office was raising objections.

DOC forwarded a communication specifying the nature of these Head Office concerns and requesting our response. The concerns were:

- That the 20 ha area was too small.
- That there was no need for the buff weka to be held in captivity.
- That there was no advocacy message & it was unclear who would have access.
- That the birds should be discouraged from breeding unless there was a release site for progeny.

In Mid September and early October 1999 we wrote back to DOC responding to the worries held by some members of the Weka Recovery Group.

Several months of sending communications back and forth followed. Basically DOC Head Office didn't want to give us our transfer permit. At one stage a couple of local DOC guys turned up in the office and said they would get it sorted shortly. Nothing happened. Eventually in mid 2000 I got Ken Shirley to ask some

questions in parliament. This got me a call directly back from the new Minister Chris Carter. I think he was surprised to learn his Department had killed 400 weka that year on the Chathams. The Minister promised me I would get a permit within a week.

In June 2000 we were finally granted a transfer permit – but with a sting in the tail. A condition in the new permit required that prior to any transfer occurring a meeting is held in conjunction with the Department of Conservation and Onuku Runanga. The Department was now using me to satisfy their treaty obligations. The details of that meeting and subsequent developments is another story.

We finally got the birds transferred on my terms in mid August 2000 – almost exactly two years after we had applied for the permit.

We have made progress improving our management of weka. We now trap inside and outside our reserves all the time. We have improved the design and strength of our predator-proof fences. We have had at least 5 lots of weka chicks hatch in the last 12 months in three reserves giving a total of 11 chicks hatched.

We have spent more time and effort fighting bureaucrats than saving wildlife.

I believe DOC would rather have native species die out than be saved privately. DOC has a vested interest in endangered species.

Roger Beattie is an entrepreneur and a conservation enthusiast. He is the founder and a director of Eyris Blue Pearls.

DOC has a vested interest in retaining a monopoly on conservation ...

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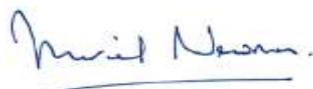
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Regards

Muriel Newman

(founder & director of



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