



President's report 2017

FOMI AGM, 21 March 2018

2017 was a year that FOMI achieved a huge amount but a major personal objective has yet to be achieved.

We started the year with an excellent turnout at the 2017 AGM with 51 members in attendance. At the time I put this down to the interest in FOMI's increased activities and DOC Ranger Chris Bell's talk on Mana Island's role in saving the Takahe from extinction. It was a great story and engagingly told.

Also, on the positive side we have had a great series of work parties. Dale Shirliff has managed this super efficiently working with Chris and teams of FOMI volunteers. Dale will summarise his activities himself. Chris has moved on this month to be the Ranger on Kapiti Island with a swap over of the Rangers on Kapiti Nick Fisentzidis and Genevieve Spargo (in a job share) coming to Mana. We have had a great working relationship with Chris and wish him and Mara all the best in the new position. We welcome the new Rangers Nic and Gen. They have a hard act to follow.

Very successful has been the ramping up of our guided tours. Jason Christensen has done a great job in developing and producing the new self guided tour brochure with the new marker points around the island. Organising the actual tours is a major task and thanks to Hannah Kyle-Parker and Philippa Doig this has gone very smoothly. We now have ten fully trained guides and five in training which will meet the needs for the current season.

Winning the Wellington Airport Community Award for Porirua City, Heritage and Environment Category was a real highlight and great credit to our many volunteers. We were also delighted that our sister organisation Pest Free Plimmerton was runner up. The 30 second video produced to introduce FOMI to the regional judges is now on our web site.

A highlight for the year was Lou Sanson's (DOC Director General) acceptance of an invitation to visit Mana Island to see for himself the work that has been done by volunteers over the years. The opportunity to make this happen was the further release in March of Ngahere geckos from GBC Winstone's Belmont quarry, a project managed by EcoGecko with FOMI and Wellington Zoo support, undertaken in March. It was a great day. Lou was very impressed with the restoration of Mana and also took on board our concerns about our relationship with DOC.

DOC's draft Wellington Conservation Management Strategy (CMS) caused your Executive significant concerns as it failed to adequately acknowledge the huge contribution being made by conservation groups like FOMI in the region. Furthermore, the draft did not mention DOC's intended strategy of passing increased responsibility to manage the conservation estate on to community groups. FOMI made a submission and presented at the hearing – to a mixed reception. However, it seems our views have been taken on board and DOC have recently informed us that they have drawn up a national

template for a generic management agreement for volunteer organisations. We look forward to seeing this draft.

March 2017 saw the presentation of the final report of consultant James Dempsey on the strategic assessment of the proposed Mana visitor/education and biosecurity centre at the Paremata bridge site. FOMI along with Plimmerton Rotary commissioned this work to gauge community interest in making the centre a reality – a dream of past President Brian Paget. Unfortunately, we could not find a champion to take the idea forward and approval in principle by Porirua City Council and DOC did not turn into tangible support. This along with community concerns over the proposed change in use of the site has meant the project did not go ahead.

The visitor centre demise led to a discussion with DOC over the non-use of the recreation room attached to the Lockwood on Mana. At the time we were told DOC had funding in their budget to repair the foundations and make it available for use again. FOMI member Miguel Braga who is a structural engineer has been working with DOC to find a cost-effective solution. Currently, this project remains at the planning stage and now DOC is uncertain about their funding.

A key project initiated in 2017 is the proposed Fernbird translocation. A group of 7 FOMI members made a trip up to Rotokare Reserve on 13 May to meet Simon Collins, Sanctuary Manager of the Rotokare Scenic Reserve Trust, talk about sourcing Fernbirds from the Reserve and see the habitat. It was a great day and established a good connection. Our sponsor, OMV, is also a major sponsor of Rotokare. We had a session around the table getting to know each other, the aspirations of both organisations and in particular to discuss the proposed Fernbird translocation. We then went out into the reserve for a wander along a track around the lake edge hoping to see some Fernbirds. We heard their calls and one of us caught a fleeting glimpse of one as it flittered along close to the ground.

This trip was followed up by an early morning visit to Pauatahanui Wildlife Reserve on 27 May to hear and see how their initial Fernbird translocation from Rotokare Reserve is working. We heard but didn't see Fernbirds. Pauatahanui's translocation appears successful and we expect them to have a second go this year. This means the earliest our translocation could take place is 2019.

We continued to work on getting the formal White Faced Storm Petrel translocation proposal approved by DOC and Iwi, quite a time consuming and somewhat bureaucratic process. The key change to the initial proposal was a move to source chicks from Burgess Island rather than Maria Island in the Hauraki Gulf. However, as we got deeper into the proposal process the feasibility of Burgess became less and less attractive. Iwi issues and increasingly complex logistical arrangements meant we needed to consider another alternative, Rangatira Island in the Chathams group. Our hopes that the translocation would actually go ahead in February 2018 were dashed when DOC informed us that we should withdraw our proposal as Chatham Islands Iwi and Imi were not ready to support us. Instead we agreed with DOC that we would undertake a reconnaissance visit to confirm the technical feasibility of the translocation (see photo below) and establish direct contact with Iwi and Imi. This was successfully done in February this year. The next step is a further visit to the Chathams to meet with Iwi and Imi kaumatua.

For some time now your Executive has been working on arranging a get together with our partners, DOC and Ngati Toa to discuss our mutual aspirations for Mana Island and ensure we are all moving together for the benefit of the island. I am delighted to say that the partner's meeting took place on the island with DOC and Ngati Toa at the end of June. It was a milestone and brought us all a bit closer together for

the benefit of Mana Island's restoration to a pre-settlement Cook Strait ecosystem. In addition, we have now established a regular quarterly meeting with DOC and Ngati Toa at DOC's Kenepuru office, the most recent held this month.

The WFSP translocation team at work on Rangatira Island. Cathy Mitchell, Brian Bell and Graeme Taylor. Note: chicks, recording equipment and typical habitat with marker poles to identify burrows



As ever, administration is a key function and the efforts of Dick Fernyhough, Philippa Doig and Darlene Adams as Treasurer, Secretary and Membership respectively mean we hum along very nicely. These are often the unsung jobs that are so essential to a smoothly running organization, brilliant efforts all round. Dick has done the lion's work on preparing our annual Performance Report. This integrates the financial accounts with a summary of FOMI's performance over 2017, a huge step forward from how accounts used to be presented. Also, thanks to John McKoy FOMI's records are in much better shape and more accessible to members through the website. He is also getting us ramped up in adopting the citizen science approach to our activities.

Behind the scenes Linda Kerkmeester and Jason Christensen have been working on a proposal to restore the wetland. We see this as a flagship project for 2018. I am delighted to say that DOC have now approved this project to proceed.

Looking ahead, planning is well advanced on a programme of celebrations to mark FOMI's 20th anniversary. Bringing Philippa Sargent on board as communications manager has lifted our profile on social media and largely thanks to her we have a great programme of events for 2018.

While I was away on the Chathams, unbeknown to me the most amazing story was unfolding on social and international media – the death of Nigel our no mate gannet. The story resonated with international media with BBC, ABC, CNN, NY Times and Washington Post to name a few all running items. Thanks to Colin Miskelly, Chris Bell, Linda Kerkmeester, Philippa Sargent and others for their contributions in communicating Nigel's story. It raised the profile of Mana Island internationally and the work of FOMI's volunteers. It was FOMI's initiative to shift the colony of concrete gannets to its new location that Nigel found so alluring.

When I took on the role as President I expected it to be a 4 year commitment. Events have conspired against this and after 2 years I will now not be available to stand this year. Kath and I are making a move to Riwaka in Tasman District, something that was on the cards long term, but brought forward when we found a property that ticked all our boxes. We will remain members of FOMI and I am committed to seeing the WFSP project to a successful conclusion.

I wish FOMI and the new Executive all the best for another successful year in celebrating FOMI's 20th anniversary and ongoing work on the restoration of Mana Island.

Brian Bell
President
6 March 2018