



Opito Bay Ratepayers' Association

General Meeting Minutes

Sunday 9th April 2023, 5pm at Biel's Shed

1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed those present to the meeting.

Present Chris Severne (CS), Paul Cook (PC), Glen Sycamore (GS), Ed Scorgie (ES), Sue Edens (SE), T Costello, G Martin, Jay Williams, Grant Northcott, Robyn Mahood, Craig and Cassie Roe, Andrew McMillan, Deli Connell, Heather Bruce

Note This list may be incomplete – please advise if you were at the meeting and not recorded above.

2. Apologies

Apologies received Cheryle Parker, Johnny Teat, Nathan Tesselaar, P Cornish, Lee Framp, Duncan Watson, Fiona Taler, Chris Mygind, Christine Pullin, Aaron Power, Jeff Wilson, Grant and Gaylene Lonergan, Qwilton Biel, Councillor Rekha Giri-Percival, Councillor John Grant, MB Community Board members.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Deli Connell and Area Manager Heather Bruce to the meeting, and thanked them for their commitment and attendance. The Chair noted the great support we have received from Heather in her current and previous roles.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were taken as read and it was moved to accept them (Moved ES, Seconded CR) – Agreed

4. Inwards / Outwards Correspondence (CS)

- 4.1 Group Manager Operations re Blackjack Road. Drove the road, and noted immediate remediation done. Design work for other remediation will be prioritised along with all the other work underway. Slips have stabilised and experts are comfortable with road open as present.
- 4.2 Jamie Boyle (TCDC) re erosion. Has had a lot of direct contact from ratepayers.

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4.3 Jim Dahm re dune erosion. Jim Dahm is recognised as an expert on dune restoration in the South Pacific. CS wrote to him to ask about what was being done at Whangapoua. He obtained a resource consent on behalf of local ratepayers, plus a global resource consent which should apply to other beaches in the Coromandel, for pushing sand back into the dunes. Conditions apply as to whether this is done with council or private owner funding (depends whether council assets are at risk). In Whangapoua work is being paid for by residents whose properties are in immediate danger. Approach is probably not appropriate for Opito. The beach reserve in front of Skippers Road is owned by DOC. Any contact should be made to them. Jim Dahm and Jamie Boyle say settled weather will restore dunes over short period of time. SE noted it is important to keep Skippers Creek relatively straight to avoid scouring out dunes to the side.

Action: CS to talk to WRC about routing of Skippers Creek so it does not run along front of dunes.

5. Treasurers Report (PC)

Report as circulated was tabled for comment. Main issue at this stage is future funding for the PFO program, which has been a huge success but will need further support to achieve the next set of objectives. Budget was discussed and noted that we need to get more external grants to meet the budget, and also have a big push on people not paying subscriptions. Paul lamented that a material percentage (around 30%) of people refuse to pay subscriptions despite the obvious benefits of many of our activities to the community health, safety, wellbeing and enjoyment of the Bay. He also asked if people could let new Sands subdivision owners know about the Association, as there are currently only 8 members from there.

Motion accepting Treasurer's Report (CS/GS) agreed

6. Scallop Rahui Update (Grant Northcott)

Grant noted that there is now a total ban on scallop fishing in place throughout NZ, with the latest closure decision based on a scientific assessment of the state of the fishery by NIWA. The ban is in place for a minimum of three years, and will only be relaxed if the scientific evidence supports that course of action – ie the ban will remain unless it is scientifically confirmed that fishing can be resumed sustainably.

NIWA intends to carry out further research to try and identify the source of the spat that fertilises the Opito and other Coromandel beds.

Legasea are now working with community groups to lobby for a total ban on dredging for scallops if the fisheries are re-opened. CS noted that we are already in communication with and supporting Legasea on this.

7. Kūaotunu Biosphere Working Group (PC)

PC advised that the Dark Sky Community initiative is now well underway, with tremendous support from TCDC and the community. Focus is on consultants completing draft plan change, team completing formal IDA application documents and continuing to build community support with events, direct email and Facebook / website.

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ES talked about changes to external domestic lighting that may be needed, and said he intends to talk to key lighting retailers in Whitianga to explain requirements and equip them to provide effective advice to consumers on appropriate fittings etc.

8. Wilding Pine Project Update (CS on behalf of Aaron Power)

CS reported on behalf of Aaron Power that the Opito section of the current funded project is effectively complete, with the results obvious to all. There will be further work required given the scale of the problem and the continued forestry activity, and Chris encouraged people to continue to target small wilding pines by pulling or cutting these whenever possible.

9. PFO and Stewart Stream track (Craig Roe)

CS introduced this item with a shout out to the team responsible for much of the work – Craig Roe himself and his family, and also others who we know but prefer not to be mentioned by name!

CR advised that 25 new traps sponsored by people in the Bay will go out in the coming weeks, and that they are now pushing up into native bush. Total kills are nearing, if not over, 2000.

A lot of people have been helping with weed clearance on the Stewart Stream track, including getting rid of a number of fallen exotics from the cyclone. CR talked to the meeting about the work done over many years by Keith Williamson and Joe Scott-Woods which laid the critical base for what is now being done.

The team is finalising a detailed, high quality updated map with full GPS tracking and waypoints., although circulation of this should be limited to avoid excessive use by outsiders.

CR talked about the use of shells to label the different tracks, which was both visually appealing and very successful.

The team has just completed the fifth track access support construction, and are now focussed on a big push on weed clearance.

Deli Connell complemented Craig on the outstanding work being done, and noted that she had completed and thoroughly enjoyed one of the tracks.

10. Dune Restoration (CS)

Things we are doing are encouraging the community to get involved – have 57 registered volunteers. Next event Saturday June 10th. CS noted that about 8,000 dune grasses have been planted around Stewart Stream, and thanked TCDC for their help and advice. He noted that TCDC are shortly to commence a program of spraying out agapanthus on the dunes.

11. General Business

Deli Connell congratulated the Bay on the many achievements and initiatives in progress. She noted the strength and uniqueness of the community, and commented that she campaigned on a platform of recognising the issues across Mercury Bay, which is not just Whitianga.

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Geoff Martin talked about issues arising from the cyclone. In particular, the community was isolated for five days after the event, with no phone or internet contact, and no interaction from agencies such as NIWA or TCDC – the first outside contact actually came from Waka Kai delivering supplies they thought might be needed. Geoff wrote to Pam Balt asking why we hadn't heard from anyone, but has not had a satisfactory response. The meeting discussed whether there was actually a formal responsibility in place to contact and support isolated communities, and if so who had this responsibility. We need to understand the plans in place and specific responsibilities to minimise a recurrence of these issues in future events. Geoff felt that we need a satellite phone for the Bay as well as improved resilience for the current communications infrastructure – it was lucky that no serious or life threatening emergency took place, as there would have been no ability to seek outside assistance.

CS noted that we had discussed the issues at Committee, and would be investigating with Pam Balt and Telecom companies what can be done to improve resilience and to establish a satisfactory emergency response capability going forward. He noted that he understood Pam Balt had already contacted WRC Emergency Response Crew and suppliers and was looking for input from them as to what improvements could be effected.

Heather Bruce advised that blue rubbish bags are going to be replaced by solid bins and a fortnightly collection, as the bins are the equivalent size of two or three blue bags. CS replied we will then have recycle, food and wheelie bins to deal with, and Robyn Mahood asked for schedules to be adjusted to accommodate long weekends – ie to ensure that a collection takes place immediately after long weekends, which will not happen if a strict fortnightly schedule is followed. We need to raise this issue with TCDC and see what changes may be needed to the proposals.

Chris thanked Deli Conell and Heather Bruce for their attendance, and there being no further business the meeting closed at 5:50pm.