

200 Turbines Proposed for Kaipara Harbour

John Retimana, Ngati Whatua, Ruawai

Introduction

John Retimana was born just down the road at Te Kopuru and was brought up at Naumai Marae. John welcomed the late arrivals to the hui and apologised for the inconvenience of shifting the hui from Naumai to Oturei Marae. Due to a recent death Naumai Marae has been reserved for the grieving whanau, in accordance with Tikanga Maori.

It was a privilege for Ngati Whatua and the local hapu Te Uri o Hau to host the Hokianga Accord. Oturei was one of 35 marae situated around the Kaipara Harbour and the Accord has been to several of those marae.

As a group the Accord has great political potential to preserve the right of people to fish for food, for people's mokopuna [descendants] to partake of that right and ensure the commercial realities were controlled for the benefit of the people.

John has a small interest in salmon farming in the South Island. He was pleasantly surprised to discover the international demand for fish grown in our local waterways. John provided some information on this venture for the hui participants to browse through.

Turbine proposal – business case

Crest Energy has been through a consent process to gain authorisation to install up to 200 power-generating turbines at the entrance to the Kaipara Harbour. While there is a business-case that shows the installation is viable and could be lucrative for assenting Maori, this has to be balanced against the long-term adverse impacts on the environment, fisheries and local communities.

There were several business groups courting different hapu in the hope of achieving agreement for their proposal from local Maori. This has created a fractious environment, which was preventing agreement amongst the collective interests of the Harbour.

Ecologically, installing turbines in the Harbour was not a clever idea. In principle the installation is wrong. However, the northern Wairoa and Dargaville areas lacked any major development that could provide employment and business opportunities for the locals. The area was still only famous for growing kumara.

The Kaipara district needed some innovative thinking and investment to rejuvenate the area. From a business perspective the money being offered was attractive as it was "*monolithic*".

Turbine proposal – a non-commercial perspective

Mihi Watene, Te Uri o Hau, Poutu

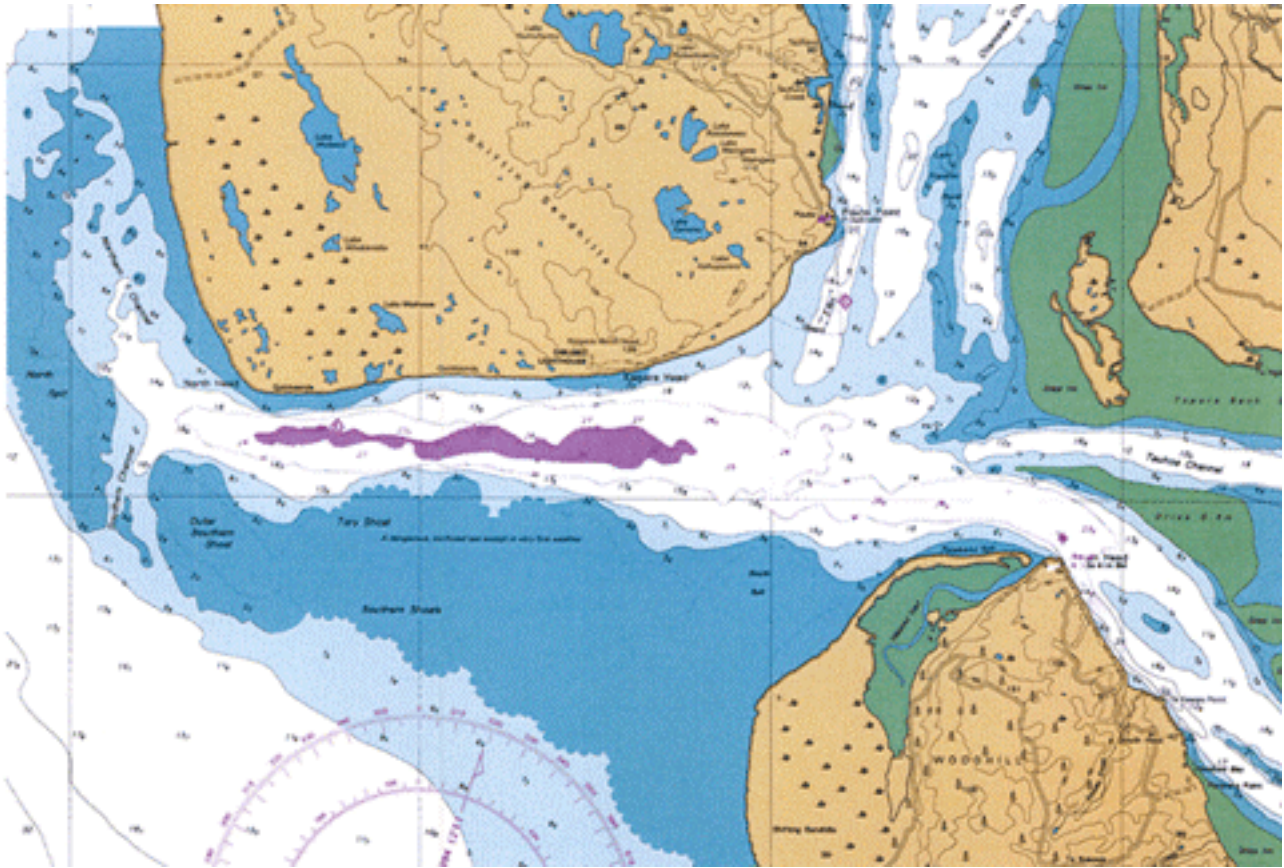
Mihi Kapa-Watene is the chairperson of Te Uri o Hau Settlement Trust. She has attended previous Accord hui in her role as a director of Environs Holdings, through the Settlement Trust. Mihi marveled at the strength and unity amongst the various groups of the Hokianga Accord.

Mihi acknowledged Sonny's chairmanship skills and caused a chuckle when recalling Sonny making similar stand-down statements at the Naumai Marae hui, in April 2007.

Background

Te Uri o Hau Settlement Trust has recently restructured its operations due to financial difficulties. Despite their dire financial position, Te Uri o Hau has spent around \$300,000 opposing the Crest Energy proposal to install turbines at the Kaipara Harbour entrance. Regardless of the rumours being bandied about, there was absolutely no financial incentive for Te Uri o Hau to accept the Crest Energy proposal.

Figure 1: Proposed installation site for 200 turbines marked in purple, northern channel of the Kaipara Harbour entrance.



Having undergone the pre-hearing and Environmental Court stages of the resource application it was plainly obvious that the applicants can afford, and do pay, “experts” to produce evidence to support their proposal.

It was likely Te Uri o Hau would lose their fight against the proposal. If so that loss could cost the Trust another \$100,000, which they will need to find.

Initially Crest want to install 20 turbines however, the resource consent applies to 200 units. It was a major concern that these machines have not been tested anywhere else in the world.

Te Uri o Hau has requested the installation of one unit and for Crest Energy to monitor the impacts. Crest Energy has opposed this suggestion.

Despite the costs, Te Uri o Hau was determined to continue their opposition to the proposal to install these turbines that measure 24 metres high, 25m wide and 30m long.

Concerns and next steps

Te Uri o Hau was seeking the support of as many organisations as possible to help them in their struggle. With the benefit of hindsight, their approach was wrong and their campaign was weakened because of the absence of professional, scientific advice.

If they lose their Environment Court proceedings Te Uri o Hau has one other legal avenue available, which is where the additional costs will be generated.

Throughout the whole process the Settlement Trust has held hui around their rohe. The response from the people has been consistent – Kaipara people do not want the installation to go ahead.

This opposition is based on the huge impacts such a development would have on the health of the Harbour. The Kaipara is special; it has the second largest coastline of any harbour in the world. The coastline extends 3,350 kilometres and covers 500 square hectares.

In addition, the Harbour is not pristine. It has been affected by many decades of land mismanagement and run-off. Any effort to plant and fence off waterways will be negated by the impacts of installing these massive machines that are over seven storeys high.

There were fears for the ongoing health of the fisheries, both coastal and harbour, for the environmental effects of having massive, swinging turbines blades creating electro-magnetic fields, the impacts of chemical contamination from the anti-foul and other paints used on the machines, and the potential to ‘chop up’ passing fish and marine organisms.

Another concern was that once the consent had been granted, Crest Energy will on-sell that right to another commercial entity and any damage control will become the responsibility of tangata whenua.

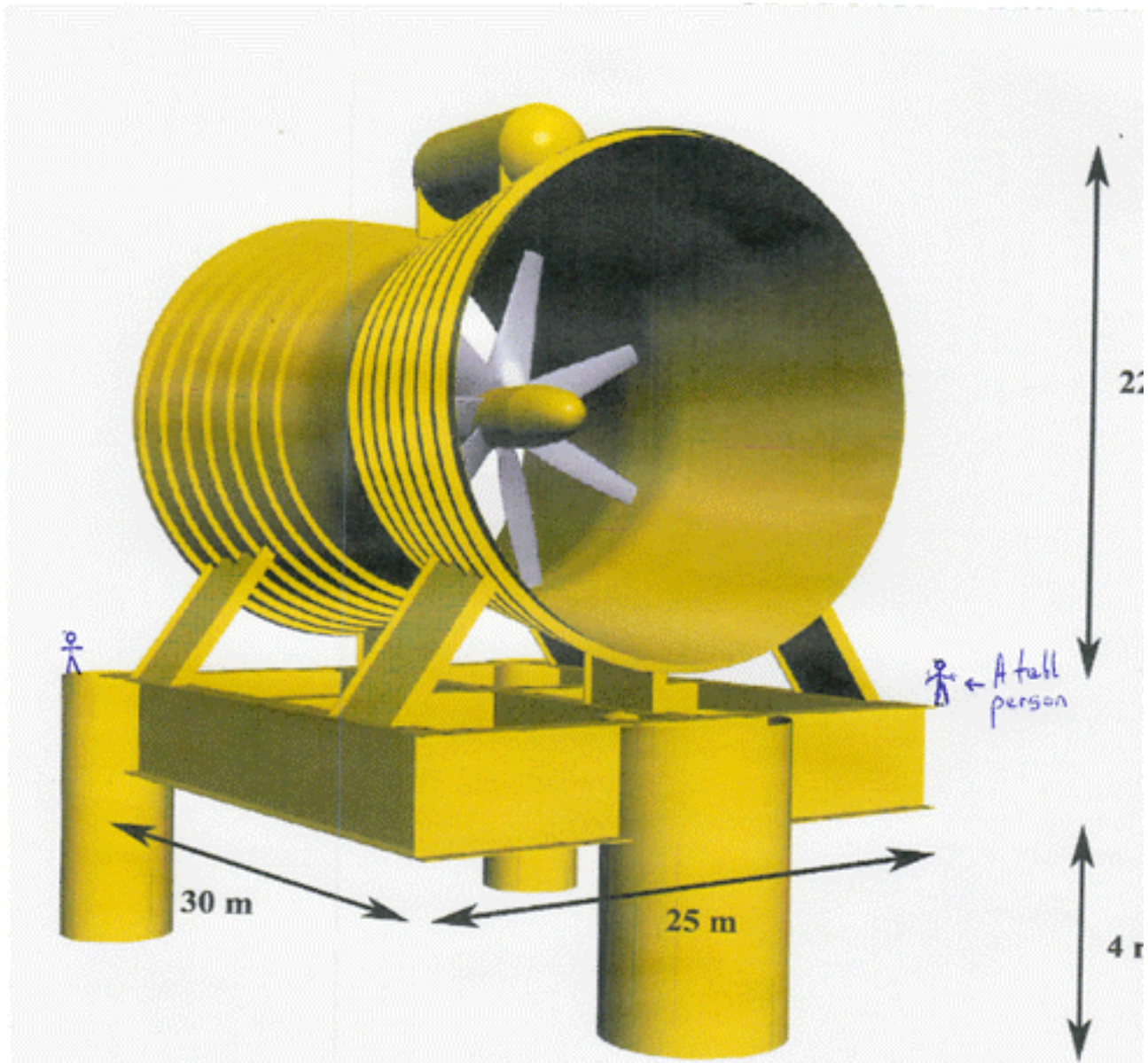
Mihi commended the progress being made by the Hokianga Accord and that the kaupapa remained for "more fish in the water/kia maha atu nga ika ki roto i te wai".

Further information

More information on the west coast fisheries, including snapper, could be found in the 2009 NIWA report produced for the Ministry of Fisheries. That report confirmed around 98 percent of all the snapper off the North Island west coast (Snapper 8 management area) originated as juvenile fish from the Kaipara Harbour¹.

¹<http://www.fish.govt.nz/en-nz/Environmental/Land-based+Effects+on+Fisheries+and+Ecosystems/NIWA+review+of+land-based+effects+on+coastal+fisheries+and+ecosystems.htm>

Figure 2: Depiction of a proposed power-generating turbine for the Kaipara Harbour entrance. This turbine measures 24 metres high x 25 metres wide x 30 metres long.



Crest Energy has limited information on its website at <http://www.crest-energy.com/faq.htm>.

Te Uri o Hau would appreciate the assistance of anyone at this hui to help their campaign. Mihi and Deborah Harding, the Trust's Social and Environmental Services Manager, would be at the hui for the rest of the day.

Hui Discussion

Mihi clarified that Te Uri o Hau has been through the original consent process with the Northland Regional Council and also a pre-hearing at Whangarei District Court. The Environment Court has issued an interim decision and Crest Energy was expected to meet certain criteria before consent would be granted.

It was very concerning to everyone that the consent process seemed stacked against local interests.

Crest Energy has maximised their resources to employ appropriate expert witnesses, and even kaumatua, to provide supporting evidence. Te Uri o Hau has few resources and no academics to produce a similar level of expertise to the Courts. This lack of resources was not unique to Te Uri o Hau; it was a common problem for many Maori organisations.

Tim Haggitt is a seaweed researcher who has previously reviewed the Kaipara Harbour environment for the Northland and Auckland Regional Councils. He has been involved in Environment Court proceedings against increasing sand mining off the west coast and the proposed oyster farms over seagrass beds. There are a lot of issues involving the Kaipara which all relate back to the sustainability of snapper, other finfish and their environment.

Regarding the tidal generators, Tim was one of the original consultants appointed by Crest Energy to conduct a survey. Eventually the researchers left the project because they were not satisfied with the way Crest Energy were using the data. Crest then contracted other consultants to continue the research.

There were many undetermined factors that could influence the passage of fish through the Harbour entrance. As such, the effects on mammals, great white sharks, gurnard, snapper and skates and rays, which use their electro-magnetic senses, were unknown.

Installing multiple turbines will require a fishing prohibition around the installation, this would mean denying people access to the very popular fishing destination, the Graveyard.

Underwater turbines were being used in Europe; however, the biological evidence of any impacts is minimal due to the difficulty of the large size of the generator and measuring effects on highly mobile finfish species.

It was also unclear if the heavy west coast iron-sands would damage the tidal generators or their moving parts.

Difficulties arose in the Environment Court proceedings because opposing parties tended to have their own scientists presenting conflicting evidence to support their claims. Consequently, the presiding Judge was not always adequately informed to make a balanced decision.

Several people at the hui offered their assistance and would continue the discussions with Mihi, Deborah and John Retimana during the lunch break.