

## Lock the gate... Government poisoning of marine life in progress

Written for the NZ Fishing Coast to Coast magazine

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17.7.06

If it had not been for the very competitive and experienced Wellington Surfcasting and Angling Club members who have been fishing the Pencarrow area for over forty years, it is quite likely no one would know how instant and serious the impact of the chemicals that are now flowing out of sewage pipes is having on the marine food chain, not just at Pencarrow. Four years ago the Hutt City Council (HCC) commissioned a new sewage processing plant at Seaview to remove the solids from the sewage. Once again the HCC, this time under the leadership of John Terris, showed a complete disregard for the marine environment as they were too miserable to lay a pipe out into the fast Cook Strait currents. The HCC instead dumped the chemical cocktail directly onto the little beach next to Pencarrow called Buff Bay.



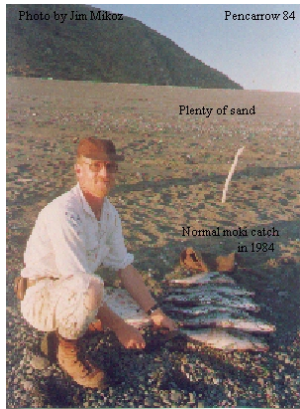
The result was instant. Not only did the paddle crabs, spotty shark and other fish disappear from the Pencarrow and Fitzroy Bay beaches overnight, but the seaweed that washes onto the beach appeared black and burnt. I received many phone calls from fishos asking what had happened to this once productive fishery. Our club history has recorded bycatch details and through photography what it was like. You can judge for yourself as the bag of moki, red gurnard and blue cod caught by two club members overnight is impressive. These fish can no longer be caught there and commercial fishers report the

butterfish and moki have also disappeared from their nets and there has been a massive drop in crayfish numbers.

Many of those past and present club members have acquired their skills fishing around this desolate coast line and have used this knowledge to represented our club at the New Zealand Angling and Casting Association National Fishing Championships, with a great deal of success. The club members target different specie by using different baits and rigs. You will not find the passive fishers here, lying back in the sun



appearing to be fishing. Those who have fished this coast are the serious fishos who make up the ten percent who catch the ninety percent, travelling through the night to fish the tide or fishing all night often using crayfish for bait. Believe me if there were any fish to be caught there these fishos would have caught some.



The HCC with the support of the Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) have provided a perfect example of their lack of marine knowledge by allowing a sewage cocktail of chemicals to be dumped onto a beach at the entrance of a harbour, that happens to be that of the Capital City of New Zealand. Forget about this clean green image crap from the councils and Government as the Minister of Conservation, Chris Carter, endorsed this resource consent and is about to sign off the dumping of chemicals onto the Pencarrow beach for another ten years. The HCC helped in keeping this a secret by installing a locked gate seven thousand metres from the pipe, to protect a sewage pipe, yeah right! No it's so that the public will never know how irresponsible the politicians are to allow this to happen. Would these same politicians dump the chemical cocktail onto Oriental Bay or Mission Bay beaches? So who do they think they are to think this is acceptable?

The HCC sewage treatment plant at Seaview is 14,500 metres from the outfall and every now and again the pipe bursts. To repair the pipe they then send the sewage into the Waiwhetu Stream and issue public notices warning the public not to gather shellfish or swim near the stream, which describes what is going out of the pipe. The HCC plant discharges poison in massive quantities as it has a trade waste system that collects waste from industrial plants such as battery recyclers and makers, wool scourers, industrial detergent manufactures, hospitals, paint manufactures and also a chemical recycling plant not to mention the massive input of petroleum by-products from the road when it rains.

However, as I was to find out later while making a submission to the Wellington City Council (WCC) resource consent application to dump millie screened sewage into Lyall Bay that there were more issues than the storm water exceeding the plant's capabilities. I have not a problem with millie screened sewage as it provides a food source for fish, the problem was in the lack of control over the massive quantities of chemicals that were now being discharged.

Since the land based green element greased their way into government departments they have caused Government to make some terrible decisions that have impacted severely on the marine environment. For example, who in their right mind proposes a marine reserve within metres of a sewage pipe. The land based greens did! Councils are driven by Government to comply with the Resource Management Act (RMA), unfortunately those who wrote this act lacked marine knowledge and in their quest to remove the solids from the sewage set a ph value. This forced councils to add still more chemicals to meet this green eco idea of how to manage sewage outfalls.



For a while I had known the WCC introduces 38,000 litres of a class eight caustic liquid every week, to bring the ph level in line with Government recommendations. Other countries strip the chemicals out and make recreational lakes from it, instead our Government makes councils add chemicals. It follows that this also could be common practice throughout the country. The WCC sewage discharge never complied with the original consent, granted ten years previously to reduce storm water in flows so the operators are today forced to add still more caustic to meet the ph value, some times its trebled. The discharge already contains household detergents, industrial trade waste, road run off and our human diseases, which all go out the pipes untreated.



The WCC paid scientist stated there would be little impact at the base of the pipe, which is logical, but he failed to advise the impact of the chemicals in the fresh water on the beaches and rock pool life. He also failed to describe the inability of the pipes' diffusers to mix the quantity of fresh water discharged with the sea water. Visible both from on the water and the overlooking hills, the discharge is only in one small area instead of the described hundred metre defuser system. Ironically this same scientist reported the marine habitat a few hundred metres from the proposed marine reserve as "the water habitats of the proposed alignment area (pipe) were

not considered to have any special or high natural environmental values". This is a perfect example of a scientific report produced to suit the agenda of whomever writes the cheque. This confirms what we have said all along, the proposed marine reserve scientific report is a jack up to suit the agenda of an ill-informed Government.

The quantity and strength of the chemical cocktail in the fresh water being discharged can be massive as both WCC and the HCC report maximum flows of 3000 to 4000 litres a second. This would be equivalent to between four and six of the biggest three axle fuel tankers on the road today dumping their entire load inside a minute. Fresh water sits on the top of sea water for thousands of metres and a trip down the west coast in an aeroplane in winter will see a muddy slick travelling miles out to sea while the current travelling down the coast ensures the beach receives a decent licking of fresh water. Fishing is often good in these conditions as there will be clean seawater below.

The first thing that suffers in the marine environment is the seaweed, as it cannot grow in fresh water. By adding chemicals, the next to go is the very beginning of the food chain, the algae which is burnt off the rocks. This is the food source for shellfish, crabs and yellow eyed mullet which come into the shallows with the incoming tide. Without these two major elements a whole food chain is lost to the fish we catch and eat, all the way to dolphin's, orcas and pilot whales. If the Government is sitting back on their hands thinking the quota management system, amateur fishing regulations, marine protected areas strategy, marine reserves and a threat management plan to save Hector and Maui dolphins is the only way to manage the marine world then they are dreaming, as all they have provided is the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff. It is totally unacceptable for any Government to remain silent while knowingly allowing councils to poison the sea along our beaches as this is destroying the most important inter-tidal food source. It is disgraceful that Government have passed into legislation the RMA that accepts without

question the advice of marine scientists, when they know they have been paid to support the cheapest option put forward by those who write the cheque, and to hell with the marine environment.

I was recently invited to speak against the proposed marine centre for the Wellington South Coast at the resource consent hearing. The logic of the current GWRC and WCC councillors supporting this project goes hand in hand with their decision to support the sinking of old rust bucket warship in some of the fastest currents in New Zealand. Not only is the proposed marine centre five hundred metres from the Wellington chemical pipe but if they had bothered to compare marine life before the pipe installation and now they would have seen a massive drop in marine life. The worst hit is Island Bay, which is smack bang in the middle of the proposed marine reserve. Here the WCC have installed a massive storm water pipe on the beach which caused the bait fish schools to disappear instantly. Before I spoke at the hearing a college boy described how his class had made a study of the rock pools at the proposed marine centre site and stated they could not find any life in them. When a group of college boys search rock pools and cannot find any life and marine scientists are not prepared to speak up about what must be obvious to them, the Government had better take a good hard look at this industry of marine advisors as this is only a small window of what is going on and it cannot continue.

As secretary of the Wellington Recreational Marine Fishers I wrote a submission opposing the discharge of chemicals into Lyall Bay from the WCC pipe. If the marine consultants had been doing their job it should have gone out a further 2000 metres past the reefs and into the fast currents. A DOC scientist spoke and described the impact on marine mammals from the cocktail of chemicals



and human diseases on the mammals' food supply. She explained that as dolphins travel in this cocktail layer they could pick up human diseases such as pathogens and antibiotic resistant bacteria including Giardia Cysts from which they would have no way of ridding themselves. This was too much for the commissioners who lost the plot completely. They would never have experienced a DOC scientist and a recreational fisher raising the same concerns before and two of them got stuck into us, as if we had come to debate the facts. The problem was they obviously did not want to deal with the impact of chemicals and diseases and it was far easier to shoot the messengers than introduce a condition that required the council to remove them.

While fishing off the Wellington south coast it pays to keep a sharp look out for the Picton ferries as the crews play chicken with recreational boats by getting as close as they can. After three close calls we try and keep an eye on them and in doing so we often spot a pod of dolphins coming from miles away. Jumping on the surface they look quite playful until they get off Pencarrow, then as if they have hit a wall, they turn around and head back out to sea. They are obviously coming across the chemicals off Pencarrow, proving they are a lot wiser than a Government that has introduced legislation that allows councils to dump chemicals onto a beach.

The GWRC recently applied for a continuation of the Pencarrow discharge through Coastal Permit WGN050359 (24539), and to support the resource consent they employed marine consultants from a major company in the Hutt Valley. They stated that they tested the water in the shipping channel (no where near the pipe) and failed to mention that there were no paddle crabs or fish in either Fitzroy or Pencarrow Bays or that there was no life in the rock pools for miles. We know the surface current sweeps down the eastern side of the harbour as many were washed ashore when the Wahine sunk, so why did they not survey the coast in either direction of the pipe? Were they too afraid to bite the hand that feeds them?

I wrote to the Minister of Conservation, Chris Carter, advising him of the errors from the consultants and the damage chemicals are doing to the marine environment, as he has yet to sign off this resource consent. If ever a Minister of Conservation should decline a resource consent, then it should be this one. It is totally unacceptable and irresponsible for a Government to knowingly poison seven kilometres of beach in either direction of a sewage pipe and to also allow a council to dump the product onto a beach. I have met a number of the Government marine advisors and have yet to meet one with any practical marine knowledge let alone an understanding of the marine environmental, which was proven when they recommended to Government that a marine reserve inside a sewage pipe's outfall is the way to go. Science will learn nothing in this reserve, other than what we have discovered already, chemicals kill marine life.

In 2000 I was invited by the Ministry of Fisheries to make a submission to the Aquaculture Reform Discussion Document and one of the concerns I raised was how would they get councils up to speed on marine knowledge. Senior management of



the Ministry of Fisheries, at a NZ Recreational Fishing Council AGM, acknowledged my concern as a major problem. If the latest actions of the GWRC are anything to go by it is little wonder Wellington Harbour has a chemical outfall on the beach at the harbour entrance, and in Northland they dump sewage and chemicals into Hokianga Harbour. No wonder marine farm allocation by regional councils is being dragged out, they have little understanding of the marine environment.

Recently the GWRC contracted a couple of marine scientists from a large Nelson environmental institute to survey the regions beaches. I was blocked from meeting them which was just as well as it was all a jack up to fool themselves and those in the GWRC who had asked for the survey. They never reported the impact on marine life from the mud being pushed over the shellfish beds of Petone Beach or that beach grooming every three days in spring is killing the beginning of a food chain, or how chemicals

discharged onto a beach has killed fifteen kilometres of beach, or how a beach stripped of its sand cannot support life. They visited all the locations and missed it. It is irresponsible of these institutions to carry out such surveys and not report back what has been obvious to recreational fishers and college boys. I know from experience that calling for such reports is a lengthy process as there has to be a proven justification to ask for it and then this requirement has to be balanced against other financial commitments. So why or who watered down the report to convey the impression to the council that chemicals, beach grooming, sand mining and dredge waste are having no impact on marine life. This report has corrupted a regional council into believing the chemicals provide no threat to marine life and this misinformation from a respected major Nelson marine consultant has contributed to fifteen kilometres of marine life once enjoyed by recreational and commercial fishers to be almost completely wiped out and has contributed to the GWRC destroying the life in two lakes.

When Victoria University fresh water scientists surveyed the Fitzroy and Pencarrow Lakes it was in preparation for DOC to manage the lakes, which are only a few hundred metres from the outfall. Their major discovery was there was few native fresh water fish, but could not establish a cause. Obviously they were unaware of the Otago University research that has established that freshwater fish migrate around our coast in the fresh water layer after a flood. If they had known they would have realised there would not be a fish in the world that could survive for very long swimming in water contaminated with chemicals.

If ever an area cried out for a marine reserve to restore the marine habitat that has been destroyed by past and present Governments, then the Pencarrow Fitzroy Bay area is the place. It would not be too hard, first get the chemical pipe out 2000 metres into the seven knots of Cook Strait current where, aided by the prevailing wind and wave action, the chemicals would disperse rapidly. Then once the lakes' outlets had been restored with sand the water would again flow, and the native fish would be able to find their way into the lakes again. The yellow-eyed mullet that once filled the harbour would once again be able to return to the raupo stands in the lakes and spawn around them. The currents would carry their young into the harbour where the migrating dolphins would once again be provided with a food source. The chemicals would stop flowing into the harbour area and access to the reserve could be managed as it is now.

But I am dreaming. We have a Government who would much rather poison the sea than install a marine reserve in an area that would receive recreational support. Hopefully the Government will wake up and realise their proposed reserve is obviously in the wrong place. For example Government allowed a warship to be sunk in the middle of it which is now sending bits of steel through the existing marine ecosystem that reserves are meant to protect! There is a pipe pouring out chemicals washing the shore line, three rubbish tips leaking leachat, five sewage overflow pipes, a number of storm water pipes. Now the ill-informed councils are supporting a marine centre that will suck up the plankton rich water before it gets a chance to flow into the reserve! Not that it will matter very much as Government allowed the GWRC to send from 1994 to 2003 fast ferries and in the time they were crossing the proposed reserve they would have sucked up the entire planktonic surface water to depth of a metre inside six days.

It will be interesting to see what happens. Will the Government through the Minister of Conservation, Chris Carter, hide behind the existing legislation created by the land based green element with no marine knowledge and endorse the resource consent to dump sewage and chemicals onto a beach for a further ten years? Will this be the signal to every council in the country that they too can poison marine life with chemicals? Marine management by Government has arrived at a cross road to poison or not to poison marine life, to drop a marine reserve proposal or to move it to a more appropriate area,