

Hawksbury Lagoon Committee Annual Report 2021-2022

Presented at the Annual General Meeting 24 March 2022 in the Board Room at the East Otago Events Centre by Ruth Ferguson

Our relationship with the Department of Conservation (DOC) has been very active during the year. In May we signed the Hawksbury Lagoon Society Health and Safety Plan (DOC2740740) and in December 2021 the Community Agreement. These binding documents clarify our relationships and responsibilities as local overseers of the lagoon and surrounds which are DOC property.

The Covid 19 pandemic has prevented our major Ki Uta Ki Tai planting days in spring and autumn and the O Week maintenance afternoon. New opportunities have however opened. In November 2021 DOC office staff and some from the committee and community planted the newly fenced reserve area on Stewart Street. Through Volunteer South we hosted ADI Instruments for the clearing grass choking plantings at the Inverary Street reserve area and on the causeways. We are also very thankful for John Ollerenshaw and recently Mike Dewar for the mowing reserve areas.

There has been active engagement with staff and pupils at Waikouaiti School. Guided tours of the lagoon, plantings and regular watering of these plants has been undertaken. Two pupils also provided a delightful article on Red Billed Gulls for addition to the regular Lagoon updates published in the POWA Newsletter. Community engagement through holding an open day was prohibited this year by the Covid pandemic restrictions.

Attention of the committee during the year has been focused on issues related to the poor quality of water in the lagoon and Post Office Creek/Waipaku. Interactions with local governance organisations have led to mending of a broken sewer line adjacent to the lagoon, clarification of where cattle can graze in the centre of the racetrack to avoid accessing tributaries to Post Office Creek/Waipaku or disrupting bird breeding, and advice on the process required to mitigate leaching from an old Silverpeaks County Council refuge site into the lagoon. We were heartened to learn that the mechanical opening of the lagoon (via Post Office Creek/Waipaku) to the sea is now based on assessment by an ecologist. Concern about the influence of a residential development off Beach Street on lagoon water quality and supply led committee representatives to meet with the Dunedin City Council (DCC) with follow-up communication. This was followed by on-site discussion with lagoon stakeholders (DCC and Otago Regional Council (ORC), apologies from DOC) to obtain support for the installation of a weir and fish passage to replace the small culvert connecting the lagoon to Post Office Creek/Waipaku. The committee have been encouraged by reports of increased fish shoals and a visual improvement in water quality for the seaward lagoon and Post Office Creek/Waipaku. The question is whether this is a season blip or real change, remains to be seen.

With the retirement of Russell Jenkinson who undertook pest trapping for the committee many years, we were able to recruit Catie Pai who has extensive experience with DOC. More will be covered under the Pest Report. Trapping statistics are now entered onto the Trapsnz website.

Bird counting at the lagoon run by ornithologist Derek Onley recommenced in October 2021. This has continued on alternating months. The pricking of eggs to control Canada geese and black swan populations was not undertaken this year due to the Covid restrictions.

During the year we have fielded complaints and have sort to resolve issues around a wide range of lagoon-related issues: children and adults feeling intimidation by horses, horse dung on causeways, dogs off leach including one dog attack, dog excrement, wasps, an invasion of sheep, and a fisherman in Post Office Creek/Waipaku. This has not always been successful – DCC signage warning about fines for leaving dog poo were removed and have not been replaced.

Vandalism is a continuing issue. Signs have been broken off and thrown into waterways repeatedly, pest traps interfered with, brochures thrown into the lagoon, and tyre spins repeated at the Inverary Street reserve. This has involved communicating with governance organisations and police.

We were excited by the presentation of a proposal to the committee to develop a paper road to provide a pathway access from Dumbarton Street onto the reserve. Our support has been given.

The issue of the on-going challenge of obtaining funding for larger projects was presented at the ORC Ten-year Plan review. Along with related submissions this has resulted in a structural change in the organisation and having a liaison officer assigned to us.

Weed management at the reserve is a major and on-going concern. This has been exacerbated by the DOC requirements of certification for the use of mechanical weed clearing and herbicide use or restriction to using hand tools and dab-on herbicides. Of particular concern is run-away species like gorse and blackberry especially on the 'old pine plantation' area, newly fenced area on Edinburgh Street, area adjacent to Dumbarton Street, and the grasses choking our plantings. This is a significant concern the committee will need to take into the year ahead.