**Local Environmental Planner dispels Fairy Tern myths**

There was no evidence that activity by people or population growth have been major threats to the survival of the Fairy Tern, according to local planner Dr Phil McDermott, who is also a former Professor of Resource and Environmental Planning at Massey University.

Dr McDermott, who has released a review of the history of the New Zealand Fairy Tern, has a background in research and analysis and has had a career as a development planning consultant.

His report endorses initiatives to protect Fairy Tern nesting areas on Mangawhai Spit, to manage the birds over the summer breeding season by DOC and efforts over the past 30 years by volunteers like the NZ Fairy Tern Trust.

“But I find no evidence that activity by people and population growth has been a major threat to their survival, largely because of the use of wardens. Also there has been no negative effect from perceived threats like Tara Iti Golf Course, increasing harbour use, or mangrove removal.

Dr McDermott says that year-to-year variations in breeding success and an apparent ceiling of around 40 birds over the past decade still leave Tara Iti (Fairy Tern) at risk of extinction. Despite the best efforts of DOC and volunteers, the flock remains well below the 250 birds required for a viable population.

Dr McDermott’s findings emphasise three serious long-term threats: the likely impacts of climate change on the spit; the loss of harbour water area, channels, and productivity from the spread of mangroves; and fertility issues in the flock itself.

The report suggests three long-term initiatives: wider catchment management, relocation of some breeding pairs to new nesting sites, and boosting genetic diversity through selective culling of infertile males and possibly introducing eggs from the counterpart Australian flocks.

Unknown to Dr McDermott until recently, DOC has been considering long-term options since 2017, in association with a PhD candidate from University College London. Their progress report in October 2021 focuses more on the population dynamics of the flock and on nesting behaviour.

Dr McDermott sees this as a more measured approach, but sees the two initiatives are complementary, the one dealing with the biology and management of the bird, and his own addressing the growing threats in the wider environment.

He also highlights the urgency of the issue and suggests an approach sensitive to changes in the wider environment. Both, he believes, raise matters worth wider public dissemination and discussion.

Dr McDermott is a committee member of Mangawhai Matters Society Inc and has taken a major role in the Society’s action against the Mangawhai Central plan at the Environment Court that led to reduced housing density and other more favourable provisions in the planned subdivision. This study by Dr McDermott on the Fairy Tern has been as a private individual, rather than sponsored by the Society.

His report can be downloaded here.