

Lianne Dalziel, Mayor of Christchurch, NATURAL ENVIRONMENT RECOVERY
PROGRAMME LAUNCH, TRAVIS WETLANDS, 26th November 2013, 2pm

My former colleagues Ruth Dyson and Mojo Mothers, Commissioners Rex Williams and Peter Skelton, Dame Margaret Bazley, Kelvin Coe Mayor of Selwyn, David Ayers Mayor of Waimakariri District and Roger Sutton CERA. My fellow Councillors Phil Clearwater, Paul Lonsdale, David East and Andrew Turner.

(Neill O'Reilly, principal of Windsor School and Te Marino Lenihan, Te Ngai Tuahuriri Runanga, Te Runanga o Ngai Tahu, Aroha Reriti-Crofts Ngai Tuahuriri).

I feel a real sense of privilege in being invited to speak at this launch here at Travis Wetlands, where I am the Patron.

We have just celebrated the 21st Anniversary of the establishment of the Trust that turned the Travis Swamp as it was known into a potential natural anchor project for the generation of the east.

I mention the Trust because it was the work of volunteers from the community working with passionate people in the Council that made this place happen. These are not bureaucrats, they are enablers and bringing the children here speaks to the future and the need to engage them in environmental projects from the start. It is all about partnership.

The earthquakes have changes our landscape – tilting of the estuary up half a metre to the south and down .2 to .3 of a metre to the north near the mouth of the Avon. There is lateral and settling of land close to the rivers. Heave and elevation of river and stream beds and the narrowing of waterways – up to 6m on the Avon.

There are direct impacts in terms of surface flooding and challenges to stormwater and sewerage networks. Overflows have increased. We have an extensive programme of research into stormwater management to address flooding and improve the quality of discharges.

Large areas of the city have had far less attention to weeds and pests with impacts on our native plants and animal communities. We have lost spawning sites. Recreational opportunities have been restricted on the Port Hills due to heightened safety concerns and pollution is restricting access to our rivers. Demolitions continue to produce enormous quantities of solid waste.

The Natural Environment Recovery Programme focuses on restoring and enhancing the city's ecosystems. The main focus which is near and dear to my heart is on the waterways – the rivers, wetlands and estuary.

Although the government is deferring any decisions on what they have described as the residential red zone, everyone can see that there is an opportunity for environmental enhancement that is seldom if ever available to an established city.

People are already imagining what this could mean – public access, cycle routes and walkways from city to sea, community gardens, urban forests, Mahinga Kai projects, recreational opportunities.

I spoke a few weeks ago about what this could mean for the city.

Think about having the largest natural wetlands within a city boundary based on Travis and stretching through the red zones. Think of the eco-tourism potential that could provide, as well as the potential for learning experiences for children, with interpretation centres explaining the history of the wetlands, its native plants and the birdlife it already attracts.

Think about a lake that has the advantage of utilising our excess water from a river that would regularly flood our streets without the new stop-banks. Think about creating a place where various venues would flourish around such a lake and where residential properties would be sought after – as our wetlands' perimeter properties were before the earthquake.

Surround the lake with a running and cycling track and think of the marathon opportunities.

All of these opportunities would not exist but for the disaster of the past three years.

The NERP gives us a considered and ordered pathway to an incredibly exciting future.