

# Report on the Hahei Great Walks meeting

By Stephan Bosman

More than 160 people attended on Saturday last week the long-awaited public meeting in Hahei about the first stage of Thames Coromandel District Council's Great Walks project and the traffic, primarily parking, issues Hahei experiences during summer and other peak holiday times.

Since the idea of a Cathedral Coast Walk, the first stage of the Great Walks, was first mooted, there was unease among the Hahei residents and ratepayers about the proposal. Presented to them were, in essence, two walks - from the Te Pupuha Blowhole south of Hahei to Hahei village and from Cathedral Cove along Lees Road to the Stella Evered reserve on the Purangi Estuary. Also presented to them were a pay and display car park at Pa Road at the entrance to Hahei and a pay and display car park on Lees Road.

In February this year the joint Hahei Ratepayers Association and Great Walks Stakeholders Group publicly urged TCDC not to proceed with the Cathedral Coast Walk until Hahei's infrastructure issues have been resolved and also stated that a "great walk" can never be along Lees Road. They also urged TCDC to explore a walk around the coast.

Leading up to last Saturday's meeting, TCDC often stated that Whitianga will be the centre of a series of great walks in Mercury Bay, ideally from Hot Water Beach in the south to Kuaotunu in the north. The Hahei community received these statements with scepticism as TCDC seemingly didn't have a plan to cross the Purangi River.

Also, earlier this year TCDC commissioned an independent traffic report from consultants MWH, asking them to propose solutions for

the traffic problems experienced in the whole of the Cooks Beach, Hahei and Hot Water Beach areas during peak times. The report basically recommended more data to be obtained before final solutions can be agreed upon, but seemed to favour from the outset a Pa Road carpark with a shuttle service to the Cathedral Cove carpark at the top of Grange Road and a Lees Road carpark as a solution to Hahei's problems.

Saturday's meeting was addressed by TCDC Mayor Glenn Leach, Mercury Bay Community Board Chairman Paul Kelly, Ngati Hei representative Peter Matai Johnston and Gemma White, local manager of the Department of Conservation.

From what the speakers had to say, it was clear that TCDC sees the pay and display carparks as a way to attract funding to not only maintain the Cathedral Coast Walk, but also to upgrade the Hahei infrastructure. A division of responsibility was also clearly spelled out - Council is to take responsibility for the Lees Road carpark and use that income for the Cathedral Coast Walk and the Community Board, under the TCDC community empowerment model, will have access to the Pa Road carpark income to upgrade all of Hahei's infrastructure, including footpaths.

It was announced at the meeting that TCDC has in principle come to an arrangement with the owner of the land earmarked for a carpark on Lees Road to be allowed to construct a carpark for public use on the land. It was also announced that plans are afoot to build a walkway around the Purangi Estuary with a crossing of the Purangi River at its narrowest point.

All of the speakers assured the audience that the governance group of the Cathedral Coast



TCDC Mayor Glenn Leach addressing the Hahei Great Walks meeting last week Saturday.

Walk, the group with formal responsibility to develop the walk and at the moment made up of representatives of TCDC, Ngati Hei and DOC, will not merely impose its will on the people of Hahei and will work with the community to address concerns and find solutions for problems.

During question time, the Lees Road residents raised a number of concerns about increased traffic on the road and it was also asked why the Hahei residents have no representation on the governance group and why Waikato Regional Council has no involvement in the development of the walk. The comment was made that Cathedral Cove attracts far more people in a

year than the Velodrome outside Cambridge ever will, so some WRC funding should be channelled towards the walk.

I left the meeting thinking that some misunderstandings were cleared up. And I left the meeting genuinely hoping that the governance group will keep to the fullest extent possible to their public undertaking to involve the Hahei community in the finding of solutions, irrespective how trivial the problems may seem.

And then I thought, really, the Hahei community should have formal representation on the governance group. And now I'm waiting for someone to tell me that they disagree.

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at Taylors Mistake after the parade ... Come join the fun!!!!

MERCURY BAY EVENTS