

New era for Tuhoe

A GLOBALLY-significant document for Te Urewera signals a change in conservation attitudes and a new era for Tuhoe.

Te Kawa o Te Urewera will guide the management of the former national park, which was returned to Tuhoe from the Department of Conservation (DoC) as part of its Treaty settlement.

The precedent-setting Te Kawa was approved this month after consultation and submissions from the community and stakeholders.

The 2127-square-kilometre stretch of land, which includes Lake Waikaremoana, Te Urewera was also granted the legal rights of a person under Te Urewera Act 2014, a move regarded internationally as "legally revolutionary".

Te Urewera Board chairman Tamati Kruger said, "Te Kawa involves a completely different way of looking at the land which speaks for and represents Te Urewera.

"Te Urewera is a person and we should treat it as such. It is not a property or an asset."

Te Urewera Act has received international praise and recognition and was cited in India this year when the Ganges River was made a legal person.

Developed over the past two years, Te Kawa sets out the principles that will guide annual priorities and operational management plans under Te Urewera Act, as well as decisions by the board about activities within Te Urewera.

Day-to-day management of Te Urewera is shared between Tuhoe and DoC.

Mr Kruger and Tuhoe Te Uru Taumatua chief executive Kirsti Luke were invited by Waikaremoana Boating and Fishing Association to present the document in a public talk at Gisborne Tatapouri Sports Fishing Club last week.

"The fact Tuhoe has been separated from Te Urewera for some 70 years has caused some hurt and injury," Mr Kruger said.

"But overall Tuhoe wants to move on and do as much work as possible with other people to bring Te Urewera as a place of joy to a whole lot of people, from overseas, around New Zealand and locally."

The process will involve completely dismantling the DoC system of managing the park.

"With DoC there was one rule that prevailed — to manage the land so people would enjoy it," Mr Kruger said.

"Te Kawa says we need to manage people.

It is people causing the problems on the land. People need nature but nature does not necessarily need people.

"Our expectations of the land need to change. We need to take on more responsibility for it, ourselves, as families and as visitors."

About 16 different recreational stakeholders including hunting, fishing, tramping and mountain clubs were involved in the document development.

"It has been a lot of work," Ms Luke said. "But we know you all have a strong connection to Te Urewera and love doing the same things in Te Urewera we do.

"If we all love Te Urewera we can all play a role in looking after it forever. That is what Te Kawa is all about."

Ms Luke said they wanted Te Kawa to be specific to Te Urewera and not be a "top-down approach".

"The Government is not necessarily the best conservationist. Families, communities, those who love and have respect for Te Urewera, are equally good stewards for the environment."

Mr Kruger said there was no intention at present to change any access or activities in Te Urewera.

"It continues as people have regarded and known it. If there are changes that need to be done urgently, because we sense it is bad for the land, the board can arrange that.

"But radical changes will not be possible without thorough investigation of how it serves the purpose of the Act."

The question of pest eradication and whether or not it would involve 1080 also came up.

"We believe conservation should really be around people management for the benefit of the land," Mr Kruger said.

"Some Tuhoe are quite fond of 1080 as a quick fix while others are more cautious.

"The focus is on ground trapping and utilising the innovative solutions around that."

There were no plans for commercialisation, and there were plans to have wilderness areas "as pristine as possible".

The board were investigating installing the country's first "green road", using wood sap instead of bitumen — a waste product of the petroleum industry.

"It seems contradictory to have bitumen in an area as pristine as Te Urewera," Mr Kruger said.

"Not only will we have most beautiful lake on our doorstep, but the greenest road."