

Old weir had outstayed its welcome



Environment
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The demolition of an old concrete weir this week means eels and other native fish can swim freely up a South Taranaki stream for the first time in 120 years.

There have been 20 years of debate about the Glenn Rd weir, in the Kaupokonui Stream, five kilometres from the coast, which was first identified as a fish barrier in 2001.

Taranaki Regional Council (TRC) director of operations Dan Harrison said the demolition was the region's biggest single intervention ever in terms of making a difference to native fish, including some that were endangered.

"Imagine a net around a beautiful patch of pristine bush to prevent tūi and kererū from getting in," he said.

"It demonstrates the effect the weir has had on New Zealand's native fish species."

"There are barriers like this all around Taranaki and all around New Zealand."

The first weir on the Kaupokonui River, near Glenn Rd, was built in 1900, and replaced with the current one in 1941. It was used to divert water to generate electricity for the Kaupokonui dairy factory until the early 1960s.

A karakia was held on the river bank on Wednesday morning before a digger moved in.

"This is a momentous day," Bart Jansma, environmental policy adviser for Te Korowai O Ngāruahine Trust, which has led the removal process, said.

"To think of all the species that haven't been up there for over 100 years and are able to go



Te Korowai O Ngāruahine Trust representatives are jubilant at achieving the removal of the disused concrete weir in the Kaupokonui Stream. From left Dion Luke, John Kahu, Kawarau Ngaia and Bart Jansma.

abundance and richness of fish. Jansma said he started working on the weir issue from 2004 while employed by the TRC, then latterly in his current role, after the trust took up the project.

Heritage New Zealand (HNZ) had initially opposed the weir removal and in 2009 initiated the process to register the Kaupokonui dairy factory complex, including the weir, as a Category 1 Historic Place, which it completed in 2019.

Efforts were made in 2011 to find a way to allow fish passage while having regard to the weir's historical value, by a group com-

prising representatives from hapū, HNZ, TRC, South Taranaki District Council (STDC), Department of Conservation, and Fish and Game, but this reached an impasse that remained for many years.

Building an effective fish pass would have been very expensive and technically difficult, Jansma said.

Funding of \$25,000 to remove the weir was contributed by the trust, the STDC, Fish and Game Taranaki and the TRC. This time, Heritage New Zealand did not oppose the move, and its staff had made a 3-D scan of the weir, so it

was recorded for the future. Marie Dwyer, of Alton, was at the karakia to farewell the weir, which was built by her grandfather, Alois Butler, of Inglewood.

"It's done its time," she said. "Times have changed. We are lucky we are able to be here and witness it."

Also attending the farewell was Boyce Luke, who said he remembered swimming down the river to the dam from the farm where he lived as a child.

"This used to be like our supermarket," Luke said. "At different times of year we would catch the eels down



Marie Dwyer, whose grandfather built the weir, and Boyce Luke, who grew up fishing there, were both present.

CATHERINE GROENESTEIN/STUFF



A digger moves in to demolish the weir.

ANDY JACKSON/STUFF