



## Political careers post Lincoln University

*The highly political nature of many subjects taught in Lincoln University's Department of Environmental Management courses is reflected in subsequent career choices made by the following two alumni – Nicky Snoyink and Nicole Reid. Nicky and Nicole, both of whom achieved post-graduate degrees (the former in environmental policy and the latter in applied science) have subsequently gone on to pursue political careers. In light of an increased interest in politics around the 2017 general election and in policies related to the sustainability of our communities (along with an increase in younger candidates standing for election), Jean Drage talked with these two Lincoln graduates about the links between their time at Lincoln university and their subsequent decision to move into a political representative role.*

### Nicky SNOYINK



Nicky Snoyink has worked in nature and cultural tourism both in New Zealand and overseas. Her interest in and commitment to the values within our culture and our environment

over the last 20 years has meant a move into a political career was a natural step. Nicky stood for an elected councillor position on Environment Canterbury's council in 2016, getting a very respectable 9,284 votes in the Selwyn district – less than 2,000 votes behind the successful candidate. In the 2017 general election Nicky stood in the Selwyn electorate for the Opportunities Party, a new political party set up in 2016 that had a strong policy platform particularly around the environment and climate change.

Nicky initially studied at Lincoln in the 1980s when she did a Diploma in Parks and Recreation. She came back to do a Masters in

Environmental Policy in 2014 /2015 after watching the increasing impact of development on the environment and closely observing the consents process for the Central Plains Water Scheme (see LPR 7 (1-2), 2015, pp 16-22). Through this process she saw the effect that ordinary community member participation can have on a decision when the potential social impact of a project is presented, an impact which could not have been or was not addressed by the applicant. She also found that planners were not necessarily planning in the broad public interest and saw that she needed to participate to be able to have a say. But first she wanted to know how the political and legal system worked, how decision-makers came to their conclusions and how to influence this process. One paper she found particularly useful was Hamish Rennie's RMA law paper (LWST602) which explained the two interpretations used by the courts - overall broad judgement versus environmental bottom lines. The King Salmon decision regarding aquaculture in the Marlborough Sounds was a defining example of the use of these interpretations.<sup>1</sup>

Her political career came next and was sparked by the timing of the first democratic

final decision. This Supreme Court decision is a departure from the approach used in previous court decisions and uses the 'avoid' part of the RMA to protect the natural environment from inappropriate development.

<sup>1</sup> *Environmental Defence Society v King Salmon [2014] NZSC 38 [75]* This Supreme Court decision interprets Part 2 of the RMA using implicit environmental bottom lines rather than weighing up the costs and benefits of an application using the overall broad judgement approach, to reach a

election for seats on the ECAN council in 2016<sup>2</sup>, a step she believes she would never have taken without the knowledge and confidence gained through the research she undertook at Lincoln University, especially that related to the Central Plains Water Scheme and Indigenous Biodiversity which ties in closely to her work in nature and cultural tourism. Her goal in standing for the ECAN council was to ensure a stronger voice for the protection of indigenous biodiversity and a broader ecological systems approach. She believes that participation is the key and voting is just a small part of this. Sadly whilst the RMA provides for this, the processes have become intimidating for many. Hence, the defenders of the environment are now mainly NGOs, such as the Environment Protection Society, Forest and Bird and Fish and Game.

## Nicole REID



*'If you want to be part of the debate Nicole you need to be sitting at this table'*

These words were the catalyst for Nicole to put her name forward for a seat on the

Selwyn District Council in 2016 in an election that saw her elected as the second highest polling candidate in the Selwyn Central ward. But it was at Lincoln University, while doing a Masters in Applied Science, where Nicole was first challenged to be involved in her community and speak out on issues that concerned her.

Lincoln was a natural fit for Nicole who has a long term interest in the environment. At high school she had been encouraged to think about engineering as an alternative to science so studied at Auckland University for a chemical engineering degree. After work with

New Zealand Dairy Group, the Auckland Regional Council and an environmental consultancy firm in Christchurch, she came to post-grad study at Lincoln to strengthen her environmental management and planning skills. This she did under a Masters in Applied Science as the thesis in this degree worked in better with the demands of also raising three children. The information gained and the debate generated through the ERST 604 paper (Advanced Urban, Regional and Resource Planning) provided her with knowledge of government and political process as well as the confidence to have a say.

Nicole's initial involvement in community politics began with the Rolleston Residents Association whom she approached for support for a Kea Crossing<sup>3</sup> on Rolleston Drive with a friend to provide a safe route for their children to walk to school. After joining the residents association she was elected chair after a year. She subsequently made several submissions to Selwyn District Council on various things such as annual plan but soon realised, after she tried to interrupt council debate, that rather than submitting for the rest of her life, she would be better to be 'at the table'.

One year on, Nicole acknowledges that it is good to be there although she is really busy. The long term planning is in the process with some big projects to be considered (town centre master plan implementation, library/community centre, pool extension, etc.). The significant rate of growth in the Selwyn district as a result of population shifts since the Canterbury earthquakes has seen this local authority move from a rural base to being more urban (in 7 years, the population in Rolleston has doubled) and this has created its own challenges particularly around the need for new infrastructure.

Nicole is particularly interested in the worldwide movement on place making (making places where people will socialise which in turn builds communities) and active transport options so that we have happy and healthy communities. She chairs the Selwyn

<sup>2</sup> This first democratic election (since central government sacked the elected council in 2010 and replaced it with appointed commissioners) was for 7 of the 13 Environment Canterbury council seats.

<sup>3</sup> Kea Crossings enable school children to safely cross busy roads at peak traffic times, particularly in the morning. While councils establish these crossings, they are run by local residents.

District Road Safety Committee and is on the Public Arts Committee and has recently been appointed to the Regional Water Committee representing both the Selwyn and Ashburton District Councils. She is also an associate member of the New Zealand Planning Institute. As a scientist, Nicole's challenge is the knowledge she has gained that not everyone thinks the same way and her need to balance the 'why' behind issues with her governance role.