



## Department of Environmental Management Staff Profiles

Compiled by Jocelyn HENDERSON

*Master of Environmental Policy and Management Student, Lincoln University, Christchurch, New Zealand*



### STEVE URLICH

Steve Ulrich teaches Environmental Management at Lincoln University. It's his second stint at Lincoln, having completed a Bachelor of Resource Studies (now a Bachelor of Environmental Management) and a PhD in Forest Ecology at Lincoln in the 1990s.

Since he was awarded his doctorate, Steve has had a varied career, working in regulatory, community-facing, and scientific and technical roles for different organisations including the Department of Conservation, Land Information New Zealand, Marlborough District Council, and the Foundation for Research, Science and Technology.

Steve credits his training at Lincoln for his interdisciplinary and holistic approach, which has enabled him to come up with innovative solutions like introducing elements of environmental history into management decisions. Providing historical context for decision-makers by, for example, looking back at the history of native forest in the Wellington region, or at historic ecosystem changes in the Marlborough Sounds, helps them understand how environmental issues have arisen. This approach also helps communities to recognise

and address the issue of shifting baselines in environmental management – where people's perceptions of the environment and what is "natural" or "degraded" is out of kilter with actual changes.

Currently, Steve has a few irons in the fire which he thinks may interest prospective Master's or PhD students. He is co-leading a Sustainable Seas project as part of the National Science Challenge, examining legislation, policy and practice in the marine environment to improve the state of the ocean.

When asked what he thinks about the planning profession today, Steve answered that planners are faced with a messy, dynamic and complex (but exciting) regulatory and social environment which poses a heap of demanding personal and professional challenges. These challenges include the proposed changes to the resource management system; reform of the biodiversity, fisheries, and freshwater management policy frameworks; urban development and highly productive soils; and a raft of national environmental standards. Cutting across all of these are the effects of climate change. Steve thinks that planners have an important role to play in helping communities pragmatically meet these challenges, saying that planners now have to be as resilient as the built and natural ecosystems that they manage. He says: "We have to be on top of our game as educators and researchers so, with a cooperative and humble approach, recognising that we are all in this together, we can help equip our planners to make the courageous, well-informed, and necessary policies and regulations."