



## **Te Waihora/ Lake Ellesmere Integrated Catchment Symposium – *Living Lake, Changing Catchment: 2011***

### **Kelly Fisher**

On the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of November the Waihora Ellesmere Trust (WET) hosted the third biannual Living Lake Symposium at Lincoln University. It was noted that this year was to be the largest symposium yet with people from a broad range of backgrounds attending. Interest in Te Waihora/Lake Ellesmere is thought to be at an all time high and it was great to see students, academics, researchers, scientists, policy makers, consultants, iwi, council staff, community groups, and industry representatives coming together with a common interest. The Living Lake symposium was an excellent opportunity to learn about what is, can, and will be done to better understand and hopefully improve the overall condition of Te Waihora/Lake Ellesmere.

Each day of the symposium had a slightly different focus. The first day was chaired by Waterways Director Jenny Webster-Brown and was filled with a series of presentations that considered the biophysical, cultural, social, and economic aspects of the Lake. The morning session presentations included topics such as land use changes, fish recruitment and habitat, catchment hydrology, water quality trends, flow variability, monitoring, and lake restoration initiatives. Jenny Webster-Brown then gave a brief overview of related research carried out by students from both Canterbury and Lincoln Universities. From a student's perspective it was very interesting to see what research has been undertaken in relation to the Lake.

In the afternoon session NIWA had three representatives give an update of their work in the catchment. This was followed by Fonterra's Todd Muller who had the tough end of day slot, as well as a potentially even tougher crowd. It was never going to be easy for a dairy industry representative to speak at this conference and he did well to convince attendees that while Fonterra accept some criticism for water quality degradation, the company is focused on improving effluent management and have implemented programmes to help improve on farm practices across the country.

In terms of area covered Te Waihora is New Zealand's fourth largest lake and it is common knowledge that it is highly enriched and polluted. With a 12 million dollar cash injection promised earlier this year to help clean up the lake, speakers at the conference were of the opinion that money is not sufficient in itself to solve the lake's complex issues. In addition to funding the complexity of the problems requires solutions based on sound science and modelling, policy making and planning which is based on scientific findings and models, and monitoring that reviews changes in the system as a result of action. There is also the need to recognise a variety of different values and perspectives as well as to integrate social,

cultural, economic, and environmental concerns. The current condition of the lake signifies that there is still a long way to go until we can claim to have this balance right.

Adopting a catchment approach to lake restoration, science and research, and planning and policy making came through as a common theme of the symposium. The interconnectedness of water quality to the rest of the environment means that land use in the catchment is recognised as being extremely important to the overall state of the lake. Industry intensification, increased urbanisation, and land use changes in the Te Waihora/Lake Ellesmere catchment have all been significant in recent decades and planning and restoration initiatives should not be limited to focusing on the lake's margins. Research and scientific investigation that leads to a better understanding of the activities and processes occurring within the catchment are required if restoration projects are to be successful. Monitoring should be used to indicate whether action on the ground is actually working and communication between stakeholders will help to ensure this information is shared and is as beneficial to as many people as possible.

The second day of the symposium was chaired by Environment Canterbury Commissioner David Caygill. The focus shifted from the lake's condition and the social, cultural, economic, and environmental aspects of the lake, to the issue of governance. David Hamilton, Bay of Plenty Regional Council Chair in lake restoration, was the keynote speaker and he opened the session with an interesting presentation on his experience with lake restoration in the North Island. The future management of Te Waihora/Lake Ellesmere will be greatly affected by the Canterbury Water Management Strategy (CWMS). This is a non-statutory document of great significance to water management in Canterbury and Peter Skelton, Environment Canterbury Commissioner, explained that while the CWMS is a non-statutory instrument it is to be given weight by decision makers under existing legislation. The amendments to the Water Conservation Order were also discussed and Craig Pauling of Ngai Tahu shared that there is a belief within Ngai Tahu that the recent amendments to the opening regime are a step in the right direction.

The afternoon session was open to the public and presented an opportunity for those interested to hear about and share ideas on the recently released Selwyn-Waihora Zone Committee's draft Zone Implementation Plan (ZIP). The third Living Lake symposium concluded on Saturday the 19<sup>th</sup> of November with a fieldtrip to the lake and to part of its catchment. Overall the symposium was very enjoyable and informative. Information boards, a tank with live eels, and a wide selection of food and drinks added to the experience. Not only was the symposium a great chance to learn about efforts to restore the lake's water quality and habitat, it was also a fantastic opportunity to network and meet new people who are also interested in the condition of the lake and its catchment.

Power point presentations from the symposium are available from the Waihora Ellesmere Trust website at: <http://www.wet.org.nz/events/living-lake-symposium-2011/>