

# Thundercats

Despite local opposition, WCC and ARC look set to approve the return of the Thundercats at Piha next summer.

Some welcome the spectacle of the high speed inflatable racing boats, saying it is fun to watch. Mayor Bob Harvey stated to TVOne last year that "It's a roaring raging coast and it's wild and this sport just fits in...not every week but it's come and I'm pleased it's here."

But others are less impressed and question if such a gratuitous motorised sport for die-hard petrolheads still has a place in today's world that has the environment, climate change and energy conservation at the top of its agenda.

At the 2008 Annual General Meeting of the Piha R&R Assn. concern was voiced over the vehicle traffic on the beach, the safety and associated pressure on local volunteer services such as First Response and Surf Lifesaving, who had to deal with injuries on and off the water, and the wider impact on the environment. A resolution was passed opposing the event.

The Thundercats racing event requires twofold consent. From WCC for use of the beach and coastal reserve, and from the ARC Harbourmaster for use of the water.

In July this year Waitakere City won 'Milestone 4' award from the Minister for the Environment, the Hon. Trevor Mallard, for reducing the effects of climate change. "Implementing actions, such as reducing waste, using energy efficient products and encouraging alternative forms of transport, not only reduce greenhouse gas emissions but they significantly improve the quality of life for the community," said ICLEI Oceania Chief Executive, Wayne Wescott in the WCC press release. "Waitakere has truly embraced the principle of 'Think global, act local' and is demonstrating that they can make a tangible difference in the area of climate change."

How can WCC possibly reconcile Thundercat racing with these noble objectives, in what is now the

Waitakere Ranges Heritage Area?

According to a recent NZ Herald article, New Zealand and Australia are the only developed countries still allowing imports of carburated and fuel injection two-stroke motors. In a presentation at the Viaduct Harbour Gary Fooks, an emissions researcher and senior lecturer at Brisbane University, informed Transport Minister Judith Tizard that the residual pollutants from two-stroke engines would leave in New Zealand waters an amount similar to a spill from a small oil tanker. Thundercat boats typically use high emission two-stroke carburated or fuel injection engines, polluting both water and air.

In the annual Environmental Awareness Survey, conducted by the ARC in August this year, more than two thirds of Aucklanders were found to be 'concerned' or 'very concerned' about the environment in the region. When asked to rate their level of concern from a list of specific environmental issues, 87 per cent said they were 'concerned' or 'very concerned' about water pollution of our beaches, harbours and streams.

In an earlier press release the ARC also expressed concern about the use of vehicles on beaches, following a death at Muriwai. "Beach users have a legitimate expectation that they will be able to visit a quiet natural environment and enjoy some of the more passive and low key attributes of those open spaces", said ARC representative, Councillor Christine Rose. She added that "Local residents and communities are also adversely affected by the noise, pollution and disruption caused by large numbers of motorised vehicles".



PHOTOGRAPH: SANDRA CONEY

In September last year the ARC amended the Management Plan for the Waitakere Ranges Parkland. One new aspect of the plan is to place limits on large-scale organised sporting activities at six specific locations which are particularly wfrom visitors - Anawhata, Pararaha, Glen Esk, North Piha, Whatipu and Karekare.. "The people of Auckland primarily visit the Ranges for the peace and quiet afforded by the natural qualities of the park, and an escape from the pressures of urban life. The Plan gives priority to protection of this experience, while catering for other compatible activities," said Cr Sandra Coney, Chair of the ARC Parks and Heritage Committee, who is opposed to a consent for the Thundercats.


Meanwhile, Waitakere City Council says it is already working towards achieving Milestone 5, which involves taking an inventory of the greenhouse gas emissions from its own activities and the community as a whole.

If our Councils want to give any credibility to their plans and milestones and expect public buy-in, they must practise what they preach. An obvious next step in "Thinking global acting local" would be to ban the Thundercats from our Waitakere Ranges Heritage Area forever.

Monique Olivier



Containers of fuel on the beach ready for burn-off PHOTOGRAPH: SANDRA CONEY



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