Developing effective partnerships between the Department of Conservation and community groups

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ABSTRACT

This report identifies the types of partnerships the New Zealand Department of Conservation (DOC) has with community groups; the key features of effective partnerships with community groups; and the key factors that must be considered when partnerships between DOC and community groups are developed. The research is based on seven case studies of partnerships using qualitative in-depth research methods. The role of communities and community partnerships in conservation is reviewed in order to help define the nature and characteristics of partnerships between DOC and community groups. The key lessons from the case studies in terms of the features of effective partnerships are discussed. The various roles and levels of involvement of DOC and DOC staff can influence the purpose, dynamics and success of partnerships. Sometimes DOC needs to take a lead in developing partnerships in order to involve a range of communities, and both DOC and the community groups need to be flexible and able to change as partnership projects develop.

Keywords: Community groups, partnerships, conservation, Conservation with Communities Strategy.

1. Introduction

This report outlines the findings from case studies of seven partnerships between the New Zealand Department of Conservation (DOC) and community groups. The purpose of this study is to identify:

- The types of partnerships DOC has with community groups
- The key features of effective community groups
- The key features of effective partnerships between DOC and community groups
- The factors that should be considered when new partnerships between DOC and community groups are developed
- Recommendations for the implementation of DOC's Conservation with Communities Strategy

The seven DOC-community partnerships selected included a mixture of urban and rural projects, large- and small-scale projects, projects initiated by the community, projects initiated by DOC, and formal and informal projects. The partnerships focus on a range of issues including species protection, pest control, recreation, education and awareness.

This research does not evaluate the conservation outcomes of the community partnerships but rather, aims to identify the key issues, features and factors that can influence the dynamics of effective partnerships and working relationships between DOC and community groups. Each project has been selected because the groups are achieving or are working to achieve specific conservation outcomes.

As well as identifying common themes across the partnerships, the research also highlights the differences that result from the wide variation in the nature and dynamics of the partnerships.

The case study community groups are (from north to south):

- Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi
- Project Kiwi
- Kaharoa Kokako Trust
- French Pass Environment Zone
- Hector for Hector's
- Weed Busters
- Tuatapere Hump Track Trust

2. Methods

The seven case studies use qualitative in-depth research methods. This methodology does not attempt to provide a comprehensive picture of the broad spectrum of partnership types DOC has with community groups. Instead, it aims to provide some insight into the key issues and dynamics surrounding a selection of partnerships between DOC and community groups.

The seven case studies were selected after discussions with DOC Head Office staff to identify the range of DOC and community partnerships. Discussions were then held with the DOC Area Office staff responsible for liaising with the seven community groups chosen in order to seek their support, collect further information and address any concerns associated with the research.

A one-page overview of the research was prepared (Appendix 1) and sent to the case study community groups by the Area Office representative. In four of the case studies, once the community group had agreed to be involved in the research, the researcher then contacted the group representative to discuss the research further and to identify who to interview. In three case studies, the Area Office representative continued to liaise directly with the community group, with the researcher having contact with the group only on the day of the interviews.

The research methods used were semi-structured interviews and focus groups. According to Dunn (2000: 52), semi-structured interviews:

> *Have some degree of predetermined order but still ensure flexibility in the way issues are addressed by the informant.*

In relation to focus group methodology:

> *Interaction between members of the group is a key characteristic of this research method, and it is that which helps differentiate it from the interview method, where interaction is between interviewer and interviewee. The group setting is generally characterised by dynamism and energy as people respond to the contributions of others (Cameron 2000: 84).*

Two interview schedules were prepared, one for DOC staff and the other for community groups, to help guide and shape the discussions (Appendix 2).

Qualitative research is a dynamic process, and each interview and focus group conducted was markedly different from the others. The questions in the interview schedule were not read out in a pre-determined order. Instead, the interviews and focus groups were as free-flowing as possible, with the questions helping to guide the process and acting as a checklist to ensure all the key issues were covered.

It was up to each community group research participant ('community participant') to decide whether they preferred to be interviewed in a group or individually. In two case studies the groups were interviewed together as a focus group, in three case studies members of the groups were interviewed individually, and for the final two, a combination of focus groups and individual interviews were used. The number of community participants interviewed for each case study ranged from two to ten, and two DOC staff members were interviewed for each case study. The choice of whether to be interviewed individually seemed to be made by individuals on the basis of convenience (they could be interviewed at the time and place of their choice). In some cases, people commented that they chose individual interviews because they wanted to be able to talk about the dynamics of the community group in confidence.

The researcher acted as facilitator for all of the focus groups and in some of the group discussions and individual interviews there was also a note-taker. In one case study, a focus group was held at the DOC Area Office; however, all other interviews and focus groups were held in people's homes or work places.

The material included in this report was selected by the researcher based on an assessment that it provides a picture of the key issues and significant themes as identified through the interviews and focus groups.

A draft report was sent to the community groups and DOC staff involved in this research for comment and feedback prior to publication.

3. Communities and partnerships

There are many definitions of the terms 'communities' and 'partnerships'. Before reviewing the key features of effective partnerships with communities, it is important to define how these terms will be used in the context of this report.

3.1 COMMUNITIES

The term 'community' can be applied to a range of different types and groups of people. For example, a community may be a group of people sharing similar interests, or residents of a particular area, or people of similar ethnicity, culture or age. The Chinese Conservation Education Trust (CCET) in Auckland, for example, is a community group based on a common ethnicity. The purpose of the Trust is to increase the Chinese community's understanding of, and involvement in, conservation. The definition of community outlined below (Forgie 2001: 6) is used in this research:

> *For conservation purposes a community can be defined as a number of people who have a goal and decide to work together to do something about it. While groups can contain mutual, overlapping and divergent interests and perspectives, the goal binds people together, giving them a common identity despite individual differences.*

This definition asserts that while people, individually, may have different perspectives, views and backgrounds, they can come together for a common goal and thus form a 'community'.

In the New Zealand context, the Landcare Trust movement is a well known example of rural communities working together on conservation or environmental protection issues. Landcare also focuses on efficient and sustainable production. According to Collins & Mulcock (1995: 2): 'Landcare is about people in the local community taking action together to prevent degradation of their environment and achieve sustainable and profitable resource use'.

The terms 'community' 'community involvement' and 'community participation' are frequently referred to in the literature on conservation and environmental management (Campbell 1994; Western & Wright 1994; Borrini-Feyerband 1996). There is much emphasis on promoting conservation initiatives that are 'bottom up' and are meaningful to local communities. The

phrase 'Community-Based Conservation' (CBC) is frequently mentioned in the literature (Western & Wright 1994). According to Little (1994: 350), CBC implies 'local-level, voluntary, people-centered, participatory, decentralised, village-based management'.

Similarly, Forgie et al. (2001: 6) use the term 'Community-Based Conservation Initiatives' (CBCI) to describe 'bottom-up (or grass root) activities that bring individuals and organisations together to work towards achieving desired environmental goals'. According to Forgie et al. (2001: 6):

> *The rationale behind CBCIs is that, by working together, people are able to achieve more than individuals or organisations working on their own, and involving those affected is likely to result in a better and more acceptable long-term solution.*

The term 'collaborative management' is also used in the literature to describe 'a situation in which some or all of the relevant stakeholders in a protected area are involved in a substantial way in management activities' (Borrini-Feyerband 1996: 12).

Much of this international literature on collaborative management and community-based conservation focuses on indigenous communities who live in and around national parks and other protected areas. The purpose of this study is to focus on the broader range of community groups working with DOC on conservation issues, both inside and outside protected areas. The broad focus of the study reinforces the direction of DOC's Conservation with Communities Strategy (Department of Conservation 2003a). This emphasises the importance of DOC developing partnerships with a range of communities to achieve conservation work. A key message of the strategy is that 'conservation needs community support':

> *To achieve conservation outcomes the department will need to be consistent with the government's commitment to creating genuine partnerships with community, voluntary and iwi / Maori organisations, where meaningful relationships are strong and respectful (Department of Conservation 2003a).*

As already mentioned, communities can be based on a range of factors including physical location and individuals' interests or demographics. Just as each community will have its on own distinct make-up, so will each community group. When the nature of any relationship between DOC and a community group is being considered, it is important to look at internal structure and nature of the group. Figure 1 provides a framework for identifying the features of groups which can be applied to the groups in this study.

Each group in this study is markedly different from the others and is situated at different places along the continuum. Groups predominantly at the left end of the continuum could be described as informal or small-scale. Those predominantly at the right end can be defined as more 'business-like' or corporate. However, community groups are dynamic and complex and may have a mix of characteristics. Groups can also move along the continuum over time or as projects progress. Across the community sector, for example, there has been an increasing shift towards professionalism of groups and an associated reliance on skilled volunteers or paid professionals. In part this can be attributed to the need to secure funding and fulfill the reporting requirements of funding providers (Wilson 2001).

Enthusiastic volunteers	←——————→	Paid professionals
Large community membership	←——————→	Small skilled executive
Ad hoc planning processes	←——————→	Strategic planning processes established
Informal arrangements with partners	←——————→	Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with partners
No legal structure	←——————→	Legal structure
No external funding	←——————→	Funding from external sources
Small-scale project	←——————→	Large-scale project

Informal   *Corporate*

Figure 1.   Community group continuum.

3.2   PARTNERSHIPS

According to Wilcox (1998) 'a partnership is an agreement between two or more individuals or groups to work together to achieve common aims'. Figure 2 identifies the different levels of community involvement in conservation and environmental management. This study is looking at 'partnerships', which sit at the top of the involvement spectrum.

Both Wilcox (1998) and Forgie (2001) have attempted to further define what 'partnership' involves. According to Wilcox (1998): 'it requires agreement about both means and ends, and entails sharing power, resources (including information), and responsibilities'. Similarly, Forgie (2001: 14) notes that partnerships are characterised by equality, joint decision-making and 'power delegated to community where feasible'. While these are some characteristics that can broadly be associated with partnerships, the present study shows clearly that the term 'partnership' can be employed to describe a multitude of relationship types.

Aside from the broad definition provided by Wilcox (1998) in the first paragraph of this section, no further attempt is made to characterise the term 'partnership'. Instead, Fig. 3 outlines a continuum that can be used to help frame and define the nature and characteristics of DOC and community group partnerships. At the left end of the continuum, DOC has a more active and dominant role, while at the right end the partnership is led by the community group which has increased commitment and accountability. Most partnerships tend to have characteristics at various points on the scales.

As Fig. 3 shows, many different factors work together to make up the dynamics and characteristics of a DOC and community group partnership. It is clear that partnership is a broad concept that can be used to describe the multiple ways that DOC and community groups can work together to achieve conservation outcomes.

Partnerships will also shift along the continuum at different stages of their development. For example, while a community group may have wanted to act by itself, it may have had to form a partnership with DOC because the subject of
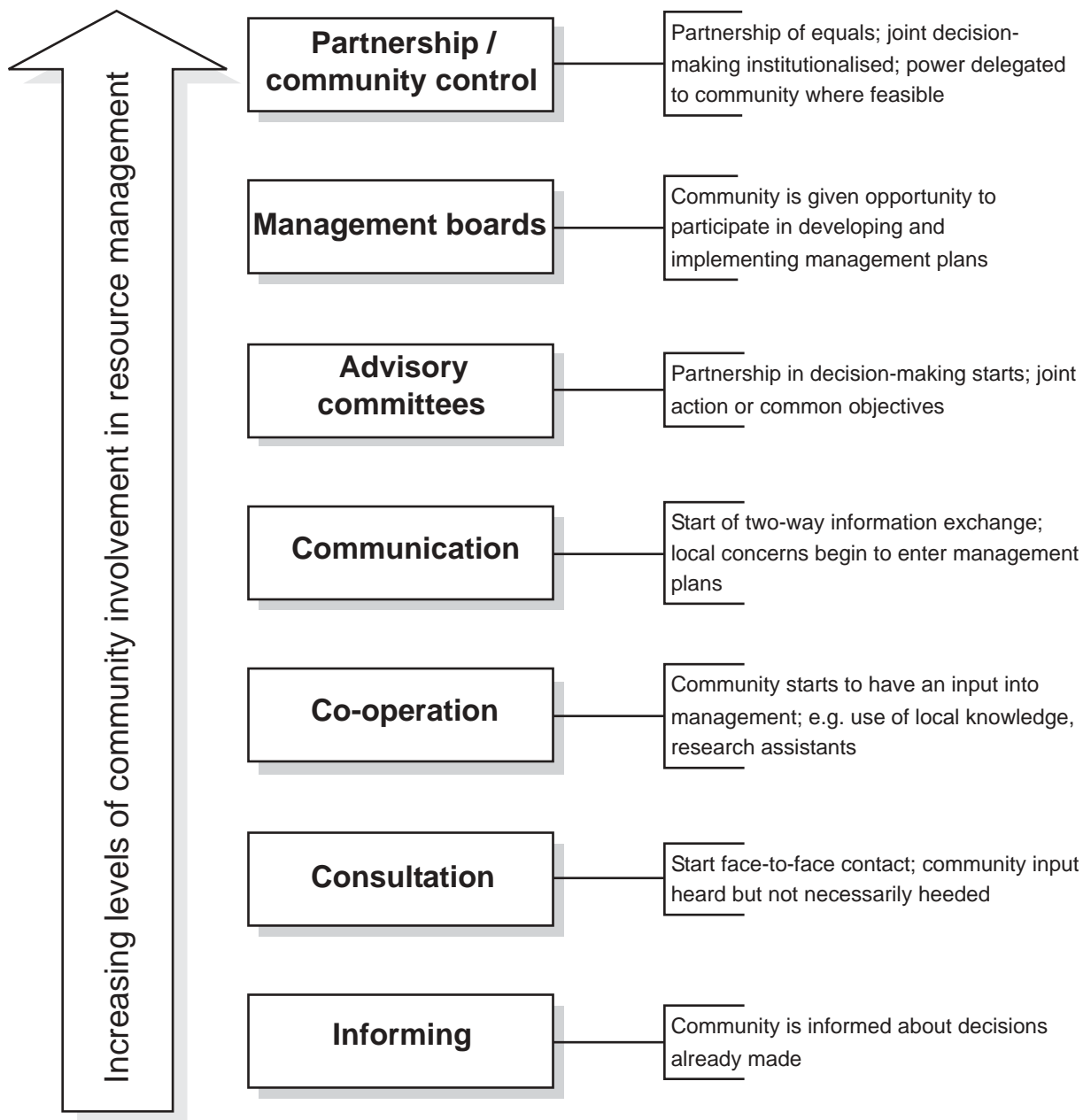
Figure 2. Progressive levels of community involvement in managing and protecting their local environment (adapted from Berkes et al. in Forgie et al. 2001, p. 14).

its attention is on DOC-managed land. In another case, DOC may have an extensive role in setting up a project, but may be 'hands off' once it is operating.

The Department of Conservation may also take number of roles within partnerships. For example, DOC's guidelines for community conservation partnerships—From Seed to Success (Department of Conservation 2003b: 31)—identifies the following range of roles that DOC staff may take on within a partnership with a community group:

• Initiator / leader / facilitator
• Conservation advocate
• Participant
• Facilitator from the back
• Technical advisor

DOC is a dominant member of the partnership and/or group	⟷	DOC is an advisor to the group
DOC takes control of direction and decision-making	⟷	Group has full control of direction and decision-making
DOC provides total funding to the group	⟷	Group is funded independently
DOC has initiated the project	⟷	Group has initiated the project
'Top down'	⟷	'Bottom up'
Project is a priority for the department	⟷	Project is a priority of the group
DOC has legal obligations	⟷	DOC does not have any legal obligations
Project solely on DOC-managed land	⟷	Project solely on private land
High level of commitment in time, resources and energy from DOC	⟷	High level of commitment in time, resources and energy from the group
DOC-dominant		*Community group-dominant*

Figure 3.   Department of Conservation and community group partnership continuum.

- Planner / policy writer
- On-the-ground operator
- Service / support provider
- Upholder of the Treaty of Waitangi partnership
- Enforcement agent / regulator

Partnership is, therefore, a dynamic process that will inevitably change over time with different levels of ownership and involvement by participants in relation to various activities.

4. Case studies

This section provides an overview of each case study (from north to south, Fig. 4). The community group and partnership continuums (Figs 1 and 3) provide the framework for considering the key features and dynamics for each case study.

4.1   SUPPORTERS OF TIRITIRI MATANGI

The Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi is a community group based on a community goal—to provide volunteer work and to raise money for the island's planting programme. As outlined in a letter from the then secretary of the Supporters to DOC (30/11/88): 'it is envisaged that the society would work in association with DOC, assisting in projects unable to be funded by DOC'.

Figure 4.   Locations of case studies.
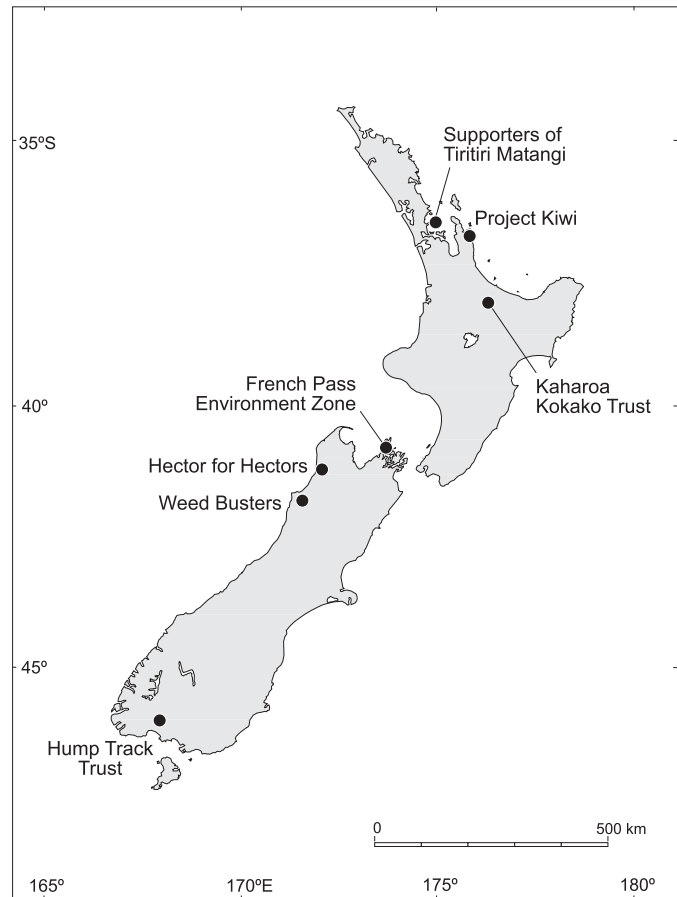
Tiritiri Matangi island forms part of the Hauraki Gulf Maritime Park. The island is managed and administered as an open sanctuary by DOC and is classified as a Scientific Reserve (Dooley 2002).

A programme of using volunteers to plant trees on Tiritiri Matangi had been in place since 1984 as the result of a proposal by Auckland University to develop the island as an open sanctuary and involve the public in its replanting. In 1988, with a reduction in funding for the island, a group of volunteers, encouraged by a DOC staff member on the island, initiated the Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi to ensure the work continued.

At the time of this study, the Supporters had 1500 members and is one of the largest conservation groups in New Zealand. According to the chairperson, the Supporters is 'really just a group of interested planters who wanted to raise money'. However, for 'just a group of [tree] planters' the Supporters has managed to generate a lot of financial support for the island. Planting on the island finished in 1990, and since then the money raised by the Supporters has gone into infrastructure, tracks and, more recently, research and education.

The three DOC staff members on the island and the Supporters work very closely together. One DOC staff member receives half their salary from DOC and half from the Supporters. This staff member, who is the only paid employee of the Supporters, is responsible for managing the shop on the island and coordinating the volunteers.

The current decision-making process is for the Supporters to talk with a DOC staff member on the island to identify priorities for funding and then seek this funding from external sources. Each year DOC will make suggestions of items

or services that the Supporters may take up as projects. While there is not a formal DOC representative on the committee, the same DOC staff member attends all Supporters' meetings and puts forward ideas and suggestions about what the island needs.

The relationship with DOC has evolved over the years and is based on interpersonal relationships with the staff on the island. The Supporters are now negotiating with DOC to sign off a memorandum of understanding (MOU) and a five-year-plan they have developed to ensure that the relationship is not solely based on the good working relationships between individuals. They also want to formalise regular meetings with DOC staff in the Area Office.

The Supporters also want to form a trust. The trust would operate the island and DOC would own it. According to the current chairperson of the Supporters:

> *The trust would be iwi, conservation board, and DOC. They would get the funds and the supporters would supply material and labour. The trust would take it away from being reliant on individuals in DOC and the incorporated society.*

The Supporters is moving along the partnership continuum (Fig. 3) towards a more formalised arrangement with DOC and has evolved from a very informal organisation to a professional business. The group has also taken on more responsibility for guiding visitors and research on the island. However, it is unlikely to move towards community ownership of the island and still identifies itself as a community group supporting DOC; for, as the chairperson points out:

> *We don't own land, we don't want to own land. Our name is 'support'—we want to support DOC.*

In addition, with the high level of success of the partnership and the now international profile of Tiritiri Matangi, DOC wants to keep its branding associated with the island.

4.2 PROJECT KIWI

Project Kiwi is 'the first private initiative to provide a kiwi-friendly environment for any species of kiwi over a large area' (Wildland Consultants 2001: 1). It is situated on the Kuaotunu Peninsula immediately northeast of Whitianga on the Coromandel Peninsula. The objective of Project Kiwi is to maintain a kiwi (*Apteryx* sp.) population on the Coromandel Peninsula by establishing a viable predator trapping regime.

Project Kiwi is a community-based organisation comprising people who live in a particular locality and who share an interest in kiwi conservation. The Project Kiwi committee consists of local landowners, farmers, business people and residents. The focus of the group is on enhancing kiwi breeding opportunities through intensive predator control on 4100 ha of public and private land on the Kuaotunu Peninsula. There are currently about 20 private properties in the Project Kiwi area, which also includes three areas administered by DOC.

Project Kiwi started in the mid 1990s as the Kuaotunu Kiwi Sanctuary Incorporated Society when a commitment was made by a group of local people to protect kiwi. The Project Kiwi initiative was the first community-initiated

kiwi programme set up and maintained by funding from a range of sources. Since 1997, Project Kiwi has obtained funding from donations, membership fees and a wide range of organisations and has moved along the continuum in Fig. 1 to adopt a more corporate structure. The principal sponsor is a major retailer—The Warehouse.

In terms of the partnership continuum in Fig. 3, the relationship with DOC has changed over the course of the project and there have been a number of relationship problems both within the group and between DOC and the group. Initially, DOC was closely involved in the project. However, it then stepped back at the request of the Project Kiwi people and there was little communication or information-sharing between the group and DOC.

In 2000, the Government announced significant new funding to set up kiwi sanctuaries in several parts of New Zealand, including Coromandel. The project now receives funding from DOC and is linked more closely to the Kiwi Recovery programme.

The Department of Conservation is providing five years of funding to Project Kiwi. This money is specifically tagged for maintaining Project Kiwi's base operations of predator control and kiwi monitoring, and requires formal reporting processes to DOC.

As one of the conditions of funding from DOC, a strategic plan for Project Kiwi was developed with an external consultant. This established the vision and objectives for 2001–2006 and has provided the opportunity to review the advances of the project as part of the tasks of completing the plan.

In the new strategic plan (Wildland Consultants 2001), the vision of Project Kiwi is 'that the footprints of our taonga, the kiwi, will always be seen on the beaches of the Kuaotunu Peninsula' and the two key objectives are to recover the kiwi population to 100 or more pairs on the Kuaotunu Peninsula by 2010 and to restore the health of the coastal forest ecosystem of Kuaotunu Peninsula.

The project has been managed under the auspices of an incorporated society since its inception in 1996. The society has an elected chairman, secretary, treasurer, and committee (of five), and three ex-officio members (iwi, DOC, The Warehouse), and also employs a professional accountant. Day-to-day management is organised by a recently contracted project manager. One trapper is also contracted to maintain the predator-trapping network on the peninsula. A contractor is employed to undertake kiwi monitoring. The Department of Conservation representative attends the project's monthly meetings as a technical advisor; however, (because of experience in contract management) this person has also helped to develop the contract descriptions and job processes for the contract project manager and the kiwi monitoring and predator control contracts.

Project Kiwi is now changing to a trust structure as recommended in the management document prepared in conjunction with the strategic plan.

4.3   KAHAROA KOKAKO TRUST

The Kaharoa Conservation Area is located on the outskirts of Rotorua, and is surrounded by farmland and a growing number of lifestyle blocks. The objective of the Kaharoa Kokako Trust is 'to ensure the long-term protection and survival of kokako (*Callaeas cinerea*) at Kaharoa'. The Kaharoa Kokako Trust comprises people who live in a particular locality and share an interest in protecting the kokako. The Trust was formed in 1997 when a small group of local residents put together a proposal for volunteers to carry out pest control in Kaharoa Forest. This work had previously been done by DOC as part of a ten-year 'research by management' experiment. However, once this research had finished, DOC did not have sufficient funds to continue with pest control.

A local resident gathered support from the local community for a community-led pest control programme. The Department of Conservation accepted the community's proposal and carried the initial cost of the programme while the Trust supplied the labour.

The Trust has since received financial support from several sources, including Fletcher Challenge and Environment Bay of Plenty (EBOP). Some of this funding is tagged for specific activities but most spending is at the discretion of the Trust.

In relation to the dynamics of the partnership with DOC (Fig. 3), Kaharoa Forest is on land administered by DOC and the relationship between DOC and the Trust has been formalised in an MOU signed in June 2001. The MOU states that DOC contributes to the Trust's work by way of technical advice, provision of poison and equipment, monitoring work and other resources.

There are several DOC staff members who are individual members of the Trust and who also act as technical advisors. The formal DOC contact, as identified in the MOU, is the local DOC Area Manager, who is not a member of the Trust. While the Area Manager attends meetings once a year, most of the contact between DOC and the Trust is by way of informal 'cup of tea' chats between the Trust chairperson and the Area Manager.

The Trust secretary is responsible for all the fundraising associated with the Trust, and all its administration work is done on a voluntary basis. The Trust employs contractors to carry out some of the pest control work. Wider community involvement comes by way of the trustees and other community members filling bait stations every weekend for one month over spring.

There are nine trustees, predominantly from the surrounding rural community, who meet once a month. As well as the DOC trustees who are involved as locals and act as advisors, there is also a representative from the regional council (EBOP). Other trustees have been handpicked in order to gain the range of skills needed to operate the Trust.

The Trust has been encouraged by the increase in the percentage of kokako pairs breeding successfully over the period that the pest control work has been carried out.

4.4   FRENCH PASS ENVIRONMENT ZONE

The goal of the French Pass Environment Zone (FPEZ) is 'to help restore the natural character of the French Pass peninsula by increasing the abundance and diversity of the area's native flora and fauna'. One of the key management objectives of the group is to establish a pest control operation to 'reduce the numbers of possums, stoats, rats, wasps and cats to as close to zero density as is practical'.

The French Pass settlement lies at the extreme outer end of a large peninsula in the outer western Malborough Sounds. The area included in the FPEZ includes both scenic reserve and private land. This is a geographically-based community group set in a small community with approximately nine permanent residents and a larger number of temporary residents who own holiday homes.

FPEZ was initiated by one permanent resident who is a conservationist and an ecotourism operator in the French Pass area. This resident got enough support from the local residents' association to then approach DOC with a proposed work plan and associated costs. This coincided with the availability of Conservation Awareness[1] funding and the Area Office agreed to support the proposal.

In relation to the partnership continuum (Fig. 3), DOC has played a dominant role in the group. Because the planned pest control operation involved the use of toxins, it was very important for the Area Office that a detailed operational plan was prepared. The Department of Conservation hired a consultant (using Conservation Awareness[1] money) to work with the resident who had initiated the project to develop an operational plan for the FPEZ. According to the FPEZ Operational Plan:

> *It will be a community-driven project which will hopefully demonstrate the benefits of pest control, the ability of small groups of committed individuals to make a difference in improving their environment, and to provide a living-working example that the wider public will appreciate and hopefully copy.*

Although the operational plan describes FPEZ as a community-driven project, DOC has spent a lot of time and resources helping to establish the pest control programme. Any work on the land covered by the FPEZ must comply with the general requirements and restrictions placed on activities on DOC-administered land, so DOC organised the toxin approval and prepared the associated applications and notifications. The possum control operation on the 130-ha area was contracted out on account of the use of toxins. Because the funding for the pest control operation work was coming out of the DOC budget, the contractor had to be a DOC employee and DOC therefore had to work through the safety issues.

Some of the local residents are involved in a practical sense by undertaking control measures. DOC staff spent a day training members of the local community on how to use traps, and traps are now monitored regularly by a few people. While a contractor was paid to set up bait stations, some community

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[1]   The Department's Conservation Awareness fund aims to foster innovation in Conservancies and Conservancy Areas that supports implementation of DOC's Conservation with Communities Strategy.

members also regularly check the bait stations, with different people in the community taking responsibility for specific parts of the control area. Some people in the local community also take responsibility for photo-monitoring native mistletoe plants and students of the French Pass School undertake bird monitoring.

Stakeholders are kept informed of meetings and developments through email, phone and personal contact. While there is an MOU among all participating parties and the group received external funds, this is a relatively informal, small-scale project (Fig. 1).

4.5 HECTOR FOR HECTOR'S

Hector for Hector's arose out of a DOC Conservation Awareness project initiated by the Buller Area Office's Rural Advocate. The goal of the project was 'to promote awareness of the special conservation value of Hector's dolphins and their vulnerability to set nets in the Buller Area'. One of the key actions to achieve this goal was 'to promote Hector's dolphin as a potential icon for the Northern Buller' (Copeland 2001).

A preliminary meeting was held between DOC and the Northern Buller Communities Society to explain the Rural Advocate's role and moot the idea of an open day in Hector to raise awareness and to celebrate Hector's dolphins (Copeland 2001). The presentation was well received and a community meeting was arranged for the Northern Buller area, and the idea of an open day and icon were suggested. By the end of the meeting, thirteen people had volunteered to be part of a working group. A meeting was arranged to form the working group and begin planning for the open day. For the next six weeks, the group met every week and planned and organised the Hector's Dolphin Day, held in May 2001 (Copeland 2001).

Since the open day, the group has continued to meet and has had a Hector's Dolphin statue mounted. The focus of the group is on action on the ground with the group. The group is planning a second open day and is establishing an interpretation site in Hector.

The DOC Rural Advocate has assisted the group to draft a strategic plan. Hector for Hector's is an interest-based community group and is relatively informal (Fig. 1). Hector for Hector's has sub-committee status under the Northern Buller Communities Incorporated Society and has a small membership fee. The group also receives funding from pub charities.

4.6 WEED BUSTERS

The Weed Busters group developed as a result of a weed awareness project initiated by DOC's Buller Area Office in 2002. The weed awareness project aimed to 'raise awareness of the biodiversity threat of weeds, encourage sound conservation practice in the disposal of weeds and involve target groups in surveillance of weeds'. A public information evening was held in Westport. According to Copeland (2002):

The most pleasing aspect of the whole weed awareness week was the response from the few participants that attended the weed information night.

A number of those present at the meeting wished to be involved in the fight against weeds and it was decided to meet again to discuss further action. Two meetings were held at DOC's Buller Area Office, with a DOC staff member facilitating, to discuss the group objectives and plan for a weed initiative.

The two main objectives of the group are action (e.g. controlling weed sites, making submissions to regional council) and awareness and education (e.g. compiling a weed chart for gardeners, articles in the news). There is a clear emphasis on action, with the group stipulating that their only form of meetings will be the working bees once a month.

The DOC Rural Advocate originally acted as group facilitator but is now simply a member. The group sets its own direction and priorities with regard to controlling weeds at particular sites and DOC then provides support for the group to undertake this work. The group has shifted along the partnerships continuum (Fig. 3) towards playing a more dominant role in the project.

In relation to Fig. 1, the Weed Busters group operates very informally and does not see a need to become an incorporated society or a trust, as they do not need any funds. The group does not have an overall vision or a strategy. Instead, the focus is on action, with the next priority area for weed control decided at the end of each working bee.

4.7   TUATAPERE HUMP TRACK TRUST

The Tuatapere Hump Ridge Track is located at the southeastern end of Fiordland National Park and takes three days and two nights to walk. Some sections of the track are on public lands administered by DOC, and others are on Maori land. Access is by agreement with the landowners (Tuatapere Hump Track Trust, undated pamphlet).

The mission statement of the Tuatapere Hump Track Trust is:

To develop and administer a diverse, historic and remote walking track for the benefit of Southland and its visitors and provide a unique outdoor experience with a minimal impact on the environment.

The Tuatapere Hump Track Trust was formed in 1985 to help revitalise the town of Tuatapere and generate income through tourism following the decline in the forestry sector. A group involved in the local business association put forward the idea of developing a track, and once they had received support from the community the Trust was formed. The vision of the trustees was for a 53-km, three-day, two-night tramp that would be totally community organised and funded—the first privately developed track of its kind in New Zealand (Arrow International 2002: 8).

The Trust is based on local residents who share a similar interest. From the outset the group has adopted a relatively corporate structure (Fig. 1), and the project was large scale and planned using paid contractors and funding from external sources.

The Trust engaged a consultant, initially as the development planner and then the project construction manager. Development included the construction of two new 40-bunk huts and associated facilities including helipads and sewage disposal systems. During the course of planning and construction, a variety of notified resource consents and multiple staged building consents were secured in negotiation with Southland District Council and Southland Regional Council. A concession agreement was negotiated with DOC along with a number of legal access agreements (Arrow International 2002). The Department of Conservation's representative is not a member of the Trust but attends most Trust meetings.

Trust members often referred to the high level of frustration they experienced with the bureaucratic process required to get project approval, and the associated delays and added costs. Much of this was attributed to the original nature of the project, which meant that there were no clear guidelines from DOC and other government organisations on how to go about it.

The Trust initially struggled financially, but eventually secured funding from a range of sources including the local community trust, local government, and central government. The total cost for constructing the track was just under three million dollars. The Trust has now employed a full-time operations manager and several part-time staff to oversee the running of the track.

The track was opened by the Prime Minister, Helen Clark, and the Minister of Conservation, Sandra Lee, in November 2001. At the opening ceremony, Sandra Lee remarked that the Hump Ridge Track is 'a worldwide attraction and a legacy for the young people of the community' (Arrow International 2002: 7).

According to the consultants working with the Trust:

> *22,000 voluntary hours, and a truck load of dedication, attitude and commitment later, and the Trust's vision has become a reality—a real triumph over adversity and bureaucracy (Arrow International 2002: 48).*

5. Features of effective community groups

Before considering the key features of effective partnerships between DOC and community groups in Section 7, it is important to first consider the internal structure and dynamics of community groups. In nearly all of the case studies, the groups have experienced internal tensions and conflict, unexpected hurdles, disappointments, or slower progress than expected. Community groups identified the range of factors that had influenced the success of their initiatives and had kept them going in the face of often significant obstacles. In particular, the key features mentioned were strong leadership, commitment, stability, specialist skills and knowledge, a vision and project plan, recognition of achievements, secure funding, an appropriate legal structure, a business approach, and good internal communication.

5.1 STRONG LEADERSHIP

In nearly all the case studies, DOC staff and community participants commented on the importance of having strong community leaders or 'movers and shakers' involved in the project. In a number of projects, community participants stressed that the success of the project was due to one or two key people involved in the group who were determined to 'hold it together':

> *If you've got good leadership, you'll go a long way. If you don't, you'll struggle.*

Nearly all of the projects initiated by the communities had one strong character or identity who had driven the project. In the case of one group, the first chairperson had the role for ten years:

> *He was determined nothing would stop them. He kept going because of bloody-mindedness. He has helped to keep it together.*

Similarly, an ex-chairperson commented:

> *It has lasted so long because … once it started I wouldn't give up. With every project there is always one key person.*

In another case, a community participant commented:

> *You need a leader, you need a pushy person. [The chairperson] is brilliant at that.*

In a couple of case studies this leadership role came from within DOC. In the Weed Busters group, DOC's Rural Advocate provided a facilitation and leadership role, particularly in the early stages of the project. In the Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi, one of the DOC staff members on the island has continued to provide leadership and direction since the project was initiated.

5.2 COMMITMENT

The importance of balancing strong leadership with a wider community commitment was frequently raised. As discussed in Section 3, a 'community' can be based on people living within a particular geographical location or with a shared sense of place, or can be a group of people with different perspectives, views and backgrounds who come together for a common goal. The 'community' for a project may simply be the trustees or committee members or may include individuals from the wider community who volunteer or have an interest in the project.

In most projects a group of people had been hand-picked to be involved in the committee or be a trustee because of their skills or interest in the project. In a number of projects there were opportunities for wider community involvement through volunteer days (e.g. Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi) or community awareness through newsletters (e.g. Kaharoa Kokako Trust).

To ensure sustained community commitment, a number of community participants commented that a leader needs to like working with a group of people and needs to involve others in the discussions and decision making. Tensions seemed to have emerged in a number of groups when the leader or initiator had made unilateral decisions. Community participants commented:

It depends on who is the driving force and whether they get on with the community. They may have the best intentions but don't get on with everyone.

One of the risks if you're passionate about something is that you may alienate other people … so people can't see past the person and won't support what they are doing. It is important that you understand people when working on something like this and the sensitivity around issues.

In one case study, the community involved in the project is based on a small geographical community rather than a group of like-minded people with a common goal sourced from a wider area. While there was a key person with the 'vision and passion' for the project, there had not been consistent community interest and involvement in it, and there appeared not to be a wider sense of community ownership.

While projects are often driven by one or two key people, there was a common sense across the groups that successful projects 'needed to be bigger than one person'. One community participant advised:

Don't let any one person dominate a project—it's difficult because projects are often started by one really keen person. How you do that I don't know. You need to know when it's got too big for one person. You need shared ownership.

According to one chairperson:

We're now established and running with systems in place. I could leave and the community won't let it go. It's not pivotal on one person wanting it—it's pivotal on the community wanting it.

A reason frequently identified for having wider community support was the need to have people to succeed as the next committee or trust members. As one community participant stated:

It's important to have the community involved because they are the next trustees. If it's just a bunch of six guys doing it—it's all about ego.

People involved in projects situated in small or rural communities like the Tuatapere Hump Track Trust and Project Kiwi commented on the sense of community in these small places and that it was easier to get people involved because they are used to being on committees and doing things for their community.

Tuatapere has old-fashioned values and committees you wouldn't find in Auckland or a city. Their commitment is totally commendable.

There have always been people to step in and carry on [when there have been problems]. In a small community there are always people you can talk into things.

However, the notion that there will always be people to 'step in' in small communities does not always apply to projects in very small communities like French Pass where there is a lot of pressure on very few resources. There is not a pool of available people and, instead, the project is reliant on the same nine permanent residents who may not all share the same vision or goal.

5.3 STABILITY

In a number of case studies the same group of trustees or committee members had been involved throughout the duration of the project. These groups had not encouraged new members on the board or committee in order to ensure that no substantially different ideas were introduced and all members remained committed to the original vision. In the case of one group, this was done to ensure there were consistent views from the trustees the whole way through and, according to one trustee:

> *We set up [the Trust] so you couldn't change the group—because change [in membership] can slow it up … There are three new people on the Trust this year but we deliberately engineered it so that it wouldn't happen until the [operational] stage … up until operational time you need it like that— need continuity of people. You can go to heaps of people for advice but you don't need them at your meeting.*

Also, with another group:

> *A couple [of members] have dropped off but we haven't pushed for new people—we're quite comfortable with us. What if [new members] have varying ideas to us? We've had that with past members who had their own agenda. It didn't work … different people will change the outlook of the group.*

In a third case, problems emerged when new members joined who introduced different ideas and goals for the organisation, and to avoid these types of situations, the membership on the more recent committee has not changed:

> *It was not completely democratic—we had the same committee rolling over. In the past few years we haven't thought about a new committee because [we are] moving towards a trust—maybe new blood after that.*

While consistent membership was identified as a positive, there was also concern raised by some that having the same people on a trust or committee does not allow for wider community ownership and there may not be people to succeed the original trustees once they step down:

> *All the people on the Tuatapere Hump Track Trust are quite old—it's always been the same people on the Trust. What will happen when they step down? That is the next test—the ultimate test of the community good will.*

5.4 SPECIALIST SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

Universally, participants commented on the importance of having a range of skills on the committee, and in many cases people had been hand picked from the community because they had proven skills to carry out specific tasks. There is a clear need to have a balance between people with vision and people with practical skills. In particular, it was considered necessary to have a good secretary who can run meetings, keep minutes and prepare funding applications:

> *I've been very involved in a few committees and you need people to do paperwork and funding. If you lose a person like this the organisation can fall over.*

> *It's critical to have someone to do paperwork and funding applications in a timely and consistent manner.*

Another important skill was accountancy. Similarly, the importance of having a lawyer involved to cope with potential health and safety and sponsorship issues was mentioned. One person commented that having a lawyer involved 'lends an air of legitimacy'.

In one case study, representatives of the regional council and DOC were also on the Trust. This was identified as a useful strategic move, as these representatives can help with technical advice, applications for funding and pest control. However, other groups were adamant that they wanted to be independent and didn't want to be seen as an extension of DOC.

Concerns were raised by some people that community groups should not simply handpick those with already proven skills but should, instead, draw on the wider community who may have enthusiasm for the project and a willingness to learn the desired skills. This highlights the tension between projects being a basis for wide-ranging community involvement and projects run as a skilled business with connotations of exclusivity and boundaries around who can be actively involved.

5.5   A VISION

All groups stressed the importance of having a clearly defined vision that all the people in the group agree to. This can help to ensure the group focuses on what they have in common rather than their differences:

> *We had a vision. It kept us going. We all agreed on the vision. It's one community group where everyone had the same vision. I don't think we ever had a disagreement on the Trust—nobody has ever walked out. The vision to get the job done was key.*

> *We didn't know each other but we had to come up with a mission statement. There was a lot of talk and discussion but by actually doing this we found we had a shared commitment … We can all agree on the shared goal and therefore we can work together on everything.*

5.6   A PROJECT PLAN

Many of the groups had developed project plans or strategic documents with short-term and long-term goals, objectives and timeframes. These project plans had helped to provide a focus for future group action. In the case of the Tuatapere Hump Track Trust, a contracted project manager wrote the nucleus of what should happen, how and when, and the Trust follows this. Similarly, Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi have developed a five-year strategic plan with links to the Conservation Management Strategy (CMS). According to the Supporters, the five year plan:

Provides a valuable insight into the path the supporters propose to move towards in the future. The plan outlined a timetable on the projects we can assist on the island covering everything from translocations, building developments, communication, education. The basis for the timetable is taken from the ten-year work plan and the CMS with input from the community (2002).

A community participant stressed the importance of the project plan being a 'live document':

Groups often put something together to get funding and then never look at it. [We] have to refer to it all the time.

Some groups advocate the importance of developing and agreeing to a plan before starting any work to ensure they set in place a foundation and framework. However, others had not formally written down anything and their actions were based more on ad hoc activities or short-term decisions. With Weed Busters, for example, the project has taken an evolutionary action-based approach. It is envisaged that the group will become more formalised with a strategy and vision in time (refer to Fig. 1). The focus is currently on harnessing the energy of the group to see action and results. As members of the group commented:

We had three meetings before we went out—that's too many as you get practical people coming along. If I was doing it I'd have one meeting and then get out—so everyone gets their hands dirty.

If there were too many meetings it would drive me nuts—I like action.

5.7   RECOGNITION OF ACHIEVEMENTS

Being able to see achievements was identified as a key motivating factor for keeping a group going. Rewards, such as receiving saddlebacks on Tiritiri Matangi, or the Weed Busters group controlling weeds, helped to drive these projects forward. In the case of Kaharoa Kokako Trust, a key factor in the project's success is that the area is accessible and 'people can walk around in half a day and have seen results'.

In order to experience project rewards, a number of people commented on the importance of having achievable goals and being able to measure progress. Celebrating short-term goals can help to ensure group momentum continues and people remain enthusiastic.

Another piece of advice from the Kaharoa Kokako Trust was to start small:

Basically we started small and proved we were successful and grew. It is important in any business to start small. Start small and get confidence from what you're doing. We haven't over-committed—that has been key.

Similarly, with Weed Busters, the group set out manageable goals and have been able to start achieving their goals, 'make a difference', and 'remove weeds on their back door step'.

Thus, it is important to set achievable goals, which provide rewarding experiences and involve, but do not over-commit, the community. The Kaharoa Kokako Trust, for example, does not have a problem keeping people motivated and interested as they only turn up every weekend for one month over spring. Similarly, people tree-planting on Tiritiri Matangi would work for half a day and then spend half a day experiencing the island.

5.8   SECURITY OF FUNDING

A key factor influencing the success and stability of groups was whether they had secure medium- to long-term funding. While some groups had funding from DOC, there was a wide range of funding sources (for example regional councils, corporate sponsorship, Lottery Grants Board, public donations, subscriptions) and also a range of funding levels.

Some groups had found it relatively easy to get funding, especially those that were well established or focussed on an iconic species such as kiwi or kokako or had a large population base. However, other groups had to continually put effort and resources into funding applications.

Project Kiwi is a clear example of the importance of stable funding. At one stage the group experienced financial difficulties with money owing, there was political upset on the committee and the group was 'floundering'. The group then received secure funding for five years from DOC.

According to one community participant:

> *All of us in communities have been involved in groups. You're fighting all the time. It took away the headaches getting the money. With funding we can focus on the project and as a committee we're stable … It's very hard to commit to things year-in year-out without solid funding.*

With funding secure, the group has been able to develop a new strategic plan and also contract a project manager and trapper and commit to ongoing monitoring.

The funding for Project Kiwi from DOC is tagged to support the kiwi monitoring and predator control. Tagged funding was identified as very important by a number of community participants across the case studies. Some concerns were raised about the level of funding and how easy some groups find it to get money that had no strings attached or was not tagged for specific tasks.

One community participant commented:

> *All this money is starting to filter around and groups jump on bandwagons. I know groups getting money who don't have a bank account … You can't throw funds at people—the average person has no idea. One day I just picked up a cheque for $48,000 from the Lottery Grants Board—wow. I had no idea about the ramifications like GST.*

The fact that some organisations can receive considerable amounts of money reinforces the importance of having good financial systems and processes in place. According to one person, talking about their previous community group experiences:

No-one involved had dealt with large chunks of money before—weren't used to dealing with large organisations with reporting processes—just got confused.

With organisations employing staff and paid contractors there needs to be some certainty of funding to ensure the project continues. In the case of the French Pass Environment Zone, for example, most of the work is being done by contracted professionals, not community volunteers, and the project is solely reliant on external funding for its survival. As one community participant commented:

If the funding dried up totally it would stop because the major work hasn't been done by the local people. That's why it's lasted—because we could employ a professional … Community involvement and support will depend a lot on whether you get the funding.

5.9 APPROPRIATE LEGAL STRUCTURE

Two of the case study groups were operating under a trust model (Kaharoa Kokako Trust, Tuatapere Hump Track Trust), two were in the process of moving from an incorporated society to a trust structure (Project Kiwi and Friends of Tiritiri Matangi), two were operating as subgroups of incorporated societies (French Pass Environment Zone, Hector for Hector's) and one was operating informally (Weed Busters).

Most groups had selected either charitable trust or incorporated society structures for their activities. The key differences between the two types of structure is that an incorporated society has a minimum of 15 members, members make the decisions, and members can easily join or leave in accordance with the membership rules. An incorporated society usually has an elected management committee. A trust has a board of at least two trustees who make decisions on behalf of a larger group. Trusts are set up under a trust deed which includes the rules of the group (Department of Internal Affairs 1996).

A trust structure has the potential to become quite exclusive and trusts often result in more limited community or member involvement. On the other hand, incorporated societies can become quite 'unwieldy' and may find it difficult to make quick decisions because of the number of people who may be involved. The legal structure of a group will influence how much community involvement there is in decision-making and may influence how much community ownership there is of a project (Department of Internal Affairs 1996).

Groups often start as an incorporated society with wider community involvement, then move along the continuum towards a trust structure as they become more 'business-like'. A number of people advocated the benefits of setting up a project as a trust from the beginning and were clear that a trust was the preferred structure. One group member commented that they would form a trust from the beginning if they were to go through the process again:

Where I [messed] up was that I started it as an incorporated society. There were too many people with too many agendas, it was a recipe for disaster.

It should have been set up with a lawyer and a scientist and been set up as a trust from the start.

Another group member commented:

If [the project] didn't have [internal] politics it could run as an incorporated society. The trust is set up to stop people infiltrating and manipulating. The trust locks it up. In an ideal world an incorporated society is good because you get so many people into it. But you lose that with a trust.

Project Kiwi plans to have an accountant, a landowner and two kiwi scientists as the founding trustees. The Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi were also in the process of forming a trust to work alongside the Supporters group. As one member noted:

There is some concern that we are creating another bureaucracy [with the trust]. But we are a business and have become more professional. We have moved away from the church steeple fund. When it first started DOC saw it as an informal group—it has evolved.

The trust would include iwi, conservation board members, and DOC. The trust would be responsible for management and funding and the Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi group would continue to supply labour and material. According to one member:

The trust would take it away from individuals in DOC and the incorporated society. The trust won't depend on individuals … it's currently built on people—if the relationships turn sour it's a concern.

A legal structure is often needed if a group wishes to apply for grants. However, Weed Busters is not reliant on external funding and, instead, relies on DOC to assist with administration, vehicles and herbicide as well as their own volunteer labour and donations. The group does not see a need for an incorporated society or a trust. Members of the group also commented that introducing a formal structure can add costs to individuals.

Many of us are on fixed incomes. We don't want more subs. We don't want any costs. You've got to give people the opportunity [to be involved].

5.10 BUSINESS APPROACH

The rhetoric of community groups running as a 'business' was frequently employed. Common comments from community participants included:

I think of it as a business.

We involved the right people, that's why it has succeeded so well. It's just like a business—we run it properly.

The committee decided to become more business-like—then personalities are not as important.

If employing [staff], voluntary organisations need to be run as a business.

We're not Forest and Bird fuddy duddies—we get things done—we're professional.

When handling large amounts of money and being subject to reporting requirements from funders, community organisations can often move to mirror the structures of the private sector. Most of the individuals who initiated these projects come from a business background and did not want to be identified as 'greenies' or 'forest and bird types'. The main objectives of the projects are physical goals such as protecting a species, building a track, or controlling a pest and they want to achieve these goals in the most efficient, timely, cost-effective and business-like manner. While the projects may be initiated and driven from someone in the community, the projects are not necessarily about 'wider community involvement'.

This preferred 'business' approach was apparent in the views of one community participant:

> If I was starting this up somewhere, the first thing I'd do is hire the most experienced ecosystem manager possible and then get good technical back-up. Start it up as a business. Enthusiasm and commitment mean bugger all, it's experience that counts. Get good plans and systems up and running and then open the doors for all the enthusiasm and passion. You've gotta be pretty mercenary, I reckon.

Similarly, another person commented:

> You need to write a project proposal, cost it, identify who is going to run it, get ideas down, present it at a meeting. People sit around for hours talking about wonderful ideas but nothing happens. No politics—you just need the project proposal and an accountant … passion is a horrible word in conservation … don't get involved with people who say they have a passion.

The importance of having strategic plans and systems in place and also handpicking a small group of people with the right skills were identified in a number of case studies as the best way to go. There was also a common theme that running the group like a 'business' avoids 'personalities' and 'passion'.

Another common theme was the importance of having paid professional 'experts' involved in the project as opposed to the 'unreliable' or 'unprofessional' enthusiastic volunteer. As mentioned previously, people from a number of groups commented on the importance of having people with specialist skills (e.g. a lawyer or accountant) involved in projects. These people often work on a voluntary basis, but in a number of cases staff with specialist skills were being employed as project managers or technical experts (e.g. in the area of pest control). Paid staff are often perceived as a 'safer' option than volunteers as organisations can guarantee that the work will get done and to a high standard and fulfil contractual commitments.

There was wide discussion as to where volunteers or the wider community fit into these community projects. A number of projects have had to turn away people who want to get involved.

> People are always saying 'what can I do?' 'How can I help?' And you've got to politely turn them down.

> It's great having two contractors out there—not just volunteers at weekends. Volunteers are never as focused or know it as well as a full time [person] on the job all the time.

While some groups, like the Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi, managed to combine a business-like organisation with wider community involvement through volunteering, the groups varied in terms of their levels of wider community involvement and some questioned whether it was necessary. Businesses do not often adopt wider social objectives of community wellbeing and therefore community organisations often chose to focus on the goals of their 'business' (e.g. species protection) as opposed to wider social objectives of community involvement.

5.11 INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Most of the groups had a formal structure with a chairperson, secretary, and treasurer and held regular meetings with minutes recorded. A few had opted for an informal arrangement, with contact between group members predominantly via telephone and email (French Pass Environment Zone) or with informal meetings carried out in association with the work (Weed Busters).

Some groups gave examples of problems where communication within the group hadn't been good. A frequent comment from community participants was that they weren't 'meetings kind of people' and wanted to focus on 'action not talk'. However, a number of groups have found that an informal communication structure based around 'action' did not work successfully and they have moved along the community group continuum towards more formal lines of communication.

In some cases, there seemed to be a tension between wanting to 'just get out there' and getting things done efficiently and spending time discussing plans with other group members and the community. In the case of one group, the group initially had meetings just before a pest control operation. It emerged that some members knew what decisions were being made and others did not. The group now has monthly meetings that keep everyone up-to-date.

When another group first started, there were no formal systems of communication in place. The group would hold meetings that sometimes went until 2 a.m. Attendees could bring up any issue, and meetings had minimal positive outcomes. According to one community participant:

> When I got there we had enthusiasts but didn't have committee rules. Didn't run a meeting, didn't record minutes, minutes have to be in a proper committee form.

The committee now employs a formal meeting structure and, as another community participant commented:

> You need people with committee experience—you need to form a motion, pass it and write it down as a minute. Things are now recorded from the beginning and we have a reasonably strong chairman to stop things going round and round.

One participant also commented on the social benefits of having regular meetings, and asked 'what else would we do once a month on a Thursday night?'

6. Factors that influence partnerships between the Department of Conservation and community groups

As well as the internal structure and dynamics of different community groups, there were factors in the interaction between DOC and the groups that influenced the effectiveness of community projects. The most important factors in partnerships between groups and DOC were motivation to work together, consistent staffing, staff style, consistent support, the level of 'bureaucracy', clearly defined roles, and regular communication.

6.1 MOTIVATION TO WORK TOGETHER

Groups will have different motives and objectives for forming relationships with DOC. Some groups would have preferred to not work with DOC at all and viewed DOC as expensive and obstructive, while others have been specifically set up to support DOC's work.

A number of groups have also shifted from wanting to have minimal involvement with DOC, to now seeing the value of forming a partnership. As one DOC staff member commented in relation to a particular group:

> *If they could have gone ahead and done this without DOC they would have. But a lot of them have come to the point where they realise they need DOC with the Trust. If the department had stood right back they would have fallen over because DOC has knowledge of what's involved, and so on. They could find out but it would take a lot of time and could fall over.*

Similarly, while another group had previously been keen to 'do it alone' without input from DOC, the current committee commented that they are keen to work with them and can see the value in terms of accessing information and research. A DOC staff member involved commented:

> *[The group] was trying to prove to DOC that they could do it alone. They could have got there more quickly if they'd been open to other groups being involved. They would know a lot more stuff and get more information. They realised they could get more out of DOC by cooperating more.*

Other reasons frequently mentioned for working with DOC included the following:

> *They have resources to help if you've got a problem.*

> *We were much happier to have DOC involved … DOC staff have practical experience.*

It makes it an official thing—not just blowing our own trumpet.

There is a lot of technical information regarding the best way to do it—can waste time and money if you don't get it right therefore important to have DOC involved for their expertise.

6.2 CONSISTENT STAFFING

Some groups commented that with multiple staff changes within DOC, a lot of time is wasted getting new staff up to speed and forming relationships, and momentum can easily be lost. Because staff do move around in DOC, staff changes will be inevitable when a project carries on over an extended period of time. While groups frequently acknowledged that this was unavoidable, a key concern was the lack of record-keeping or handover processes when these staff changes did occur. An associated concern was that sometimes key contacts are not replaced when they leave.

One group has had many different DOC staff as their key contact because of a number of organisational restructurings and staff changes. This group found it frustrating to have to build relationships with new DOC staff, particularly because there did not seem to be any handover process to new staff. One trustee commented:

The department representative needs a full agenda of what happens day-to-day so new staff can pick it up quickly. It was frustrating always having to deal with new people. They haven't done their homework.

Because of the staff changes and the lack of record-keeping, it became clear to the trustees that different DOC staff were giving different messages:

We came across heaps of inconsistencies [between staff], some decisions therefore seemed very subjective ... things came down to the personality of the person you deal with ... their preferences rather than the policy on it.

There didn't seem to be clear, strong record-keeping when a new person came on board—we would spend months recapping, which was frustrating. We wanted to put a toilet at a particular spot and the previous DOC person said no—then the new DOC person had a bright idea about putting a toilet there—it showed it was subjective.

Similarly, members of another group commented that there had been communication problems when DOC staff had left and not been replaced and that work plans had to be altered on account of staff changes. A number of groups commented that they did not feel 'valued' or 'taken seriously' by DOC when DOC staff did not put consistent effort into representation and record-keeping.

6.3 STAFF STYLE

Staff style refers to the way a DOC staff member values, respects and communicates with the community group. All groups were positive about the relationships they had with their current DOC representatives.

A go-between person between DOC and the community person is important. [DOC staff member] is perfect. He doesn't try to take over.

The personalities of DOC staff members also need to match the groups they are involved in and one DOC staff member recalled the experience of one community group:

The group was upset by the type of staff member. It's important to consider dress standards—he turned up wearing pink pants and it's a conservative community. You have to tailor your language and style to the community and work out how to go about it … be respected and respectful.

The importance of ensuring that personalities match is evident in this quote from one community participant:

Things began to change during the [next] phase because [DOC staff member] is impatient like me. [Conservator and DOC staff member] turned it around—we realised we shared the same vision.

Community group participants often discussed their relationship with individual staff members as distinct from their experiences with the rest of DOC. While DOC often came in for criticism, people were generally very supportive of the individual staff members they worked with. One staff member was described, for example, as 'not holier-than-thou or arrogant like the department'.

Community participants spoke about how the commitment and leadership of individual DOC staff had inspired others. The DOC staff on Tiritiri Matangi were frequently described as the 'most vital ingredient' to the success of the project and a member of the Supporters group commented:

[The DOC rangers] are such special people. There is a concern that when they retire they will be replaced by people on a three-year contract—will we get the same level of support? … It's currently built on people—if the relationships turn sour it's a concern.

A community participant commented:

DOC staff need to be careful not to take preconceived ideas into the group and to wait until they hear the sort of things the group wants to do. For us it works well. [Staff member] is the ideal guy to handle the situation. There are no preconceived ideas—we're just working through it.

When working with community groups, other skills identified as important were 'people skills', 'not being too outspoken in their approach', 'not coming across as an expert in their field—more subtle', and 'realising how important local knowledge is'. As one community participant commented:

The biggest issue for DOC is communicating in a way that is accepted. They need to spend time talking and just listening to the community.

6.4 CONSISTENT SUPPORT

While a number of groups agreed that it was important that they 'prove themselves' to DOC, there was wide agreement that they should receive consistent support and commitment once DOC had agreed to support the

project. A number of community groups commented on the mixed messages they received from staff and the perceived lack of trust in the community group. There was a sense that while there was usually support from the staff 'on the ground' who were working with the group, they received mixed messages from the larger body that is 'the department'.

For example, while one group received consistent support from the local DOC Conservator, they were aware that there were mixed feelings within the wider department as to whether the particular project should go ahead or not.

> *We applied for a concession but some people behind the desks at DOC didn't want it to go ahead and put lots of hurdles in our way. It wasn't the staff we had out here. They were great. Or the top ones—[the Conservator] was great. It was those in the office behind the desks.*

DOC staff and community participants attributed some of the hesitancy, nervousness and reluctance on the part of DOC to the fact that this type of work had not been done before. One community participant commented:

> *[DOC staff] were very aware that it was a first and were just being careful. There was a lot of caution from DOC staff—making sure all the 't's were crossed and 'i's dotted—could be seen as obstructive—but from department's point of view this was brand new.*

Some group members also attributed this view to the fact that the priority for the group was not a priority for DOC. They also perceived a concern in some DOC staff that they were 'just a bunch of wallies' and this was 'DOC's work'.

According to one community participant:

> *The biggest delay was changing attitudes with the department. There were mixed views within the department as to whether it should be done or not. … [There was the view that] the department should be doing it—not private enterprise.*

A cautious reaction from DOC to work that has traditionally been 'DOC's work' was also evident in another case. Staff from DOC commented that in the earlier days there were real anxieties about the group taking over core DOC work and there was a fear that DOC would lose its profile. A member of the group commented:

> *There was a lot of resistance from the department—they saw us as a radical group. The comment from DOC was 'give them a year and they'll fold'. Now we're seen as a serious partner. While the group still experiences some resistance from DOC, the relationship has improved.*

> *[The new Conservator] has been the making of the relationship between DOC and the group … [we] have developed a rapport. The leadership from [the Conservator] went right down to the Area Office where there was resistance before. He said [DOC] needs to work with [the group]. We've tried for so long to be a partner but it was adversarial. I'm concerned that if [the Conservator] left—what would happen? He has helped to develop the partnership to a high level.*

Similarly, a number of DOC staff and community participants commented that DOC often has an unwillingness to let go. According to one staff member:

> *From a department point of view once a decision is made that you're going to do it just shut up and do it.*

6.5 LEVEL OF 'BUREAUCRACY'

Often groups will have different expectations of what is involved in getting a community project off the ground and can be overwhelmed by the level of paperwork and 'bureaucracy' associated with DOC requirements. According to trustees of the Tuatapere Hump Track Trust:

> *We thought it would loosely take twelve months and a couple of corrugated iron huts and then it would be done. It's just as well we didn't know what we were doing—its been enormous. Our ignorance has been our strength—all of us haven't given up. A tribute to bloody-mindedness.*

> *The construction phase was nine months—the rest is just hassles—wading through bureaucracy. The idea was first floated eleven years before!*

A large number of relationship problems between DOC and community groups had come about as a result of delays and confusion and lack of understanding over statutory processes and timeframes.

Problems with the Tuatapere Hump Track Trust process arose because DOC had not been through the process before and there was a need to be cautious. In addition, because part of the track was on DOC-administered land, it was thought that the public would have certain expectations as to how the land should be managed. The Department of Conservation recommended 50 special conditions as part of the concession. One condition was the there be a $480,000 contingency fee and this caused huge debate as the group struggled to find funding. Again, community participants made a distinction between the DOC staff on the ground and the DOC 'bureaucracy':

> *Didn't need to happen how it did—bureaucracy. Three million dollars in bullshit. But not necessarily the department's fault. Not these guys. Its up the ladder where the shiny bums sit.*

> *We underestimated the amount of time and effort involved. Every time we ask a question we'd realise we'd have to ask 20 more. It's been enormous. In some ways our ignorance has been our strength and our vision has kept us going.*

Members of other groups also commented on the high level of paperwork associated with dealing with DOC and the complexity of applications for pest control and other initiatives. This appears to be particularly difficult for groups when they are just starting and have no knowledge of how DOC operates, or the processes involved. They find they can be unexpectedly 'hit' with 'a wall of bureaucracy', time delays or complications.

6.6 CLEARLY DEFINED ROLES

As outlined in Fig. 3, the roles of DOC and community groups working in partnership are dynamic and will vary across projects and over time. What is evident from this research is that while there is no overall 'correct' role for DOC in these partnerships, the level of involvement and responsibility of both DOC and the community group needs to be clearly stated, agreed to and well understood.

In the case of one group, for example, the role of the DOC representative is to attend the group's meetings once a month and to provide specialist technical advice to the committee. However, at the time of this research, the project was in a 'state of flux' as it moved from being an incorporated society to a trust, and from using volunteers to having a contracted project manager. The DOC representative had been helping out with job descriptions and processes for the project management position. This is outside the bounds of technical advice, but it appears that once DOC gets involved in projects such as these, in practical terms there is often a need for staff to be flexible and help out in a range of other areas. According to the DOC representative:

> *My role is specialist advice. It's not the department's role to get involved in the nuts and bolts of what they're doing … supporting but not interfering … I can't push too hard as I don't want to be seen to be taking over and DOC doing too much … [it's] hard to balance … I'm doing the job descriptions and job processes for the project manager position … I'm not entirely sure how I should play [my role]. If no one else is doing it I will do it. Could also be perception that DOC is taking over … [I have] been the pseudo project manager … I have said that I'll help you to fill in until you get on your feet.*

In a number of projects there seemed to be concern amongst DOC representatives that they were involved too much and needed to step back and leave it to the group. In practice, it was hard to step back when the group was going through a hard time or was having problems and needed extra support. If a staff member was committed to a project, it often appeared that there was a need to go beyond the call of duty and play a larger role in the project, while trying to ensure that DOC wasn't 'taking over'. The concern that DOC didn't 'take over' was also echoed by a number of community participants. According to one community participant:

> *I can see the advantage of a relationship with DOC as we have limited expertise. And it's great to see our data linking in with national studies. But there can also be a suspicion that DOC is trying to take over.*

The Weed Busters and Hector for Hector's groups differ because DOC's Rural Advocate acted as a catalyst for the formation of the groups and continues to be a member. However, the groups involved clearly see them as community partnerships not 'DOC projects'. One key reason for this is that the Rural Advocate does not wear a DOC uniform and describes himself as 'conservation facilitator' who liaises between DOC and communities. As the Rural Advocate explains in relation to Hector for Hector's:

> *I am the DOC liaison person on the group—a facilitator. I am DOC support … and am part of the group. With all the groups I go in and facilitate, get it running on own steam, and then am a member of the group. We're not trying to create work for ourselves, [we are] a catalyst for the group—then hope it will be self supporting … I do occupy a no man's land—very particular to keep to that. I wouldn't come in uniform. I am a facilitator.*

Group members overwhelmingly valued the active role the Rural Advocate took in the projects. One member of Weed Busters commented:

A lot of [the cost] is transport … DOC takes a vehicle and there is no cost for us. Transport is a huge problem. I would have done this years ago otherwise. Also organising—you need someone who can organise us. I appreciate that DOC writes the notes. Otherwise things fall over very quickly. Also equipment, DOC stuff, we always go out with heaps of stuff.

Similarly, a member of Hector for Hector's commented:

[In relation to] DOC's level of involvement, we don't want more, we have control of what is going on. We feel that they are a servant to us, rather than us working for them. DOC sparked the initiative … if DOC had too much community involvement it would turn the community off.

We wouldn't want DOC to drop out of the picture, we want DOC's involvement at this level. I don't see [Rural Advocate] as DOC—see [Rural Advocate] as a fellow member.

There were also some clear messages about what role DOC should not take. In the Project Kiwi case study in particular, a number of current and past members commented on the importance of DOC staying out of internal politics. As one person commented:

DOC has to leave community groups alone. There is a lot of politics and game playing … DOC gets involved in internal politics … [they] should stay out of it. When a group starts DOC shouldn't get heavily involved.

This did not appear to be a universal view. In some cases DOC played a key role in liaising among community members and bringing people on side:

It would never have got off the ground without [DOC involvement] … Because [we were] being pushed by one particular [community] person … [DOC representative] would know everyone in this area better than us. He would probably know more people.

It's more difficult to bring up problems with [community member] … better to deal with [DOC representative] … If you're having problems in a group DOC can act as a go-between, a mediator … In a community [you] will get greenies and don't see eye to eye. DOC's role is to work with all groups.

As these case studies illustrate, the role of DOC will vary significantly in any 'partnership' and the role will often change over time. In the case of the Tuatapere Hump Track Trust, for example, the DOC representative went to approximately 90% of the meetings in a liaison / advice role. However, now that the track is up and running, the DOC representative is stepping back. In the case of the French Pass Environment Zone, DOC staff had significantly different expectations of the roles of DOC and the community in the project than what actually happened.

There was a wide range of views about the need for memorandums of understanding (MOUs) between DOC and community groups to define the scope of relationships and the specific role of each partner. One DOC staff member stressed the importance of DOC having a formal agreement with a group before a project starts so that 'the community group understand what they're letting themselves in for'. According to the staff member:

> *We decided that if we were going to have a relationship we needed a formal agreement. It went to legal, went back and forward a few times … It took a long time to get in place. We all know what we're committing ourselves to with an MOU. There's no sense committing to an agreement if nothing on paper.*

Other DOC staff also stressed the importance of not starting until you have an MOU and everyone has agreed on the vision.

In another case study there was no formal relationship agreement between DOC and the group. According to the key DOC contact, the reason for this was because he has been with the project for so long and has had such an active role, and knows the history of the project.

> *We don't have anything formal with regard to our relationship with the group. I've stayed in it the whole way through … Because I've had such an active role there is no need to have a formal agreement. But because I've got the history—it has stayed with me. The consistency has been a big thing.*

However, as discussed previously, while staff consistency and personalities are key, it is also important that projects are bigger than individual personalities. This has also been an issue with another group where there is also no formal MOU and the relationship is based on personalities. As one member of the group commented:

> *The [group] is very much personality-based. There needs to be a much closer relationship between [the DOC Area Office] and the [group]. There needs to be a much more formalised arrangement.*

Some groups do not currently have an MOU with DOC but are keen to work towards one. However, a number of community participants commented that even when an MOU had been signed, it doesn't mean anything unless it is a 'living document' that both parties adhere to. In one case study partnership agreement, the MOU states that the group needs to prepare annual work plans that are submitted to DOC. While the group prepares these plans and sends them in, they never receive any feedback on them from DOC.

6.7 REGULAR COMMUNICATION

It was evident from the interviews with community groups, that groups wanted to be 'taken seriously' by DOC and that a key to achieving this was to have avenues for regular face-to-face discussion and communication with DOC staff. As one community group member commented: 'sitting around the table [with DOC] is important—not just writing letters':

> *We send DOC a letter outlining our work plan for the year but we never get an acknowledgment. [DOC] needs to communicate better … [The DOC Area Manager] has made it clear that communication goes through him. If no one acknowledges [the work] programme we're not being taken seriously by the department.*

Communication was necessary on two levels. There was a need for regular informal 'cup of tea' chats as well as regular structured meetings with the DOC representative. These meetings enable strong ongoing personal relationships to form. They also allow groups to be kept up-to-date with relevant DOC business, and to get feedback on work plans and other relevant documents. There was also a need for contact and acknowledgement from the local Area Manager and / or Conservator so that the group feels it is taken seriously as a partner. While some groups had regular contact with the DOC representative and some had formed a relationship with the Conservator, it was clear that the partnership needed both tiers of communication in order to be effective.

7. Considerations for the Department of Conservation

One goal of DOC's Conservation with Communities Strategy is to 'develop and maintain appropriate and effective partnerships with tangata whenua and communities to enhance conservation outcomes'. As DOC increasingly moves to develop these partnerships and share conservation work, it is important to take into account a number of factors that can influence the purpose, dynamics and success of any partnership. The following five issues (staff workload, work priorities, how we define communities, staff roles and DOC's role) arose consistently across the case studies and deserve further consideration.

7.1 STAFF WORKLOAD

When a project is initiated, DOC and the community group's expectations of the level of work involved and the responsibilities of each party can differ markedly from what eventuates. One concern raised by a number of staff was the often higher than anticipated workload associated with developing a project in partnership with a community group. A staff member commented:

> *It has been a lot more time than I expected. During [one phase] it was 100%—I did nothing else.*

While DOC may agree to be involved in a project, staff commented that they are often unclear as to what is expected of them in terms of day-to-day work until the project gets underway. While the role of DOC may be clearly stipulated at the start, DOC staff can find they need to take on a greater role as the skills needed to develop detailed operation plans or complete an application for pest control may be absent in the community.

In relation to one project, DOC staff commented:

> *We wanted [the community] to do [the toxin approval]. It was too hard— so we did it. It was something I didn't want but it was the easier option.*

We wanted the community to do the operational plan. But they weren't up to it. Their idea of an operational plan was different. They did a one-page work plan. We hired a consultant who ended up doing the plan. We were lucky because we had the funding. The [community] just didn't have the skills. The [community] were supporting [the consultant] to go and do the work but they didn't have the skills to sit in front of the computer.

The Department of Conservation may also need to unexpectedly take responsibility for additional work as the project progresses because the project is on land managed by DOC or because the project is funded by DOC. In relation to one project, a staff member commented:

I thought the [group] would have hired [the pest control contractor]. But because it was coming out of the DOC budget they had to be a DOC employee. DOC therefore had to work through the safety issues … We were employing someone to do work on reserve and private land. Even through it was community-initiated, it was a DOC project.

With the introduction of the Conservation with Communities Strategy, there is a need to consider how the additional, and often unexpected, workload associated with community partnerships will be managed. A number of staff across the projects raised concerns regarding this issue:

There is a huge push within DOC to involve communities but it takes a lot of time. I know how much work it takes. … We have to greatly increase our resources if we are doing this.

If someone else came forward with an idea, you really need to have someone dedicated to it.

A concern of mine is that each group requires so much [time]. Cumulative little bits become big bits and it becomes huge. These groups are determined and [I] hate [the groups] to have expectations that [we] can't fulfil. [DOC's] credibility just goes out the window.

With the Trust we've committed DOC to a level of involvement that we can't do with other groups. The perception is that [staff] should do a lot. I am concerned that DOC staff are committing [to groups] when they don't know what is involved.

All of the case study projects involved a substantial commitment of DOC staff time and resources, and often this commitment was markedly more than had originally been anticipated. However, once DOC had made a commitment to a project, there was often an expectation that the department would 'help out' where needed to ensure the success of the project, often going 'beyond the call of duty' and the level of support (in time and resources) that had originally been expected.

7.2 COMMUNITY V. DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION PRIORITIES

When asked why DOC had decided to form partnerships with these groups, most staff answered that at the time they were the only group that had approached DOC and therefore staff did not need to prioritise or choose among

different projects. However, with DOC's Conservation with Communities Strategy and other related initiatives, there is now a greater push towards community involvement in conservation. In addition, some of the case study projects have led to other groups wanting to start their own projects, and these new groups are also seeking assistance from DOC. With the possibility of an increasing number of groups approaching DOC for support and assistance, there is a need for staff to consider how they prioritise and decide what projects to support and, in some cases, how they turn down a group if they don't have sufficient time and resources for their project.

According to one DOC staff member:

> *Things have got busier and more community groups are keen. … There is a significant risk to the capacity of the organisation with an increasing number of groups wanting to work with DOC … There is a risk of overstretching people with good attitudes and skills to burn out. We need to carefully manage expectations.*

The priorities of the community groups may also differ from those of DOC. It is therefore important to consider whether DOC should alter its priorities in order to accommodate a community initiative or, instead, support projects that fit within DOC's own priorities. In the case of the Tuatapere Hump Track Trust, building a new track was not a priority for DOC. However, once the decision was made to support the Trust, DOC changed its priorities so it could offer time and resources to the project. However, this did cause some concern and tension within DOC, as a staff member notes:

> *Negativity bubbled to the surface [within the department] as there was a risk DOC would pick up the costs. [Some staff were saying] why are we building a whole new track when we are rationalising and closing down tracks? It wasn't in line with what the department was doing. Community [involvement] is being pushed now; it wasn't five years ago as we were in an era of downsizing. [There are] issues when community objectives are different from the department's objectives.*

The Weed Busters group also focuses on the priorities of group members rather than those of DOC. According to the DOC Rural Advocate working with the group, the focus is on action and enthusiasm. Communities will be enthusiastic about something that is a priority to them, and 'on their own back doorstep'. Similarly, with another group, one DOC staff member commented:

> *No other community group was asking for DOC assistance at this stage. The work was not a DOC priority at all … conservation-wise it is not a high priority … The project is beneficial for community relations.*

It is evident that group priorities will not always fit in with DOC priorities, and individuals will often want to work on things that are important to them, often on a micro scale, as opposed to looking at how they can support DOC's wider strategic priorities. As one DOC staff member commented, people will frequently want to be 'volunteers for themselves, not volunteers for DOC'. With more groups approaching DOC, it is important to consider where staff target their limited time and resources.

7.3   DEFINING 'COMMUNITIES'

Another key consideration for DOC staff is what is meant by the term 'community'. As discussed in Section 3, the term 'community' can be used to refer to a range of different types and clusters of people. When developing a partnership with the 'community' it is important that DOC staff consider who is included, and who is possibly excluded, from this particular 'community'.

In a number of the case studies discussed, the projects are run by a small group of people without any, or only minimal, wider community involvement. In some cases, there have been comments from others in the community that these types of projects are 'elite' or 'exclusive'.

As mentioned previously, often the goal of these projects is not to involve the wider community, but to achieve specific tangible conservation outcomes such as pest control or species protection in an efficient manner. However, some community participants discussed the tension between running a project 'as a business' and also providing for wider community involvement:

> *[The secretary] keeps reminding [the chairperson] to include the community. We have to be a bit inefficient because the community funds us. [The chairperson] would prefer just to have six efficient people … The [committee] is very white, upper class and rural.*

It is important to realise that partnerships between DOC and community groups are only one small sub-set of the range of community involvement. Often community projects are initiated and run by people who are already committed to conservation goals and who have the time, resources, skills and confidence to do something about them. While they may be achieving ecological outcomes, some community projects may not contribute to DOC's goals for community involvement or raising conservation awareness amongst particular social, economic or cultural groups, and it is important to consider ways of involving a wider range of people or groups in conservation partnerships. The Weed Busters initiative is a key example of a way to actively involve community members who may not have initiated their own conservation projects but who have the enthusiasm and energy to participate if DOC acts as a catalyst and brings people together. As members of the group commented:

> *I hadn't thought about being part of this before … didn't have the people power. This group gave us the power.*

> *I saw it in the paper—the first working bee—I thought, this is me, I want to be involved.*

> *At the meeting we found out about other people who were interested. It's a privilege to be involved.*

> *I was surprised that there were so many people interested in weeds … surprised at the cross section of people. It's a good way to get a project started. It brings in people you wouldn't expect.*

Another key consideration is the role of iwi / hapu in these community partnerships. The Department of Conservation involves iwi / hapu in the management of conservation in accordance with its responsibilities to give effect to the Treaty of Waitangi in its work (Department of Conservation 2001).

Some of the study groups had been reluctant to involve iwi / hapu in the partnership project and instead wanted to focus on 'getting the job done'. In some cases, this appeared to put DOC staff in a difficult position. While DOC staff were keen for the groups to involve iwi / hapu in the project, some community members were reluctant to do so and saw it as a divergence from the goal, as DOC being 'politically correct' or, as one person commented, 'there is too much warm fuzzy [stuff] with DOC and iwi'.

Thus, while projects may be initiated by members of the 'community', there can be debate over whether some of these are 'community' projects. As DOC has wide goals of community participation that include a range of social, economic and cultural groups, it is important to consider how DOC can work to actively involve other groups in conservation. As illustrated in the Weed Busters example, to involve a range of people in conservation partnerships may require DOC to act as a catalyst and provide opportunities for community members to come together to initiate projects, as opposed to waiting for groups to approach DOC.

7.4 STAFF ROLES

Another key consideration is whether DOC staff should be active members of community groups. In one case study, a conservancy staff member became a committee member of the community group because he lived in the area. While he was not the DOC representative on the group (this was the responsibility of the Area Manager), he provided technical advice to the group and guided the group through the consents process, and was often identified as a DOC representative by other group members. When the Area Manager received a letter from the group he would simply contact the conservancy staff member who, he knew, had written the letter on behalf of the group. The situation of having staff on the committee did initially create some problems for the Area Manager, as he comments:

> *Conservancy staff were … giving advice [to the group] when they shouldn't … [and there was] conflicting and confusing advice from staff to the group … I said the word is from me. The roles need to be understood. We need to be internally consistent. The line is absolutely critical.*

However, in this case, committee members were very positive about having a DOC staff member on the committee. As one person commented:

> *Having him gave us credibility for funding. He could tell us what to do and give us the best DOC advice. [We] took his advice [on poison] every year. He could discuss the pros and cons … He was the right person—a resident—not just DOC. Good sound technical advice.*

The notion of having a DOC staff member on a committee worked in this case as he was a local and part of the community. However, as the Area Manager noted, it is essential that the roles of staff and what 'hat' they are wearing are made clear.

In another example there had been some concern over the level of involvement of a DOC staff member in a community group. While the staff member is no

longer a member of the group, he still has an informal arrangement with it and attends all their committee meetings. However, DOC staff had been concerned that it was unclear whether the priorities of the staff member were those of DOC or the group. As a DOC staff member notes:

> *[The staff member] had problems with [DOC] managers as the group grew. [The department] didn't set up a framework for [the staff member] and we couldn't get [the staff member] to divorce [him / herself] emotionally. We got [staff member] to leave the group but [staff member] couldn't divorce [him / herself] from them.*

It is evident that in some cases DOC staff will have a strong personal or emotional connection with a group that may blur the lines of responsibility and representation. It is clear that if staff are members of a group or have a strong emotional connection to a group, their personal and professional roles need to be transparent to both the community group and DOC.

7.5 THE DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION'S ROLE

When developing a project in partnership with a community group, it is also important to consider the desired end goal in terms of the level of involvement by DOC. In relation to the continuum in Fig. 3: is the end goal to be at the right end of the continuum with DOC having minimal or no involvement in the management and running of the project, or will DOC continue to have a high level of involvement for the duration of the project?

One of the goals of DOC's Conservation with Communities Strategy is to develop skills and capabilities within communities so they can undertake their own initiatives. With this in mind, it may be expected that the ultimate goal for DOC's community projects is that DOC supports groups to get started and then steps back and leaves projects to the community. In relation to one group, some members commented that DOC's role was to come up with the initial funding 'which kicked us off' and now it was up to the group to look for funding and support elsewhere:

> *It's good for DOC to have a role in seeding funding—it gives the operation credibility.*

However, a number of staff commented that they did not think it was appropriate for DOC to step out of these community projects, and some community groups also commented that they wanted to continue to work in partnership with DOC. One example of this is the Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi which was set up to support DOC's work. While it is feasible that the Supporters could take over the running of the island, the group wants DOC to retain this role. In addition, DOC staff members commented that they would not want to leave the management of the island to the Supporters as it now has an international profile and it is important that it continues to be associated with DOC.

It is clear that the ultimate end goal, in terms of DOC's level of involvement, will vary for different projects. Some groups may ultimately prefer to not work closely with DOC, while others will choose to continue to work in partnership.

However, across DOC's work with communities, the Conservation with Communities Strategy sends a strong signal that DOC does have a long-term role in developing the skills and capacity of communities to do their own work. With this in mind, a number of staff commented that communities need to be involved in DOC's staff training programmes and groups need to have opportunities to network. A number of groups commented that other community groups had approached them to get information and advice on how to get started and how to develop strategic plans. In the case of Project Kiwi, the group was able to share their suggestions and advice at an ecological restoration hui organised by DOC's local Area Office. Members of Project Kiwi were positive about this hui and believed that DOC needed to facilitate more interaction and sharing of information between groups.

8. Conclusions

As stated in section 1, the purpose of this study is to identify:

- The types of partnerships DOC has with community groups
- The key features of effective community groups
- The key features of effective partnerships between DOC and community groups
- The factors to consider when developing new partnerships between DOC and community groups
- Recommendations for the implementation of DOC's Conservation with Communities Strategy

The continuums in Figs 1 (community groups) and 3 (community partnerships) help to provide a framework for considering the wide range of community groups that DOC has partnerships with and the dynamics of these partnerships. There are many types of partnerships and this research has touched on a few of these by reviewing seven case studies. The purpose of these conclusions, therefore, is to highlight a number of points that should be considered in future DOC and community group partnerships. In particular, the need to facilitate community involvement, play multiple and often unexpected roles, and show a long-term commitment to the partnership.

8.1 FACILITATING COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

When developing partnerships with communities, it is important that DOC staff consider who is included, and who is possibly excluded from these communities. Often conservation projects are initiated and run by people in communities who are already committed to conservation goals and who have the time, resources, skills, confidence and capability to do something about these goals. Such groups frequently attempt to run their projects in an efficient 'business-like' manner in order to achieve specific ecological outcomes and meet the requirements of the funders, and there may only be minimal

opportunities for wider community involvement. Thus, while these projects may address specific ecological outcomes, they may not always contribute to DOC's goals of supporting a range of social, economic and cultural communities to develop the skills and capability they need to do conservation work. It is therefore important that DOC considers new and innovative ways of involving other communities in conservation work.

A number of people in the Weed Busters group commented that the group would not have started without the leadership and resources of DOC, as members did not have the financial resources to initiate such a project. Thus, in order to ensure a range of communities have the opportunity to be involved in conservation work, DOC may need to take on a more active role as catalyst and facilitator, as happened with Weed Busters.

8.2 PLAYING MULTIPLE AND UNEXPECTED ROLES

It is also evident that while DOC staff will take on different roles in different DOC and community group projects, they will also often be required to assume a number of roles within individual projects. As outlined in Section 4, the role of DOC staff members can range from initiator to technical advisor to support provider to participant. While the role of a staff member may be clearly stipulated at the beginning of a project, the case studies clearly illustrate that this role can change markedly over the course of a project. Once DOC has committed to a project, there is a need for flexibility and for staff to adopt a range of roles in order to make progress with the project. While an MOU or other agreement may clearly stipulate the roles of each party, the case studies demonstrate that projects will often develop and evolve in significantly different ways from what had originally been intended. As each project changes and evolves, so too will the roles of each party involved in a project. While it is important to learn from the experiences of other projects, there is no sure template for developing DOC and community group partnerships. Instead, it is important to acknowledge that both parties will need to be flexible and able to adapt to unexpected developments.

8.3 DEMONSTRATING A LONG-TERM COMMITMENT

As well as being able to adapt to change across the course of projects, it is also important that DOC considers its relationship with groups over the longer term. Just as a group has made a long-term commitment to achieving a specific conservation outcome, DOC has also made a long-term commitment to the group. It is evident that the success of many of the case study partnerships is based on relationships between individual DOC staff and the community groups, and that community groups will also often make a distinction between their positive relationship with individual staff members and the rest of DOC. In order to demonstrate to a group the value placed on a community partnership, DOC's long-term commitment needs to be clearly greater than just the particular efforts of individual staff members working with the community group.

9. Recommendations for improving DOC's partnerships with community groups

This study has highlighted a number of approaches that DOC could consider to improve its partnerships with community groups and thus implement its Conservation with Communities Strategy. These are listed below.

9.1 BUILDING DOC CAPABILITY

1. Undertake an information campaign, targeted at all staff, that identifies why DOC needs to work with communities. This should explain the objectives for, and the benefits of, working with communities.

2. Provide regular opportunities for staff to meet and share their experiences of working with communities and best practice; for example, knowledge of MOUs, funding opportunities and staff roles.

3. Regularly review the roles of key staff members in each partnership, make adjustments to roles and workloads where appropriate, and provide increased support where needed.

4. Recognise, acknowledge and value the contributions staff make to community partnerships and accommodate the additional workloads often associated with these projects.

5. Allow for flexibility in business planning to accommodate any unexpected developments during a community project.

6. Ensure that the project is bigger than one staff member and that senior managers are committed to it, and have ongoing involvement in it.

7. Provide opportunities for staff to further develop skills for working with communities; for example, in project initiation and facilitation.

9.2 SHARING CONSERVATION WORK

9.2.1 Partnerships

1. Establish a process for determining what types of projects DOC should become involved in and the appropriate level of involvement for each project type; for example, projects that fit in with DOC priorities or projects that reflect community priorities.

2. Be direct with community groups about the level of involvement and support DOC can offer.

3. Ensure the roles of DOC and the community group are clearly stated and regularly reviewed.

4. Ensure there is always a key DOC contact person for the group and that this person has an effective working relationship with group members.

5. Ensure that the DOC contact person and the community group are clear about what decisions the contact person is authorised to make on behalf of DOC.

6. Ensure effective transition processes are in place when there are changes in DOC staff.

7. Ensure there is regular face-to-face contact between the community group and the DOC representative.

8. Provide feedback to community groups on their work plans and other initiatives.

9. Keep detailed records of all meetings with the group and all decisions made.

10. Invite the community group to meet annually with the local DOC Conservator, Area Manager and other key senior managers to ensure the group feels valued.

11. Meet with the community group annually to discuss and reflect on the direction of the project, the project outcomes, the roles of each partner and whether any changes are needed.

12. Encourage and support groups to celebrate their achievements.

13. Undertake a survey of all community partners (using a postal questionnaire) in order to further explore the dynamics of conservation partnerships and their conservation outcomes[2].

9.2.2 Opportunities for participation

1. Facilitate opportunities for community members to be involved in conservation, particularly those social, economic and ethnic groups that are unlikely to initiate their own projects without support from DOC.

2. Work with other organisations, including regional councils and territorial local authorities, in order to provide opportunities for a range of community members to be involved in conservation.

3. Encourage community groups to include objectives relating to conservation awareness and advocacy as well as ecological objectives.

4. Participate in projects that are a priority for communities (but not necessarily for DOC) in order to encourage community involvement in and ownership of conservation work.

5. Produce guidelines on how to start a conservation project for interested community groups that outline what DOC can offer, potential funding sources, and so on.

6. Provide information to community groups on the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi and the significance of including iwi / hapu in community partnerships.

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[2] As mentioned in Section 1, this research does not evaluate the conservation outcomes of the community partnerships but, rather, aims to identify the key issues, features and factors that can influence the dynamics of effective partnerships and working relationships between DOC and community groups.

7. Provide information to community groups on why DOC wants participation opportunities for a range of social, economic and ethnic groups and encourage groups to involve a wide range of people.

8. Encourage wider community participation in existing community projects through volunteering, community newsletters and other initiatives.

9. Undertake research on the best way to involve a range of social, economic and ethnic groups in conservation initiatives and the barriers to involvement.

9.2.3 Community skills

1. Provide opportunities for community groups to come together and share their experiences in terms of what they have learnt about undertaking conservation projects, strategic planning, funding opportunities, MOUs, legal structures, pest control and so on.

2. Share DOC's research findings and other technical information with community groups in accessible and 'user-friendly' ways (e.g. community hui).

3. Invite community groups to participate in DOC presentations, workshops and training opportunities.

4. Facilitate training opportunities for community group members to develop the skills and capabilities they need to do their own conservation work.

5. Provide information to community groups on DOC's structure, how DOC makes decisions, the roles of staff, and relevant legislation.

6. Share the findings from this research, particularly the key features of successful groups, with community groups.

7. Undertake further research to identify the skills training and resources community groups are interested in receiving, and to identify the most effective ways of supporting communities to develop these skills.

10. Acknowledgements

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Appendix 1

This letter was sent to the seven community groups, inviting them to participate in the research.

Research into partnerships between community groups and the Department of Conservation

The Department of Conservation is currently undertaking a piece of social research on partnerships between community groups and DOC and would like to include [name of group] as a case study in this research.

Background

The Department of Conservation is currently involved in a number of partnerships with community groups and would like to establish more of these in the future. However, in order to assist with the development of new partnerships and to enhance ones that already exist, DOC would like to learn more about the key features of current partnerships.

Purpose of the research

The purpose of this research is to look at seven existing partnerships between the Department of Conservation and community groups in order to identify the different types of partnerships that currently exist and the key features of effective partnerships.

The research will be based on interviews and small group discussions with people working in partnership with DOC and DOC staff.

Some of the key areas that the research will cover include:
• The nature of the current partnership between the community group and DOC
• The expectations of the community group and DOC
• The ways in which the community group and DOC would like to see the relationship further develop or improve
• The outcomes to date from the partnership and future expected outcomes

The final report will include a section on each of the partnerships as well as a section on common themes and issues across the partnership case studies.

Timeframe

If [name of group] is interested in being involved in this research, interviews with the Trust and DOC staff would take place sometime in [date]. The final report would be available to [name of group] and staff towards the end of 2003.

Please let me know if you are interested in being involved and, if so, we can then talk further about the research and arrange a suitable date to meet.

Carla Wilson
Social Scientist
Department of Conservation
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Ph 04 471 3123

Appendix 2

As discussed in Section 2, this research used a semi-structured interview approach. In this approach, the interviewee plays a key role in deciding the priorities and direction for the interview and the questions act as a guide to ensure the interview stays focused on the key themes.

A2.1 Community participants

Project overview
What is the purpose of the project?
Where did the idea for the project come from?
How did you get involved in the project?
What is your role in the project?
Have you been involved in anything like this before?

Group processes

How did the group start?
Please describe how the project was developed and each stage the group went through?
What type of structure / model / process did the group adopt?
How did the group decide what structure / model / process to adopt?
How did the group decide who would be on the committee or trust?
Did the group develop a vision / mission statement/project plan? Why or why not?
How is the project funded?
Does the group have paid staff and / or volunteers?
How does the group communicate internally?
What skills are needed within the group?
Has group membership changed over the course of the project? Why or why not?
Have there been any 'burn-out' issues? If so, why and how has this been dealt with?
Has there been any conflict or problems within the group? If so, over what issues and how have these been resolved?

Wider community

How would you describe the community in this area?
Has the project received wider community support?
What types of opportunities are there for wider community involvement in the project?
Who are the other key individuals, groups or organisations who have been involved in the project? What are their roles?

Relationship with the Department of Conservation

When did the group approach DOC?
What had been your experiences with DOC before this project?
What were your expectations of DOC?

What role did you want DOC to play in the project?

What are the advantages / disadvantages of working in partnership with DOC?

What sorts of things have been useful from DOC? What can be improved on?

Would you like DOC to have more or less of a role in the project?

Do you have a formal agreement with DOC? Why or why not?

Has there been any conflict or problems with DOC? If so, over what issues and how have these been resolved?

Reflections on the project

What were your expectations when the project was first initiated (in terms of the time it would take and resources needed)?

In what ways has it involved more or less time and resources than you expected?

Why has the project got up and running and continued on?

What have been the highlights for you?

What have been the key ingredients that have kept the project going?

What have been the key difficulties with the project?

What have been the key lessons learnt?

What would you do differently if you were starting again?

What advice do you have for groups keen to start a similar project?

What advice do you have for DOC staff when they are approached by a community group?

What is your vision for the future of the group?

What role would you like DOC to play in the group in the future?

A2.2 DEAPRTMENT OF CONSERVATION STAFF

DOC Overview

How long have you worked for DOC?

What is your role in DOC?

Involvement with the community group

How long has DOC been involved with the community project?

Why did DOC decide to get involved in this community project?

Was the issue a high priority for DOC?

Had your office been involved in a project like this before?

What did DOC see as the benefits of getting involved?

What was DOC's relationship like with this community before the project started?

DOC's role

What is DOC's role in the community project?

What is your specific role?

What are the roles of other staff involved in the project?

How did DOC decide what role to play in the community project?

Did you refer to other models / examples of community partnerships when deciding what role to play? If so, what models / examples?

Has the role of DOC changed over the course of the project? If so, in what ways?

Has there been any conflict or problems between DOC and the community group? If so, over what issues and how have these been resolved?

Do you have a formal agreement (e.g. an MOU) with the group? Why or why not?

How would you like to see the role of DOC develop in the future?

Reflections on the project

What were your expectations when the project was first initiated (in terms of the time it would take and resources needed)?

In what ways has it involved more or less time and resources than you expected?

Why has the project got up and running and continued on?

What have been the highlights for you?

What benefits have developed from the partnership?

What have been the key ingredients that have kept the partnership project going?

What have been the key difficulties with the project?

What have been the key lessons learnt?

What advice do you have for groups keen to start a similar project?

What advice do you have for DOC staff when they are approached by a community group?

What process would you adopt if another group approached you wanting to start a project?