

## Closing Address and Call for Action

Harvey Brookes  
Chairman  
New Zealand Coastal Society

It's unusual to attend a conference which begins by taking an artists' perspective. But that is without doubt the right place to begin, and perhaps also the right place to end here today. Co-incidentally in a recent Harvard Business Review article it was revealed that the BFA (Bachelor of Fine Arts) is replacing the MBA as the new currency of organisational and cultural transformation. One can't help but ponder a future where competing sides of a development debate roll out their expert coastal artists to debate the merits of a development- the best artistic vision wins. While not wishing to minimise the important utilitarian role of our coasts and lakes especially for ports and other transport and people-related infrastructure, the truth is that what brings us here is a deep artistic, aesthetic, emotional and even spiritual level of care for our coasts and lakes. It's probably not an exaggeration to say that of all natural environments, the water's edge is one which humanity cannot avert its gaze from, or keep itself away from (much to the irritation of hazard scientists!). Herman Melville in Moby Dick expressed it eloquently when he said:

*"But look – here comes more crowds, pacing straight for the water, and seemingly bound for a dive – strange – nothing will content them but the extremist limit of the land"*

If you have sat at dusk on the shore of KariKari Beach and watched the sun set over an unspoiled Puheke Hill then you know my favourite coastal place. And for that in no small measure I have the EDS to thank for their commitment, fight and vision more than 20 years ago. It is therefore appropriate that as our coasts and lakes are put under development pressure like never seen before, that the EDS again takes a leadership role in leading a vision and a path forwards for us all.

In looking towards the future I cannot help but look for inspiration from the past- one of the main reasons being that we have had this debate many times before. The people are different, laws have changed, and the pressures have intensified but some messages ring as true today as they did a generation or more ago. In 1973 three farsighted gentlemen by the names of John Morton, David Thom and Ron Locker produced a book many of you will know and probably still own. And like me, your copy is probably badly scuffed, often borrowed and dearly treasured. *Seacoast in the Seventies* remains for me a touchstone of the values which New Zealanders place on our coast (and lakes), and the duty we all have to ensure that those values are preserved and protected- whether we be a developer, a conservationist, a lawyer, politician, engineer, planner or artist. What always strikes me as ironic about this book is that aside from some changes in social and political context, the concerns expressed in the early 1970s (especially the central role of landscape as an integrating theme) are as present today as they were then, even though the scale of issues and pressures today dwarfs those a generation ago (thus proving that any assessment of environmental degradation is a relative judgement). A collection of some of the passages from the book which strike me the most include:

*"The past throws its shadow forward. Bad laws, customs and attitudes are carried on unless an evaluation is made, and new principles established for action. The coastline is deteriorating too fast for the corrective measures which have been so far set in motion... The gulf between good planning on paper and official action is still wide, and the wheels, where they turn at all, turn too slowly. Pollution is much talked*

*about as if it were the major conservation problem in this country. It is secondary to unwise decisions about the use of land, the results of which are far more damaging and irreversible. Different attitudes will be required of us as individuals. We must be prepared to give up some cherished freedoms...in exchange for the wider and lasting freedom of our coastline for all our people...*

*Our cities are entering a phase of renewal, and the cultural opportunities they offer increase from year to year. But the wild and beautiful places with which nature endowed us, recede. For modern urban man (sic) opportunities for frequent retreat to these unspoiled places are vital. Our real standard of living depends on it. The lift to the spirit that comes from the sea, as from the hills, is more than just a luxury."*

So if today we wish to make a call for action, let it be that these issues not be allowed to persist for another generation: to address the very long standing barriers to achieving our common vision for the coast and our lakes. And to whom are we calling? In this room are the law makers, the judges, the lawyers, the scientists, the planners, the landscape architects, the developers and of course the passionate artists in us all. What's more, the community we appeal to is also us. Amongst us are probably plenty of coastal and lakeside property owners and users with more than a technical, and possibly a selfish interest in the achievement of a sustainable future for our coast- and a great personal responsibility. Charity begins at home so, if to nobody else the call is to ourselves. The challenge is to accept that we all have a role, a duty to the community and we all owe it to ourselves and our children to settle only for absolute excellence.

As leaders we must accept our role is to be agents of transformation, not of management transaction. No matter what part we play we must all be driven by a common purpose – a single vision. And it's not just our vision. There is more than ample evidence that the quality of coastal/lakeside areas is a key driver in the quality of life, regardless of culture or place. In Auckland quality of life surveys for the past 10 years have consistency shown that access to a natural coastal environment is the overwhelming prime factor which affects quality of life – not economic opportunities, jobs or other forms of recreation. As citizens in a democracy where we all expect the freedom to choose and apply our own aesthetic standard, there will always need to be a foundation of excellent law, planning and the best technical advice to make the wisest (or most sustainable) choices for the greater good, but our role as leaders must be to define and draw people towards a better vision for the future. This means that we must avoid an alternative future where our standard toolbox of actions continues to include things such as:

- Bargaining as a standard form of communication
- Adherence to precedent- which will always stifle innovation
- Strict interpretation of rules
- Managerialism
- Contractual mindsets
- Silence
- Competition for resources
- Fear of failure; and
- Many levels of authorisation

And to move towards a transformational approach where we embrace:

- A model of community citizenship
- A constant search for new ways and ideas

- Lateral thinking- innovation
- An insistence on excellence as the only standard- best practice
- Saying what we think; and
- Taking responsibility for our own actions

I put it to you that the successes you have discussed and heard of here have been as a result of transformational leadership, while the failures and issues are the result of an often deeply ingrained transactional approach.

The good can easily become the enemy of the great. We cannot let our coasts and lakes become our greatest tragedy of the commons. By being here I hope that you also acknowledge that a step change is needed both in the things we do and the way we do them. We must make sure that regardless of whether we see the world through an impressionist, realist, cubist or even just a plain sketchy viewing glass, the sheer artistry and majesty of our coasts and lakes are at the core of what we have come from as tangata whenua, pakeha, New Zealanders, and where we will go into the future. The challenge for each of you now is assess how you will, each as a leader in your own right, make at least one small change towards the visions which have been expressed in successive ways for the past 30 years. It would be **the** greatest tragedy if somebody, in a world ignorant and devoid of coastal and lacustrine artistry reads the proceedings of this conference in 2035 and wonders...if only....

At the height of the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 (not a situational analogy!), Kennedy stated:

*“When at some future date the High Court of history sits in judgement on each of us, it will ask ‘Were we truly people of courage – with the courage to stand up to ones enemies – and the courage to stand up, when necessary to one’s associates?’”*

I wish you well.

Harvey Brookes  
Chairman, New Zealand Coastal Society