



MOA POINT

te take, te tiko, te taniwha

THE pa site of Rangitatau occupies a prominent hilltop at the entrance to te Whanganui a Tara, Wellington Harbour. With a full 360 degrees viewpoint, Rangitatau proved a formidable defence for the Ngai Tara iwi, the mana whenua of Poneke.

With the pa site of his tupuna, Tuteremoana virtually on his backyard and dominating his skyline, Ray Ahipene Mercer is finding that his whakapapa has proved that the best defence is offence as he battles to prevent the continued desecration taking place below Rangitatau.

The fight is over the sewage outfall of Wellington city at Moa Point. Untreated sewage has been pouring from this outfall pipe for many years despoiling kaimoana and desecrating a fishing resource guaranteed to the Maori people under article two of the Treaty of Waitangi. It is equally an affront to pakeha with flow on effects to health from the polluted water.

For Ray and his allies, the Clean Water Campaign, the take is quite simple. All the people in Wellington contribute to the tiko, so all should share in its removal.

For the operators of the outfall, the Wellington City Council, it's equally clear unlike the moana around the outfall. Sewage is a necessity of life and must go somewhere. Moa Point has proved handy for many years but the increasing community concern regarding environmental issues means improvements must be considered.

The council has been involved in a battle with the Clean Water Campaign for the past year over plans to build a milliscreening plant at Moa Point. The council says this would reduce the sewage in size and so make it easier to be broken down and absorbed by the sea.

Opponents say milliscreening would be no more than a giant sieve and make less obvious, dangerous pollution. They say it could even give a false sense of security to people that the shellfish and surrounding beaches are safe for use.

Ray lives at Breaker Bay, just around the corner from Moa Point, and along with local residents and other allies such as the environmental action group,



the Clean Water Campaign, has worked to get improvements. This has included adequate warning signs at Moa Point. Rays says the old ones were almost illegible through weathering. Even newer ones are so full of jargonese that they are not effective as a health warning.

He says many times people in the water even collecting shellfish have to be told about the outfall. He provided Wellington City councillor David Bull with warning messages in Samoan and Maori as well as English, but says nothing came of it.

Ray is a 37-year-old musician and guitar maker by trade. He spent most of his life in England, returning to his homeland in 1981, the time of the Springbok protests. For him it was a rude awakening to divisions in New Zealand society, divisions that cut right across racial, economic and political lines. In the aftermath of a more conscious New Zealand, Ray found a vitality and an increased social concern. In a linking of this concern with his musicians background, Ray has received the support of the Wellington Musician's Union in opposition to the outfall at Moa Pt. He also received the backing of the recent Maori Trade Unionists' Hui at Rotorua. He says his involvement in the

Clean Water Campaign came more from a cultural viewpoint than just environmental concern.

"I am a Maori first. I've avoided getting wrapped up in the technical aspects, the dispersal rates, the flow rates etc, and stuck to the principles." He has the support of his parents, mother Romona Ahipene and father Gene Mercer.

Ray is most angry that two alternate sites have been investigated by the Wellington City encompassing primary and secondary treatment. Both Gollans Valley among the hills on the east side of the harbour, and Karori Stream mouth were found to be environmentally superior and similar in cost to Moa Point according to Ray. That cost was estimated at more than 70 million dollars.

The milliscreening plant at Moa Point is costed at ten million dollars for which the council has to get a loan. However ratepayers rejected the loan proposal in a recent poll. Other sites are now being considered.

The council has said a milliscreening plant is just the first stage with secondary treatment, so to speak, in the pipeline. The debate has raged equally fiercely within the council, with Labour and Citizen party politics, each accusing the other of time-wasting.