

## FROM HYDRO TOWN TO COUNTY TOWN

### 11.1 INTRODUCTION

Several 'new towns' were established in New Zealand during the 1950s and 1960s, all bearing the distinctive marks of the Ministry of Works' town planning in their curving streets and culs-de-sac, uniformity of houses, pedestrian shopping centres, parking lots, and separation from the traffic on the main highway. Two types can be distinguished: timber towns such as Tokoroa, Kawerau, and Murupara, and hydro towns associated with the construction of hydroelectric power projects in both islands. The early hydro towns were not intended to be permanent, as timber towns were, but some, such as Mangakino, survived anyway. Turangi was the first hydro town built with the intention of creating a permanent town, after lobbying on the part of the Taupo County Council.<sup>1</sup>

The new towns were characterised by rapid early growth and the dominance of a single employer. In hydro towns, the Ministry of Works played a similar role to a forestry company in a timber town. The project engineer was the town boss, a sort of mayor, director, arbitrator, and decision-maker. The Ministry was the landlord and employer. In Turangi, the Ministry of Works was dubbed 'Uncle MOW', and played a dominant role in the Turangi Liaison Committee, which was the form of local government between 1965 and 1974. All the hydro towns had some sort of welfare association to coordinate community activities. The Mangakino welfare association controlled the civic centre and sports grounds and consisted of representatives of various town organisations. When Mangakino hydro workers moved to Turangi, the welfare association moved there too.

### 11.2 BOOM TOWNS

In their early years of rapid growth, towns such as Turangi, Tokoroa, and Kinleith exhibited the characteristics of 'boom towns'. This differentiates them from towns of comparable size which have evolved over several decades as urban centres serving a rural hinterland. The new towns exhibit distinctive spatial characteristics in their layout and social organisations. They have a single employer, a young population dominated by single men, and a 'paternalistic attitude of "management" towards town development'.<sup>2</sup> This paternalism stems from the fact that, to attract employment and compensate for the remote surroundings, the single employer must provide a range of amenities and features, such as housing, schools, electricity and water supply, medical facilities, and parks and other recreation areas. The head of the company or construction force, therefore, 'tends to be the sole arbiter of the way in which the settlement is run'.<sup>3</sup>

One of the biggest problems facing a new town is the development of a community identity. There is a high potential for social disruption in a rapidly growing town with a

transient, multicultural, immigrant population and a typical new town age-sex structure.

Sociologist Don Chapple, in his study of Tokoroa, commented:

**In the mushroom growth of an industrial boom town, the slow wisdom of traditional community life is not possible. The boom town is a synthetic community. Its inhabitants have not all been nurtured in its rhythms and its rules. Most have had to adjust to these, and adjust much more rapidly than people have been accustomed to over most of human history. There are many merits in the new and expanding cultural environment. There can be stimulating variety, and a pattern of status and prestige which is more fluid than in most traditional communities. A premium may thus be placed upon openmindedness, initiative and talent. But there are also many hazards. The social casualty rate measured in terms of loneliness and apathy, whakamaa (a compound of shyness, shame and lack of confidence), and frustration, is probably very high, much higher than in older communities.<sup>4</sup>**

All these new towns passed through stressful early years of mushroom growth before evolving into more settled communities. But they all retain a distinctive character imposed on them by the physical, economic, and psychological domination of a single enterprise, whether it is a large pulp and paper mill or a massive power project. In Turangi, even though the Ministry of Works has left, the provision of alternative employment, especially for women and young people, has been a continuing challenge.

### 11.3 HOUSING LAYOUT

Chapple was particularly critical of the new towns' housing layout and house design, which reflected industrial needs rather than social benefits. He quoted a comment heard in Tokoroa in 1970 that those 'who create a town think in terms of numbers and labour force . . . [and] tend to forget that the numbers they are dealing with are people'.<sup>5</sup> As a sociologist, he considered that the Ministry of Works' town plans of the 1950s and 1960s were not appropriate for the social demands and uncertainties of new industrial communities:

**The New Zealand answer to housing people is supplied by engineering and animal husbandry; that is, the provision of cheap, sanitary boxes, arbitrarily partitioned, and hooked up to essential power, water, and drainage networks. All this is set in a few square yards of the flattest grazing land, and is bordered by a road or 'race' along which the breadwinner may be driven to or from the forest or factory where he labours. Spatial relationships between such house units, and between these and other facilities – especially those which cater for the needs of young mothers, children and old people – are matters which have seldom exercised the minds of our town planners.<sup>6</sup>**

The Ministry of Works' houses were based on the assumption of a nuclear family – a married couple, with a father (the breadwinner), who worked on the project, and a mother, who stayed home to look after the children. Single workers lived in the 'single men's camps'. There was little flexibility for extended Maori families or for the grandparents'

generation. The houses were small and box-like and were not designed for large extended families.

#### **11.4 DYNAMICS OF NEW TOWNS**

In the 1960s, there was almost no information collected about the dynamics of the growth of new towns, and no assessment of their impact on host communities. Chapman has commented that ‘There are serious doubts whether we know much about the development of the New Zealand town once the provision of physical facilities is accomplished’. He wondered whether, in the construction of another new town, ‘New Zealand planners would have little more than broad impressions of how its new towns have progressed since the initial establishment of physical facilities’.<sup>7</sup> While a review of the research on new towns overseas would provide some general guidelines on the social processes involved, ‘it is no guarantee that detailed and non-physical community planning in New Zealand can be based upon any other than well documented local experience’.<sup>8</sup> It can be expected that new towns move from the early boom town years through a transition period to a social and demographic structure more typical of older small towns. It is during this transition stage that the potential for social disorganisation is greatest. Many of the workforce move on. Some will stay if alternative forms of employment are available. The new town has to attract other enterprises in order to keep its population and sustain its economic and social viability.

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In the early 1970s, Turangi people began to consider the implications of a reduction in the workforce. By 1973 the first two stages of the TPD were complete, including the ‘western diversions’ of water from the Whanganui, Whakapapa, and Tongariro Rivers to Lake Rotoaira, as well as the construction of the Tokaanu Power Station, tailrace, and tunnel. The ‘Moawhango diversion’ would not be complete until 1977, although a large reduction in the workforce was expected if the Rangipo scheme did not proceed. In early 1973, the total workforce on the TPD was about 1700.

In 1972 a survey of 300 households (including single men’s quarters and motor camps) in Turangi was carried out by B Mitcalfe and students of Wellington Teachers’ College. At that stage, no decision had been made about the construction of Rangipo or any other power project which the hydro construction workers could move to when the TPD was complete. In the early 1970s, Turangi was ‘entering the transitional phase’ as construction work wound down and diversification into other activities was considered in order to maintain employment opportunities. Mitcalfe observed that the decision to create a permanent town at Turangi was a ‘calculated risk’ and that Turangi remained ‘almost entirely dependent on the construction works for its economic wellbeing’.<sup>9</sup> Turangi was still a construction town and many families did not know how long they would stay. It all depended on employment opportunities; if there were other jobs, they might stay.

## **11.5 EMPLOYMENT AND RELATED PROBLEMS**

### **11.5.1 Commission for the Environment audit**

In 1973 the Ministry of Works produced an 'environmental impact statement' for the Rangipo power project, the first under the newly promulgated 'environmental protection and enhancement procedures'.<sup>10</sup> In this, the Ministry noted that the immediate survival of Turangi as a permanent town depended upon whether the Rangipo project went ahead, but that Rangipo would only delay an inevitable population decline from 6000 to 3000 people. However, the Ministry recognised the need for a 'labour intensive industry with a high added value' in Turangi. The interest of private industry in the town had thus far only been 'mild', although there was likely to be more involvement from various Government departments, in particular the Forest Service. The Ministry also hoped tourism based on the Tongariro fishery would expand.<sup>11</sup>

In its 'audit' of this 'environmental impact statement', the Commission for the Environment commented on the industrial prospects for Turangi and noted that there had been 'only limited interest' from private industrial developers. The large Ministry of Works workshops and hostel facilities were not being made available until a decision was made on Rangipo, and the commission observed that industry could not therefore make any firm commitments. Pointedly, the commission stated that Turangi residents 'tend to neglect

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opportunities to diversify the economic base of the town as long as they have the Ministry of Works to fall back on'. However, it noted that new efforts had been made since a symposium in May 1973 to find solutions to the problem of Turangi's future.<sup>12</sup>

The commission also noted developments in the forestry area, including negotiations between the Tuwharetoa Maori Trust Board and the Forest Service, begun in 1967, to lease land for afforestation; the planting of Lake Taupo Forest, begun in 1969; the commencement of planting in Rotoaira Forest by 1973; and prospects for other forestry development which could provide employment for some 150 people who would live in Turangi. The potential for tourism, including trout fishing, was also noted, especially an expectation that visitor numbers to Tongariro National Park would increase and that Turangi might 'share in a growing accommodation and service role'.<sup>13</sup> A decision to proceed with the Rangipo construction, the commission observed, would not solve Turangi's problems but would 'provide more time to find the right answers which will finally remove those doubts'.<sup>14</sup>

This audit also commented on the employment issue. One of the few submissions to the commission dealing with social issues was made by the president of the Turangi branch of the New Zealand Workers' Union in support of the Rangipo proposal, and outlined the benefits brought to local Maori by the construction of the Turangi township and the TPD. He explained that the town had brought with it a full range of social amenities and

opportunities, whereas formally there had been little to change Maori existing as ‘hewers of wood and drawers of water’. He said the local Maori, a large number of whom were members of his own union, sat on many local committees and took ‘a considerable part’ in the running of various activities in the town. Maori elders, he said, were very pleased with the situation, whereby the young people stayed and worked in their tribal area and families were kept together. In conclusion:

**The local Maori people are today enjoying a quality of living which would have been impossible in this area if the Tongariro Power Development had not gone ahead. Also, it should never be forgotten, that it was the foresight, co-operation and goodwill of the Tuwharetoa Tribe which facilitated the efficient construction of the Tongariro Power Development.<sup>15</sup>**

In the audit, based on the submissions made to it and on staff investigations, the commission noted that the Ministry of Works, the New Zealand Workers’ Union, and John Asher, the secretary of the Tuwharetoa Maori Trust Board, had confirmed the benefits of the TPD and the construction of the Turangi township to local Maori. Asher was confident, wrote the commission, that ‘given sufficient employment at centres near home, Maori youths will be happy to remain there rather than move to Auckland, Wellington or some other city’.<sup>16</sup>

### **11.5.2 Development prospects**

In May 1973, the Associate Minister of Works, Fraser Colman, spoke to a symposium on the future of Turangi which was organised by the Turangi Lions Club. Among other things, the Minister referred to the benefits that the town had brought to Ngati Tuwharetoa. He said that the Government would 'keep faith' with the Maori people who had parted with their lands for the township. He suggested that the urban drift of Maori youth could be 'arrested' through the use of 'training facilities in the vacated camps'. Colman noted, however, that 'it may be difficult to attract industry to Turangi' because of its isolation, lack of a rail link, and lack of nearby raw materials. He said that the Government would do its best, but that much depended on the local people preventing Turangi reverting to a 'weekend fishing village'. He went on to deny that the Government 'owes Turangi a living' and explained that the Government was always going to withdraw from the town once the TPD had been constructed. However, he said, the Government wanted 'to see industry in Turangi and we will do everything possible to make it as attractive as possible to potential investors who will contribute to the town's development'.<sup>17</sup>

The papers delivered in the symposium addressed the prospects in the Turangi district for the development of land, forestry, and tourism. The common theme was how to create alternative job opportunities. The most problematic was how to attract industrial enterprises to Turangi. In summary discussions at the symposium, however, the prospects for industrial development were viewed pessimistically. Turangi's disadvantageous location was 'all too obvious', and the town's provision of buildings, while attractive, 'did not offset other disadvantages'.<sup>18</sup> It was agreed that the kind of industry required 'must be light, non-polluting, and labour intensive (high added value)'. It was also noted that land had to be available and that buildings remaining for the TPD construction should be offered at attractive prices to encourage private enterprise.

In 1975 the Taupo County Council's planner, Peter Crawford, produced a report reviewing the social and economic issues and the future development of Turangi. Among the 'dilemmas' to be faced by Turangi in the late 1970s as the TPD work wound down, Crawford cited the maintenance of community investment despite the reduced economic base; the support of facilities built to cater for a much larger population; and future progress in both employment and community economic activity.<sup>19</sup> One of the aims of this report was to identify the factual matters which would provide the base for planning development strategies for Turangi in the future. Crawford noted that much planning in Turangi, while it had occurred in a period of constant change, had not been well thought out.<sup>20</sup>

By this stage, a decision had been made to proceed with Rangipo, but it was not clear by just how much the population would decline by the time the Rangipo project was completed. Population estimates varied, and Crawford suggested that this 'illustrates not

only the vulnerability of the settlement but also the hydro town character of the town'.<sup>21</sup> The population of Turangi in the 1971 census was 5994, compared with 1661 in 1966. Over the period 1966 to 1971, however, the population of the surrounding rural area had declined, but it was not clear to Crawford 'whether or not the rural depopulation was to the work created at Turangi or a general urban shift elsewhere in population'.<sup>22</sup>

As outlined in the previous chapter, the planning policy for the southern Lake Taupo region was to concentrate all urban development in Turangi, restrict rural residential development, and constrain other settlements, such as the Tokaanu village and more recent urban subdivisions at Motuoapa, Pukawa, and Kuratau, within existing limits. The intention of this policy was to encourage residential concentration in Turangi, which would also support the development of tourist accommodation and employment. It was also envisaged that Turangi would be the residential base for employees in forestry development, although the establishment of a timber, pulp, and paper processing plant in the Lake Taupo catchment area was ruled out on environmental grounds. Crawford considered that the prospects for industrial development in Turangi had been unrealistic given the distance to both raw materials and a sizeable market. He concluded that Turangi 'currently has little to offer an industrialist, apart from an exciting natural environment, which is of no industrial assistance or economic advantage'.<sup>23</sup> He considered that Turangi in 1975 'has been and is a Ministry of Works and Development construction town. That is a town established by statute'.<sup>24</sup> There was considerable social and economic dependence on the Ministry of Works. Over 70 percent of the population was either directly or indirectly employed by the Ministry, many of them having spent much of their working lives moving from project to project. 'Uncle MOW' provided social, economic, and cultural services. 'The basic philosophy of the Ministry,' he explained, '[was] to provide supporting and ancillary services to the construction work force.' The shift in management of the township to local government and the eventual departure of the Ministry meant that social and economic relationships would be 'drastically altered'.<sup>25</sup>

If the Ministry of Works had not come to Turangi, Crawford argued, there would have been some growth of the old Turangi village as a service centre with similar characteristics to Taupo. It would have also developed as a holiday accommodation centre, which would have expanded other service facilities in turn. Turangi's strategic significance – at the convergence of two State highways and the Tongariro River – also provided 'an important stopping place for travellers', and such places have traditionally been the point of growth for towns.<sup>26</sup>

In other words, the old Turangi village would have gradually expanded to meet the needs of increasing numbers of visitors. But the new construction town of Turangi had not been successfully grafted on the old village; it was separate, on the other side of SH1. In its 1973 audit, the Commission for the Environment remarked that the Turangi village, while well integrated socially with the new town, was 'almost entirely independent of the power scheme for employment' and could be expected to expand regardless of whether the Rangipo project went ahead.<sup>27</sup>

## **11.6 CONTROL IS TRANSFERRED TO THE TAUPO COUNTY COUNCIL**

On 12 January 1975, an agreement between the Minister of Works and the Taupo County Council was signed, transferring Turangi to local government control on 31 March 1975, following the expiry of the Turangi Township Act 1964 (B2(a):270–273). In this agreement, interim provision was made for the operation of a number of public utilities and the transfer of property. However, there was a good deal of further negotiation and it was not until March 1980 that a final agreement was signed (B2(a):274–304). The Rangipo power project was not commissioned until 1983 but, by the late 1970s, the Ministry of Works had begun disposing of some surplus properties. The substandard houses had to be removed because they did not comply with Taupo County Council building requirements, and most were sold for removal. The sections they had stood on were subsequently sold as residential sites. This process continued in the 1980s, accelerating in 1983 and 1984 as the Ministry finally departed. There were some pieces of land which had been taken under the Public Works Act 1928 but had never been used for the township and remained Crown land, and there was also undeveloped land in the industrial area. Given the statements made in the early 1970s about the prospects for attracting industrial enterprises, it seems hard to justify the Crown's acquisition of the industrial area. Ironically, at the time, Ministry of Works officials and the Taupo County Council had seen the acquisition as essential to the future economic development of Turangi.

## **11.7 FAILURE TO RETURN SURPLUS LAND**

Following the restructuring of Government departments and the establishment of State-owned enterprises in the late 1980s, there was a further round of disposals of Crown lands and other property. Central to the claimants' grievances has been the disposal of Crown assets on Maori land which was taken by proclamation under the Public Works Act 1928. In chapter 17, we consider the Crown's policy on the disposal of properties taken under the Public Works Act. For Ngati Turangitukua people, it seemed that the difficulties put in their way, not the least being that 'offer back' conditions included paying current market prices for their lands, only reinforced their sense of grievance. After all the stress suffered by dislocated families, the loss of ancestral lands, the destruction of wahi tapu, and the social and economic disruption suffered during the construction work, Ngati Turangitukua felt that they were being denied the opportunity to participate fully in the next stage of Turangi's development. In the following chapter, we explore in more detail the impact of the construction of the township and the Tokaanu power project on Ngati Turangitukua.

## **References**

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