

The funnelling wind speeds of Cook Strait enable the West Wind location to power 71,000 average homes each year.

Power play

Sun, wind or water...

which of these can sustain our lives without despoiling our heritage sites?

PHOTOGRAPHY: MIKE HEYDON

Imagine the land on which three generations of your family had lived, toiled and played being quite literally swept from under your feet, enveloped by a gigantic expanse of water that would forever submerge its heritage and history. Imagine having no choice but to watch it go under, even when you've made frantic efforts to preserve what you can.

When consent was granted in the early 1980s to build the immense Clyde Dam in Central Otago, 2300 hectares of productive land, including numerous orchards, were sentenced to life underwater. Some buildings were saved and relocated to Old Cromwell Town but others, like the Welcome Home Hotel (built in 1869 and the social hub of the Lowburn community), were demolished to make way for the water.

Then-Prime Minister Robert Muldoon's Think Big project created a deep rift among the Cromwell community and, as film maker Gemma Duncan found out when she spent time there last year to film her documentary *Bridge under the water*, for some the scars have yet to heal. "There should have been more engagement from the powers that be with the community on ways to keep the connection with its heritage and history," she notes. "It's not just about tangible things; it's about emotional connections too."

Modern-day renewable-energy projects might not reach the scale of the Clyde Dam any more but as New Zealand works towards meeting the Government's target of 90 percent renewable electricity by 2025 (it currently stands at around the mid-70s), it's a pertinent reminder of what can be lost as we seek new ways to gain the energy that powers our lives. And, with hydroelectric dam levels falling dangerously low on numerous occasions, alternative renewable energy sources such as geothermal, biogas, solar, wood, marine and especially wind will become even more important, as will the question: where on Middle Earth will we locate these new renewable energy projects when it seems as if almost every parcel of Kiwi land is of social, cultural, historical or environmental significance?

"Renewable energy is a proud part of New Zealand's history," comments NZHPT Senior Heritage Policy Advisor Robert McClean. And while in the past it has resulted in the significant erosion of heritage, he says we can learn a lot from "major watershed" projects like the Clyde Dam. "For any type of energy generation, you have to make sure that the benefit to the nation is not just per kilowatt of electricity generation," he advises.

"It's not just about tangible things;
it's about emotional connections too."



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PHOTOGRAPHY: JASON JIA



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"You have to look at the full range of costs and benefits. Social, environmental, cultural and economic impacts need to be taken into account."

Dr Rick McGovern-Wilson, the NZHPT's Senior Archaeologist, says the concept of protecting landscapes is "all well and good" but at what expense? "Renewable energy is the way forward," he says. "You'll always have the public who don't want these projects for numerous reasons but I think there's greater awareness among the energy companies involved about their social and historical responsibilities."

The NZHPT's involvement in renewable-energy projects is twofold. When resource consent is required for projects, the Trust is often consulted as an affected party to the process under the *Resource Management Act (RMA)*. Additionally, these projects may require an archaeological authority from the Trust. The Trust also works closely with local iwi on most large projects, often checking to make sure that tangata whenua have been consulted in the RMA.

The NZHPT's involvement in these projects began almost as soon as it was established in 1954, when the development of the Waipapa dam in Waikato threatened to destroy Maori rock paintings at the site. A grant from the Trust

enabled drawings, photographs and impressions of the paintings to be taken and whole sections of the painted wall to be removed for a new life in museum care.

These days, much of its involvement is focused on wind farms and Robert says the Trust has been able to work around a lot of the issues surrounding this particular form of renewable-energy generation. "With a wind farm you can move or locate the turbines to avoid impacts on archaeological sites," he says. The big exception to this, he cautions, is when it interferes with the setting of a heritage place.

Case in point: Meridian's Project Hayes. Robert says the Trust had concerns about the impact of the turbines on the setting of the Old Dunstan Road, an historic gold-mining route. "The turbines were so big and so close to the road that we thought they might impinge on the view." The lesson to be learned from Project Hayes, he adds, is to avoid adverse impacts on valued heritage surroundings.

Early this year Meridian decided to put the controversial \$2 billion project to bed even though it had already spent \$8 million on preparatory work. But New Zealand Wind Energy Association Chief Executive Eric Pyle says the project could have "enhanced or enabled people's appreciation of the heritage that's there" in much the same way that Meridian's 62-turbine Project West Wind has.

1 Documentary-maker Gemma Duncan spent weeks with community members affected by the building of the Clyde Dam.

2 A still from the documentary *Bridge under the water* before 2300 hectares of land were submerged.

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The NZHPT played a critical role in preserving sections of Maori rock paintings threatened by the building of the Waipapa dam in Waikato.

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Public access to West Wind was on the cards since the project's inception, and Meridian worked closely with the Makara community to establish the recreation area. It includes the old Post Office building, which has been converted into a viewing platform, walking tracks with expansive coastal views, and interpretive panels and guide maps.



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He notes that here the old Post Office building on the project site has been given a new lease on life, converted into a visitors' centre with a viewing platform from where the coastal vista can be enjoyed together with the wind farm. It's all part of a larger recreation area that was created in collaboration with Meridian and the local Makara community. The site, located on the hills of Makara Farm and Terawhiti Station, includes several walking tracks and access to Makara beach.

Eric says the centre has "enabled greater public access to some of the heritage sites that are out there and, one assumes, has improved people's appreciation of the heritage there". The project included several assessments, covering everything from ecology to geology and archaeology to visual impacts. The area is home to a rich gold-mining history which began in the 1850s and much of the NZHPT's archaeological work on the site was focused on that history.

Robert acknowledges that while the NZHPT had a "number of concerns", the preparation of archaeological assessments and peer reviewing resulted in the project being designed in a way that respected the heritage of the area. The analysis meant that roads could be constructed to haul propeller blades with spans the size of jumbo jets up the hills without affecting sites. "In terms of its effects on historic and archaeological heritage, it's about finding a compromise that allows a project to go ahead while protecting significant places and, where that's not possible, recovering information from sites that will be affected," he says.

While West Wind offers an example of a more successful large-scale renewable-energy project (it produces enough electricity to power about 71,000

average New Zealand homes), bigger does not necessarily equate to better. "It seems to me the bigger the project, the bigger the problems it can generate," says Robert. "I think there's probably a stronger case needed for more small-scale, low-level renewable generation."

Green Party energy spokesperson Gareth Hughes says mega proposals like Project Hayes have significant impacts on the landscape and, to a smaller degree, the environment. "Maybe our problem is that we're thinking big too often and should be thinking smaller scale." To that end, he'd like to see iwi and communities coming together and identifying the need for one or only a few turbines to supply power to their local areas. "If you had iwi or communities doing the development, you'd actually see significant savings through the consenting process because you'd have that buy-in earlier on." ■

IN THE ZONE

The US Department of the Interior has identified solar-energy zones in the six sunniest western states. While solar in New Zealand generally tends to be confined to businesses and households - currently there are no solar farms in New Zealand - there is a case for identifying ahead of time all the appropriate locations for wind-energy projects here.

Gareth Hughes, Green Party energy spokesperson: "We could have a national wind strategy that could do a bit of spatial planning across the country to identify the good sites well in advance."

Eric Pyle, New Zealand Wind Energy Association Chief Executive: "We'd very much like to see the planning system move up a gear in New Zealand - to see outstanding landscapes identified or, at the very least, clear criteria on what an outstanding landscape might be."

Robert McClean, NZHPT Senior Heritage Policy Advisor: "Rather than just waiting for an application to come in from a company, I think a better way would be zoning for wind farms or at least indicating those areas where wind farms are not acceptable."

WEST WIND PHOTOGRAPHY: MIKE HEYDON



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