



MYSTERY MOTIVE: Kawhia Moana Kai Festival committee member Jane Rutherford is stunned the word 'kai' has been painted out of the SH31 sign advertising the popular Waitangi weekend event that offers visitors a taste of the delicious kai available on the coast.

Vandals attack sign for new kai festival

BY **ROBBIE KAY**

ORGANISERS of the popular Waitangi Day weekend event formerly known as the Kawhia Kai Festival are gobsmacked their sign at the Kawhia turnoff on the corner of Ngutunui Rd and SH31 has been vandalised.

The new event is called the 'Kawhia Moana Kai Festival' but sometime on Tuesday afternoon the word 'Kai' on the sign was painted out.

A complaint has been laid with Kawhia Police.

Festival organisers believe this is not

random graffiti as the word 'kai' has been specifically targeted.

They say the vandalism has strengthened their resolve to carry on and make sure the event at Kawhia's Omimiti Reserve on February 7 is a day to remember.

DETERMINED

Organising committee member Jane Rutherford says she was initially angry about the senseless vandalism, but is now more determined than ever to make sure the event is a success.

"We have had huge support from the community, the Kawhia Community

Board and the Otorohanga District Development Board which approved a \$5000 grant to ensure we were able to go ahead," says Mrs Rutherford. (*Waitomo News*, November 27).

"Getting our funding together pre-Christmas was a real challenge and we decided to invest in a professional sign on SH31 to help pull in the public.

"The sign soaked up quite a large amount of our very small kitty, so discovering it has been vandalised is a blow, but we're not going to let the Kawhia community down.

"We will carry on."

TO P3

\$4.5 million + owing in rates

WAITOMO and Otorohanga district councils are taking proactive steps to help local residents pay their overdue rates bills.

At the end of 2014, WDC was owed \$3.8m and ODC \$717,912.

In Waitomo, \$1.1m of the outstanding amount was for late penalties, while in Otorohanga the penalty total came to \$261,110.

Rates are collected by district councils to pay for several services including maintenance to parks and reserves, rubbish collection and road repairs.

Waitomo mayor Brian Hanna says while arrears are high, the district does face a unique challenge when compared to city councils in that \$1.3m (34%) of the \$3.8m is attributed to Maori Freehold Land (MFL).

"This is not a race issue, but the thing for council is that we have a huge number of small holdings that are multiply-owned and are effectively unproductive.

"The outstanding amount is significant, but it is no worse than it has probably always been."

COMPLEX ISSUE

WDC corporate services manager Vibhuti Chopra says collection of MFL rates is a complex issue and there is no one solution that will resolve the problem.

She says there are significant differences between MFL and general land that impact on the methods available for recovery of arrears.

"Unlike general land, rating 'sales' cannot be used as a process on MFL covered by Te Ture Whenua Maori Act 1993.

"And where MFL is vested in trustees, the trustees are only liable for the rates to the extent of income derived from the land.

"In addition to this, the difficulty in confirming the full ownership details and contact addresses makes debt collection difficult where the land is in multiple-ownership.

TO P3

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\$4.5 million + owing in rates

FROM P1

“WDC endeavours to balance the cost of pursuing the outstanding rates from multiple owners versus the recovery of outstanding rates on general land.”

PROACTIVE

Highlighting WDC's efforts to collect overdue rates, the total number of general land properties in arrears reduced from 680 to 654 during the past financial year.

Mr Hanna says WDC is “proactive” in helping to find repayment options that best suit each individual's circumstances.

And he says once an arrears issue has been addressed, direct debit options are promoted in order to minimise any future problems.

When all else fails, there are several avenues for the recovery of rates including referring the debt on to external debt collection agencies, mortgage demands, rating sale and abandoned land sales.

“Our staff members are very proactive when it comes to collecting arrears because we think it's totally unfair that for everyone who doesn't pay, everyone else has to pay more.”

“But where there are genuine cases of hardship we want to be fair and reasonable and provide help.”

“We take this issue very seriously and we will pursue anyone where there is legitimate reason that their rates should be paid.”

OTOROHANGA RECORD

Otorohanga mayor Max Baxter says while more

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Brian Hanna

than \$700,000 is currently owed to ODC, he says the council has a good record of collecting outstanding arrears.

“For the past 15 years or so, our collection success has been consistently above 98%.”

“And of those who currently owe a significant amount, they are working together with council to work out an instalment programme to get that money paid back.”

“Our policy has always been to provide help and guidance for those struggling to pay their rates.”

Mr Baxter says while council's collection success is high it is important for all those who live on rateable properties to pay on time or face a 10% penalty.

“If we don't pay our rates our roads will fall apart, sewerage will pollute the streets, rubbish will pile up on the sidewalks and the list goes on,” he says.

“A lot of people will have no problem paying \$150-\$200 for a pair of shoes, but when you ask them to contribute to their rates then they have major issues.”

“We live in and love Aotearoa. If we want it to stay as the beautiful country that it is then we have to pay our rates.”

For more information about how rates are determined, methods of repaying and various rates relief options visit the websites – otodc.govt.nz or waitomo.govt.nz

Vandals attack new festival sign

FROM P1

Mrs Rutherford says the vandalism is not the only setback experienced by the organisers.

The festival attracted a large number of tourists in the past, however someone has tried to sabotage that by posting a notice on Google Earth saying there's no Kawhia Kai Festival this year.

“That's extremely misleading and, I feel, underhanded,” says Mrs Rutherford.

“We have since put our own page up on the internet to try to counter that damage.”

NAME OF EVENT

“When the organisers of the former kai festival decided to pull the plug on their 10-year-old event (*Waitomo News*, June 24) they made it clear no-one was to use the ‘Kawhia Kai Festival’ name which is why we changed it to Kawhia Moana Kai Festival.”

“Clearly someone is rather put out we are using any reference to ‘kai’ even though that's what the event is all about and that's what people

expect to find in Kawhia on February 7.”

30 STALLS

Mrs Rutherford says February's event has received total marae support and 30 stalls will be open on the day.

“It's a wee bit bigger than we originally planned, but there's so much enthusiasm in Kawhia it's snowballed.”

WAKA & WHALEBOAT

There will be waka on the water this year with some offering the public a waka paddling experience and Oparau Whaleboat Club will be launching their whaleboat.

The stalls will offer traditional kai including hangi, mussel and whitebait fritters, shark liver pate, preserved corn and wild pork sausages as well as sushi and oven-baked pizza.

A full lineup of bands, including local talent, will be onstage throughout the day playing everything from bluegrass to blues to reggae.

Entry is by gold coin donation to ensure the event is accessible to all.

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