

Lines charges have clients fearing worst

BY **ROBBIE KAY**

PENSIONERS and people on fixed incomes are worried by a letter they recently received from electricity network supplier The Lines Company (TLC) about changes to its customer pricing.

Grey Power Waitomo president Ngaire Grayson says the increases some members are facing are "far beyond" what they were expecting and they're "afraid and upset" about where it's all leading.

"With winter approaching they fear for their health. We also feel badly for first home owners on tight budgets for whom even a \$5 a week increase is a big deal.

"The general consensus among Grey Power members is why can't TLC fix their charges and then work within that budget?"

"The onus should be on the company to run their business better."

CONFUSION

Mrs Grayson says the uncertainty around TLC's charges is what's upsetting people.

"These increases keep happening every year, so people can't budget and we don't know where it's going to stop.

"Grey Power members don't live the high life.

"We're all pretty frugal, watching every cent, and even if TLC isn't worried about on-going price rises, many of our members are very afraid of the future."

Grey Power Waitomo secretary Merv Williamson has been ringing around members to gauge reaction to TLC's recent letter.

"The vast majority can't understand the letter because it's too confusing," he says.

"They're saying there's nothing they can do about it so they're just quietly waiting to see how it affects them when their new TLC invoices start arriving. Several pensioners are facing increases of more than \$30 a month and they're wondering how they're going to cope."

CONNECTIONS

There are 11,512 customer connections to TLC's northern network.

Most North King Country residents are in the Hangatiki group of customers from Mokau through Te Kuiti, Otorohanga to just south of Te Awamutu and out to the coast at Marokopa.

TLC's billing system is made of variable charges, fixed charges and fees.

The variable charge is the kilowatt (kW) load TLC estimates a customer will put on its network in the following year, multiplied by a dollar rate, plus a matching transmission unit multiplied by a dollar rate.

Once they are worked out, customers pay the variable line charges, fixed line charges and fees in 12 equal monthly amounts.



DARK DAYS: Grey Power Waitomo president Ngaire Grayson says The Lines Company's recent increased charges mean some members are facing lines bills "far beyond" what they were expecting and they're "afraid and upset" about where it's all leading.

TO P3

Mayor furious with Mokau dam delay

By **TODD WARD**

AN ancient shell midden unearthed during the construction of a water dam in Mokau will cost Waitomo ratepayers an extra \$50,000 in Resource Management Act costs.

The \$800,000 dam is being built by Waitomo District Council (WDC) to double the capacity of the coastal town's drinking water

storage from 10,000-20,000 cubic metres of water.

An archaeological assessment, required for the land use consent, showed that the site on David Black's farm had no archaeological significant sites, but five days after digging began on February 3 it was stopped when a shell midden (heap) was found.

Five days later, a suspected hangi pit was also found.

Before the works can resume, a "time-consuming" RMA process needs to be completed which includes approval from a Historic Places Trust archaeologist, local iwi Mokau Ki Runga, Waikato Regional Council (WRC) and WDC.

Work could be delayed up to three months with the additional cost estimated between \$35,000-50,000.

Waitomo mayor Brian Hanna is furious

with the delay.

"If the Historic Places Trust was serious about protecting this, surely there'd be some urgency, but the process takes so long and the Wellington-based archaeologist we need to talk to simply can't be reached.

"So basically the whole process could potentially delay the project for up to three months during what is the prime construction season."

TO P5

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Mayor furious with Mokau dam delay

FROM P1

“This could end up costing \$100,000 more than was originally planned. It’s mindboggling.”

Mr Hanna says his frustration is not with Mokau Ki Runga’s interest in the site, but with the length of time to complete the RMA related processes.

“The Historic Places Trust is a) under-resourced and b) they seem to take forever to address the matter.

“It’s not like we’re building an oil rig or a gold mine, we’re building a dam for a tiny coastal community to store water in.

“The frustrating part is that the community pays through the nose for it and if construction is delayed until June then works won’t begin again until October (because of the winter weather).”



DAM BUSTER: An ancient shell midden and hangi pit found during the construction of a water dam in Mokau has the potential to halt works for up to three months to complete Resource Management Act processes. PHOTO SUPPLIED

The dam’s design has been slightly modified following consultation with iwi and WRC so work can hopefully begin again earlier.

Agreement was reached for limited construction to start on March 3 while the other RMA processes are completed.

Awards for local spaces

THE Timber Trail at Pureora and Waitomo’s Ruakuri Walk were celebrated recently for receiving the internationally-recognised Green Flag award.

The award recognises good quality public parks and green spaces that are managed in environmentally sustainable ways.

“This award is yet another drawcard to the

local region to show that we’re flying high,” says Waitomo mayor Brian Hanna.

“The Green Flag will encourage more New Zealanders to experience our local conservation visitor destinations, which is an important driver behind the Department of Conservation’s work” says Kay Booth, deputy director general of partnerships, who presented the awards to the DOC Maniapoto services team.

The Timber Trail was chosen for the award for its combination of the beauty of nature, the use of historic infrastructure and its appeal to young and old alike.

A sustainability tick for the trail was the use of environmentally-friendly ink on its signage.

The Ruakuri Walk was recognised for conserving the natural, historic and cultural integrity of the track. The 1km walk includes karst landscapes and glowworm caves.

The Green Flag Scheme is picking up momentum internationally with parks such as the Redwoods Forest in Rotorua and other DOC sites such as the Whanganui River Journey, and Lake Matheson on the South Island’s West Coast also receiving green flags.

IN BRIEF

Budget revised

THE budget for the five metre tall carved pou at Kawhia, which featured in the *Waitomo News* (March 4) has been scaled back to \$102,000 from \$150,000.

And if the Kawhia Community Projects Trust is successful with its \$37,000 application to Creative NZ, the trust will only need to raise a further \$21,000 - half of the original estimate.

The trust also intends to apply to the Maniapoto and Waikato-Tainui iwi boards for a contribution to the project.