

# Is Taranaki the New Texas?

With over 200 new wells planned throughout Taranaki over the next few years, the face of Taranaki is changing.

What will the region look like in ten years time?

Proponents of the oil and gas industry want to step things up even more, environmentalists are urging caution, while local residents near the exploration and drilling sites are dealing with the reality of life in the midst of an oil and gas boom.

Words Irena Brooks

Five years ago, the Taranaki Regional Council was getting twice as many consent applications from farms than from the oil and gas sector. By 2012, oil and gas consents were out-numbering agricultural consents and most of them concerned discharges of contaminants to our water, land and air. For the first round of consents this year, oil and gas discharge applications out-numbered farming by almost three-to-one.

Then came the news that not only are we having to find more places to dispose of the waste generated by the industry in our own back yard, but that there are plans afoot to import the waste from oil and gas exploration and production in other parts of the North Island as well.

"It is my understanding that the regional councils on the East Coast and Wairarapa, simply don't allow for the disposal of this waste. But the Taranaki Regional Council has granted resource consents for discharges in Taranaki, and it makes no difference to them where the waste comes from," says Sarah Roberts, a schoolteacher and mother who has been forced to research the industry as she fights to protect her family and community.

"Why should Taranaki be the dump-site for the oil and gas industry in New Zealand? If it was safe and clean, it would be used for local landfill, not trucked across the country. Do we want trucks filled with contaminated or toxic waste negotiating our highways into Taranaki?"

Oil and gas waste is disposed of in three ways – deep well injection, land farming and mixed bury cover.

Overseas studies have already revealed that deep well injection

causes earthquakes, confirmed in the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment's report last year. The report states there is some concern that it has the potential to cause contamination of aquifers as well, if the process is not well managed.

A number of these waste disposal sites are situated on or directly beside Fonterra supply farms and on the Fonterra research farm itself near Hawera.

Sarah is also frustrated that the New Plymouth District Council only seems interested in protecting urban ratepayers, not rural ones, in the Block Offer 2013.

In a recent submission to New Zealand Petroleum and Minerals by NPDC the council described the current level of oil and gas activity in the region as "only the beginning (the sunrise) of the industry in New Zealand".

The NPDC then goes on to request NZP&M excludes land currently zoned Residential, Business and Open Space Environment; land about to be confirmed Future Urban Development (FUD); and any land comprised in the New Plymouth Airport property, from the Block Offer.

"Which is all well and good," says Sarah, "but why is the same protection not sought for the rural community, the families and their homes, the rural schools and small towns of Taranaki?"

"We are appalled by the double standards. If it is so imperative for New Plymouth District Council to request removal of land in urban areas from the Block Offer, why is the same not offered to the rural communities?"

Roberts is concerned that with the

rise and rise of the oil and gas industry in Taranaki, it will be inevitable decreasing rural and farm property prices will come, degraded rural amenities will follow, and there will be no, or high, insurances for affected land owners beside these sites.

"Oil and gas will be competing with dairy and tourism for a piece of the economic pie. There is a tipping point," she warns.

After holding and attending several meetings with affected landowners in Taranaki, Sarah Roberts has heard the same complaints from over 100 local people, who through no fault of their own, now find they are living in an industrial zone, when they thought they would be embracing the peace of a country lifestyle.

"The numbers of affected residents will grow exponentially. There are already serious on-going issues with regulating and monitoring of oil and gas companies and communication from our councils to ensure the health and safety of the public and the quality of the environment is upheld."

So serious, that when the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, Jan Wright, released her interim report into fracking last November, she stated: "...I have significant concerns about how fragmented and complicated the regulatory environment for fracking is and about how these rules are being applied. If fracking is not done well it can have significant environmental impacts including polluting water and triggering earthquakes. I am also concerned that regulation may be too light-handed, particularly if fracking



opens the door to a large-scale and widespread oil and gas boom with a lot of different companies involved.

"These concerns form the basis of the next stage of my investigation into fracking which I hope to conclude before the middle of next year."

Just two weeks after the PCE's initial findings were released, Venture Taranaki released their report into the economic benefits of fracking. In their best case scenario, they predicted an increased revenue of \$29 billion dollars. Their disclaimer, however, comments: "... no assurance can be given that these expectations will prove to be correct. Such forward-looking statements included in the report should not be unduly relied upon."

The report only examines one side of the economic equation – potentially adverse economic impacts of fracking, like environmental impacts, falling property values, increasing infrastructure costs, lost business revenue caused by impacts of the energy sector, and the potential costs of any clean-ups, are not considered in each of the scenarios.

## The Tikorangi Experience

The nature of rural Taranaki is changing, especially in Tikorangi, just north of New Plymouth.

Ever since settlers arrived here in the 1800s, farming has been the predominant industry. In fact, many of the families in the Tikorangi area are descendants of those early pioneers.

But now, this rolling rural land, is fast becoming industrial.

Traffic has increased exponentially, a new row of power poles and lines marches across the landscape where there were once established native trees, two rigs tower into the sky and a proliferation of production sites, which emit noise 24/7, dot the landscape.

"It's not just the well sites themselves, it's everything else that comes with it too – trucks and other vehicles, helicopters, pipelines, a whole new power line just for Todd alone, road works – sometimes it's just constant noise," says Abbie.

When the Jury's signed a consent form as 'an affected party' for the Mangahewa C site, they were told there would be up to 8 light vehicles per day and 3 heavy traffic vehicles during drilling and testing phases.

"We thought we could live with that and so we signed," says Abbie.

In February of this year, over six years after granting the consent, NPDC did a traffic count and discovered numbers were way in excess. There were no days when the light vehicles complied and the average was over 60 per day. Heavy traffic vehicles were as high as 16 on a single day and exceeded the declared number on half the days. "And that is just for Mangahewa C site. On top of that, we get all the McKee traffic too and there has been a huge increase in that."

Even though the traffic movements have been grossly exceeded, the Jury's have no recourse.

"When you sign consent, you sign away all your rights," states Abbie.

She is concerned that the industry is entering a period of rampant growth and the checks and balances to protect the environment and the rights of local residents, are just not adequate.

She's not the only one.

Gavin Faull, an international businessman whose family has lived at Tikorangi since the 1840s, expressed his concern at the recent Tikorangi residents' meeting attended by over 80 people.

The chairperson read a statement to the meeting on his behalf, expressing his concern for the industrialisation happening in Tikorangi as a result of lack of control and lack of environmental concern, from the recent surge in oil and gas exploration.

"I am in Taranaki every six weeks as required for the management of the farm...and I am also in Taranaki often due to my involvement in organisations which are involved with the betterment of Taranaki," he said. "As a result of requests by a particular petrochemical exploration company for access approvals and disturbance approvals, I started contacting local residents about 'what was happening'."

## TURNING WATER INTO WASTE

In the last round of consents alone (25<sup>th</sup> January to 7<sup>th</sup> March 2013), there were 28 consents for discharges granted to oil and gas companies, compared with 10 for agricultural purposes.

During that six-week period, there were also 5 water consents for oil and gas companies and none for agricultural purposes.

Four were to take and use groundwater for fracking at York A (York Rd, Midhurst), Kowhai C (Otaraoa Rd), and Turangi C (Turangi Road) by Greymouth Petroleum, and also at Mangahewa E (Tikorangi Rd) by Todd Energy.

The other was to take and use water from the Mangawharawhara Stream for hydrocarbon exploration activities at the Wairere wellsite, Cornwall Road, Eltham by Taranaki Ventures Ltd.

The consents are for a period of 10-14 years.

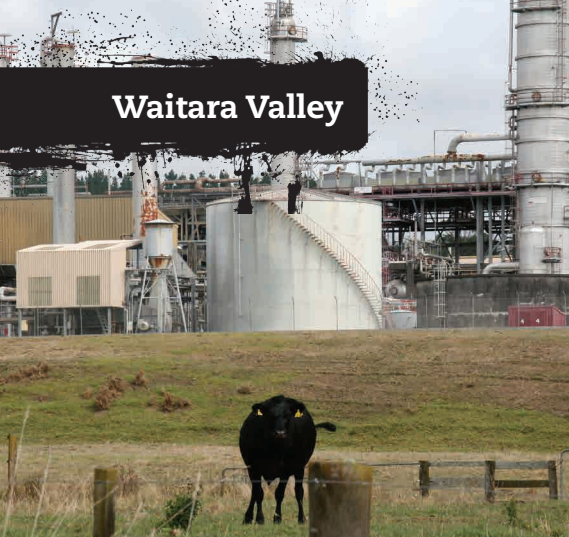
A drought was declared in Taranaki on 15<sup>th</sup> March.

## THE 2013 BLOCK OFFER

The total onshore area of the Block Offer proposal is 242 square kilometres. Approximately 150 sq kms is in South Taranaki and generally includes Oaonui, Opunake and Oeo and inland to Wiremu Road. According to NZP&M this includes the township of Opunake and Opunake Beach. The New Plymouth District is in two parts. The largest area incorporates the eastern portion of Bell Block urban area and extends south almost to Egmont Village. The second area is 12 sq kms in area and extends over rural land from Lower Norfolk Road south to Tariki Road South.



## Waitara Valley



“Even though I visit frequently and I had seen oil and gas exploration and development since the 1960s in Tīkorangi, I was shocked by the extensive development going on which had crept up on us.

“I found out how the oil exploration was now disturbing people’s lives, their peace, their environment, their farming businesses, and the safety of the district. They also had concerns about it threatening them and their families’ future in being able to live in a rural environment and enjoy the farming businesses, which we have all probably taken for granted.

“However what shocked me more as I made further enquiry and consulted legal and property experts, was that there seems to be very limited protection for such a farming community against this oil and gas exploration and industrialisation.

“But what shocked me most was that the two councils involved in the area, who have as one of the key elements of their responsibility to protect the environment, the existing land use and the residents’ rights and interests, consider that the oil exploration activities and developments are within the legislated rights of these companies.

“At the moment, a petrochemical company could establish a major exploration site next door to my land and claim it would have no effect on me or my neighbours. I had been asked to sign a ‘traffic disturbance’ consent and when I became difficult, I got a subsequent letter withdrawing the request as they had ‘changed their activities’ to fit in with the legislative requirements.

“Clearly something must be done for the Tīkorangi district to protect the rural identity and environment before it becomes totally industrialised, especially as I hear that there could well be over 50 plus wells drilled and industrial operations such as power stations, processing plants etc being developed. There must be a way to manage this development in an

environmentally and socially sensitive manner for the protection of the local residents and for the protection of New Zealand. We must not totally destroy the environment in the way I see so often in my international travels.

“The 100% Pure tourism and international branding of New Zealand which brings billions of dollars to New Zealand could easily be destroyed in a decade for a few barrels of oil and gas.”

## IT’S HAPPENING AT INGLEWOOD TOO

“Our life has become a living hell,” says Gaylene Kay who lives with her husband Vernon, on Durham Road, south of Inglewood. Just 210 metres away, is the drill on the Sidewinder site, operated by Tag Oil.

The couple built their dream home on a quiet rural section three years ago. With grand views of the mountain and surrounded by lush pasture, they were looking forward to finishing it off and doing the landscaping.

Then Tag Oil came along, seeking their consent for two wells.

“We signed consent for two and then they said they wanted to come along and do another two. ‘We’ll pipe them and cap them and there’ll be a wire fence and minor facilities, like there is with Ngatoro B on Bedford Road, with just a few pipes,’ they said. ‘That would be the worst case scenario’ they told us – ‘you’ll never know we’re here.’

“So we signed and it was the worst thing we could have possibly ever done.

“Putting the pipeline in, doing the production station, and all the drilling...

“Now we’ve had to fight them to stop them doing these four wells. They wanted to put a bale fence wall right around our property, seven metres high – which is two metres higher than the highest point of our upstairs bedroom. We would have lost our daylight, our remaining views, everything, and we would have had these big bales rotting and God knows what. It cost

us thousands of dollars to stop them doing that. We had to pay people to do modeling of what it would look like, hire a lawyer, and then they decided to lower the platform so they wouldn’t need our consent.

“The council (NPDC) are probably to blame for a big part of it too, because they allow these people to come in, give consents to these companies, and they don’t even come out to visit the sites. So we weren’t just fighting Tag Oil, we were fighting the council because they were allowing it to happen.”

The Sidewinder site did have various stipulations put on it, so the legal battle wasn’t a complete waste of time, says Gaylene. “But they pretty much backed us into a corner, so we had to sign this agreement for four more wells. I was at the lawyer’s office crying my eyes out ‘cause I didn’t want to sign it, you know. But there was nowhere else to go. We couldn’t bring up the injustices that had been done to us two years prior by lying to us – you’re not allowed to bring that into it. That’s the way they get around things.

“They made us sign this agreement and out of it we got \$10,000 which nowhere near covered our costs to fight them, but if we didn’t sign, the next step was the Environment Court and we were told they could have sued us for loss of earnings, which would have bankrupted us. And their lawyer made that very clear.”

Even though the couple loves gardening and landscaping, now they don’t want to be outside because the noise is continuous.

“You just want to get away from it. Even with headphones on, you can hear it. We go to bed with the TV on every night now, to drown out that humming, droning sound. We’ve never done that before in our lives, but you just can’t get to sleep otherwise. And you get so angry about it all, it winds you up and your mind keeps going round and round.”

The night before our visit, Gaylene and Vernon had been up until midnight, after contacting the council about the noise.



PHOTO: FIONA CLARK



PHOTO: FIONA CLARK

## Motunui

"We rang them about nine, then they rang the noise control officer, then she rang us back to confirm details, and arrived about ten. We were still up at midnight. We get up at quarter to six every morning.

"I understand why people don't complain because it's such a procedure. Prior to the current system, you'd ring in to the council number and you'd get a call back from someone in Auckland who had no idea where you were or what was going on.

"Not only that, you ring the council and later you find out (they have deemed) it wasn't a formal complaint. So now, every time I ring, I email as well and make sure they know it is a formal complaint.

"The reason we're speaking up now, is that there are going to be so many more people affected like we have been. People need to know."

Gaylene wants the message to get out to other people who are approached for consent with oil companies.

"Any negotiations made with an oil company need to be done in writing, in the presence of your lawyer, and the oil company needs to pay for it. And make sure that if they breach anything you've agreed to, that compensation is paid. You have to cover yourself."

## THE COST OF 'PROGRESS'

Landowners with wellsites on their properties are paid compensation, but nobody knows for sure how much as they all sign confidentiality agreements. Figures of \$20,000 and \$30,000 have been bandied about but no-one knows if payments are on a one-off basis, or paid every year, like a rental.

The most recent going rate for a seismic survey shot hole was \$12 (2012 prices), says Abbie Jury.

"For that, the company's contractors get to bring a small drilling rig onto your property and from then until the explosive charge is detonated, which may be a couple of weeks later, the

affected paddocks can't be grazed. This causes problems for farmers' grazing cycles. Then there are the helicopters working on the survey, any hour of the day, any day of the week. For \$12 a shot hole and a bit more for listening lines? Ridiculous. Seismic surveys are one of the most intrusive aspects for the largest number of people."

Neighbours complaining of noise may get double-glazing or a fence, a holiday or maybe a goodwill hamper.

Abbie has been somewhat heartened by the recent change in attitude at NPDC. Council staff members have visited the area to see firsthand what the issues are and are now convening a working party involving senior planning staff and local residents to work out a new set of protocols for Tikorangi.

"Over the years we have seen changes and some for the better. The first well drilled next door to us, maybe six years ago, was flared for many weeks on end. It was so bright, we could see the glow as we drove out of New Plymouth, 25km away. It lit our house all night. But worse was the noise – the constant, unabated, low-grade roar, which meant that living here was like living on the flight path to Heathrow, but this was 24/7 when weather conditions sent the noise our way. When you have lived for years in the relative silence and total darkness of the country, flaring has a huge impact on quality of life."

Flaring was greatly reduced for subsequent wells on the site where the fifth is currently being drilled and the improvement for residents was significant as a result.

But residents have also noticed deterioration in other areas.

"We have seen changes in the way the councils handle consents and the winding back on the definitions of affected parties. It is very difficult to convince councils that you are an affected party now and if you acquiesce and sign the agreement for one well, essentially you have signed away all rights to object in the future.

"I have met with successive mayors

## PROPOSED RMA CHANGES

Central Government feels the RMA legislation and its systems have become too cumbersome and uncertain, and this was costing residents, businesses, and councils too much time and money.

A discussion paper on the RMA said the Act did not reflect up-to-date values and there was concern that its principles placed too greater emphasis on environmental matters, which overshadowed the positive effects of economic or social activities.

Under the proposed changes, the Minister for the Environment would have the power to insert provisions directly into council plans with no consultation.

There would also be limits on conditions that can be put on resource consents, as well as on the ability to make submissions.

The National government wants to increase the Minister for the Environment's powers to direct that some 'nationally important issues' (eg new oil and gas exploration) will mean the Government can override decisions made by the local council.

Submissions on the proposed changes to the RMA close on 22 April (see [www.mfe.govt.nz](http://www.mfe.govt.nz)).



**Mangahewa C**

PHOTO: ROB TUCKER



**Mckee**

PHOTO: ROB TUCKER

and councils over about fifteen years, pleading with them to be more proactive in planning to mitigate the negative effects. They are terribly concerned and sympathetic and nothing happens. Planning, such as it is, has remained completely reactive.”

Reading reports of how well the industry has been integrated into the local community really gets Abbie riled.

“Nobody has ever bothered talking to the locals about it. It’s all ra-ra positive spin, so much so that it is only very recently that Tikorangi locals have started to speak out on what the negative impacts are on their day-to-day lives. The traffic, the noise, the use of helicopters, having industrial sites in view of your home, the anxiety of not knowing whether your neighbour will let the companies in right next door, worrying about whether one well will balloon out to a full-on industrial site, worrying about what is happening to property values...”

“I very much doubt that the elected councillors understand at all what the impact is like for locals. They are just thrilled to accept financial gifts for civic projects, which are some distance away in New Plymouth. And councils have abdicated any planning role. Basically what they have been doing is approving applications from the companies.”

## “BARELY TO ACCEPTABLE STANDARDS”

Reviewing recent consents and paperwork from NPDC related to the latest projects in Tikorangi raises many questions.

One letter, in Feb 2012, from NPDC consultant, Norbert Schaffoener of resources, is positively scathing of a local company’s handling of a consent application by Greymouth Petroleum for the Kowhai B well site on Ngatimaru Road.

The ‘Risk Assessment’ part of the application was described as “of barely

acceptable standard and detail.”

Corrections on substance information were not done, with 3 of 9 chemicals listed for the drilling phase alone, showing “somewhat muddled together substance information sheets.”

Schaffoener adds that, “after repeatedly asking for information of widely considered acceptable professional standards, I wonder whether it is ignorance or arrogance, on part of the consultant in failing to meet such.

“It appears to be based on a ‘she’ll be right’ copy-and-paste approach rather than appropriate analysis. Mistakes of past applications are repeated again and again.”

“While transport risks are identified as potentially significant, no mention is made of the transport route or potential cumulative effects (risks) due to ever-increasing transport movements in the vicinity, potentially affecting the local primary school.”

Mr Schaffoener also points out that Greymouth Petroleum had had no specific discussions with the school about the Kowhai B well site and that he considers the school to be an affected party who should be notified of the application, as should the closest neighbor on Ngatimaru Road.

By December of last year, the council had ignored its own consultant’s advice. The resident, whose home is just over 300 metres from the well site and whose boundary is now shared with the actual site, was discounted as an affected party. The Council did not check whether consultation took place with the school (reports are that any such consultation was woefully inadequate and both the Board and the principal were unaware of the implications of the development). The existence of the Tikorangi Playcentre was not even acknowledged in any of the paperwork.

Under section 95E of the Resource Management Act, a consent authority must decide that a person is an affected person if the activity’s effects on them are minor or more than minor.

## COSY RELATIONSHIPS

An exchange of emails between one of NPDC’s Environmental Planners and an employee from a local consulting company, who oversaw the expansion of Mangahewa C on behalf of Todd Energy, reveals a worryingly friendly relationship between NPDC and the industry.

The emails were provided by the NPDC.

The following exchange is verbatim and outlines that the consent for the expansion of Mangahewa C was written without a site inspection and BEFORE all information had been confirmed.

NPDC Environmental Planner:

“Hahah hey don’t worry about the site visit I am going (away) for a month on Friday so I have a lot of work to finish off before then so I probably won’t be able to get out of the office now. We will try and arrange a site visit when I’m back.

“Have you got this revised plan? I have written the consent it’s ready to go I just want to make reference to the revised plan.”

There are further emails featuring smiley faces, and an invitation from the NPDC officer to “give me a ring if you want to discuss especially if I’m talking a whole heap of rubbish.”

Which begs the question, do the NPDC Environmental Planners know what they are doing?

Then there’s a confession from Todds’ representative that one of the plans “has north in a funny place which confused us all for a while.”

The council officer requests a site visit on 5<sup>th</sup> Dec and it appears may have been put off as the officer is still trying to arrange it nearly two weeks later. On 14<sup>th</sup> Dec, the officer receives an email from the consultant company that they haven’t forgotten about the site visit and “FYI – its likely the rig will move over to this side might start as early as 21 December. No pressure.”

In another email, to the head of Environmental Planning at NPDC on 27 Sept last year, the consultant finishes



“P.S. (named person) mentioned its time to do some socializing: I’ll tee something up & let you know!”

Then there’s the sponsorship of key council events and venues, by the oil and gas companies, which has made some locals uncomfortable.

Todd Energy sponsors the New Plymouth Aquatic Centre, WOMAD and in Sept 2011, pledged a total of \$3 million to the Len Lye Centre.

Shell also sponsor WOMAD, and Puke Ariki.

Though their largesse could be viewed as being a generous corporate citizen and giving back to the community, some people have openly wondered if those sponsorships could be oiling the wheels of city hall.

## A FLAWED SYSTEM

The land-use consents from the oil and gas industry and submitted to New Plymouth District Council, are not considered alongside the discharge consents granted by Taranaki Regional Council (TRC). The TRC often grant these prior to the land-use consents.

“The problem with this,” says Sarah Roberts “is Taranaki Regional Council is consenting for discharging of contaminants without knowing what hazardous substances are being used as this is the jurisdiction of New Plymouth District Council land use consents. These consent applications relate to the same activity and can and should be considered together. It is dangerous and irresponsible not to.

“The Resource Management Act (1991) creates a statutory duty when there is an application to more than one consenting authority for the same activity they should be considered together, and our councils are not doing this. Sometimes the companies are giving contradictory information to the different councils for the same activity.”

The decision on notification (whether a consent application will be non-notified, limited or public) is decided on

whether the activity is deemed to be “minor” or not.

The definition of “minor” does not appear to be spelled out anywhere.

There is also no specific policy on who “affected parties” are.

Very few land-use consents for oil and gas are turned down. There is only one the NPDC head environmental planner, Rowan Williams, can remember.

Each district council also has a different set of rules for oil and gas companies to comply with.

For example, the Stratford District Council now requires a transition from open flare pits to the use of flare combustion chambers to reduce the light emissions. Last year flaring was so prevalent that Mike Avery, the SDC director community and environmental services, compared going into Stratford in the early morning, was like going into the “bowels of Mordor”.

The transition to flare combustion chambers has now been accepted by all of the companies currently engaged in exploration in the District, although a report to councilors noted that to date neither of the neighbouring Councils (NPDC and STDC) have taken the same approach.

It is understood that wellsites proposed on the East Coast will be subject to similar restrictions.

His report to council earlier this year, outlined the myriad of ramifications councils need to be mindful of as the industry gears up, including:

- Increased frequency and density of drilling activity
- Longer and more frequent well testing periods
- Sites potentially active for a longer period
- Greater involvement of minor road network
- Increased pipeline network
- Larger visible “footprint” of sites due to decentralised production

The report states over 140 wells are planned at 14 sites in the next 2-3 years in the Stratford District with one

of these well sites being very close to the Stratford urban area. To date there have been no proposals to actually drill within the urban area of Stratford, although the entire township has been seismically surveyed and has been included in the granted exploration blocks, the report points out.

There is also a comment that SDC is under some pressure from oil companies to change the notification assessment, which would result in a substantially lower number of affected persons and would allow more freedom in the location of well-sites.

“The NPDC uses noise contours typically to determine the affected persons rather than the comparatively arbitrary 1000m line used by ourselves and South Taranaki,” says Mr Avery. “The difficulty with using the more ‘pure’ noise contours is that these are modelled and as such, open to challenge. The advantages of our approach are that it actively encourages a greater degree of consultation with the local community and provides a higher level of certainty for all as to who is considered to be potentially affected.”

“I also note that current changes to the RMA promoted by Government will very likely severely limit the ability of the local communities to submit on oil and gas proposals once those changes go through,” Mike Avery observes.

Internationally, local governments are tightening regulations for the oil and gas industry.

In February, the New Brunswick Council in Canada, announced 97 new rules that will cover the oil and gas industry’s practices. Under the new regulations, exploratory wells will be required to have a double casing to protect surrounding groundwater. Open pits for the storage of wastewater will not be allowed. Instead, companies must use large tanks to hold wastewater.

Oil and gas companies will also have to buy \$10 million in liability insurance to cover personal injury or damage to property or the environment. If a water supply is compromised, the province

PHOTO: ROB TUCKER

would work to fix it and then go after the responsible oil or gas company for reimbursement so that residents aren't fighting big oil and gas companies.

## THE ROAD TO RICHES, OR RUIN?

Roading also offers some thorny debate.

Stratford District Council had, up until the 2000s, "taken a financial contribution for road maintenance based on a levy of the actual barrels of oil produced. This was dropped due to case law, which in summary states 'a road is a road is a road'," says Mike Avery's report to council. "Roads are supposed to be designed to take heavy traffic and, where they do not, that is the responsibility of the roading authority. If the use of the road by a specific user causes extraordinary damage then the cost of that damage may be recoverable, but it is tenuous to place a 'tax' on the use of the road in anticipation of such damage.

"The cost of initial upgrading of minor roads to accommodate the additional heavy traffic generated, has been accepted by oil companies as the use of these roads by other heavy traffic is very limited."

At Tikorangi, the winding country lanes that cross the landscape simply aren't suitable for the size and volume of traffic currently using them.

"The biggest danger here, is a truck-on-truck incident," believes Abbie Jury. "But we don't want our country roads turned into highways to accommodate petrochemical traffic. We want the traffic slowed down, not sped up."

However, those roads are now being strengthened, and widened.

The road works on Tikorangi Road were extremely high impact, says Abbie. "The amount of compaction they did on that road, it just seemed to go on and on."

Though she understands Todd Energy have paid for the majority of the section of the road outside her property, the

NPDC announced they had brought forward three years of funding to widen and upgrade a section of Otaraoa Road.

Here, the road is seriously subsiding – trucks simply cannot stay on the left-hand side coming up this hill as they risk toppling into the valley below.

## WHAT IF SOMETHING GOES WRONG?

Residents are encouraged to take any concerns they have, directly to the oil and gas companies.

"But because we have been complaining directly to the companies, as far as the council's concerned there are no problems because no-one's complained (to the council)," says Abbie.

From 2006, when the work started on Mangahewa C, until Dec 2012, the list of residents for evacuation in case of an emergency gave 14 residences in the 1km "evacuation zone". "There are actually 37," Abbie points out. "They've corrected it now, but it is a worry it took so long for them to pick up the mistake.

"Of course, it doesn't look as bad if you've only got 14 homes on your list. When you get to 37 it's starting to look quite populated."

When Abbie requested the reports on the assessments of environmental effects of Mangahewa C, she was shocked to discover none had been done over the six years the site had been operating.

"We will be the guinea pigs for fracking here," she believes.

"I hope that in a few decades, all the viable reserves of oil and gas beneath us will be gone. The companies will pull out. The multitudes of small industrial sites I try not to look at will be reclaimed by long grass and then by other vegetation. Processing plants will be mothballed. The traffic will reduce and peace will return. I have to take the long view because the juggernaut, that is the petrochemical industry rolls on unchecked in Taranaki in the short term." ••

## AN ISSUE OF CONSENT

Sarah Roberts says the consenting at Moturoa 5 wellsite, which sits at the eastern end of Ngamotu Beach, behind the giant grain store, just 50 metres from a public area, is a classic example of the failings of the current consenting regime.

"Taranaki Regional Council (TRC) granted six resource consents for Moturoa 5 wellsite for discharge of contaminants to land, water, and air on 9th May 2006.

These resource consents are due to expire on 1 June 2020. If Greymouth Petroleum wants to frack this well, the public wouldn't know because all the consents are non-notified. This is because Greymouth has obtained the landowner's approval as an affected party, and the TRC was satisfied that 'the environmental effects of the activity would be minor'."

TRC are the landowners.

"The legal discharge consents from the TRC were issued separately from the legal land use consents of NPDC, which outline use and storage of hazardous chemicals at the site. These latter requirements directly affect the discharge consents from TRC. So TRC are not legally connected to the well site regarding what hazardous contaminants are actually being discharged and how much."

Further reading reveals the resource consent is granted conditional on the NPDC receiving a copy of the hazardous substances emergency management plan for the well site prior to drilling as well as a complete list of hazardous substances and their quantities actually used and stored on site.

They didn't actually receive this information until 24th January 2013. The wells were drilled in 2006 and 2007.

"Resource consents should have all conditions met before they are consented for and not after as the case is currently," believes Sarah. "The land use consent from the district council needs to be considered together with the discharge consents from the regional council.

"Affected parties and interested parties need to be considered appropriately. There should have been public notification of the application of these consents because of the proximity to the public area of Ngamotu Beach, the recreational boat users of the harbour, the public road Oceanview Parade, the members of the public who visit the two restaurants Gusto and The Bach and other business premises in the immediate area, and Whiteley Street residents.

"NPDC granted the consent even though the Hazardous Risk Assessment described 'the public access Ngamotu Beach area' would be 'affected in terms of fatality risk under the worst case scenario'."