

TRUSTED FRIEND MOVES ON

Maxwell John Hetherington. May 19, 1946 – July 18, 2006

BY KEITH INGRAM

MAX HETHERINGTON died peacefully at his home on July 18, aged 60.

I first met Max over 20 years ago when he was the keeper of the cash for the Reserve Bank. He looked after and accounted for what was in the vaults, a pretty responsible job. It demanded honesty and integrity, qualities that Max carried throughout his life. You could call him a lot of names, and many did, but you could not question his honesty and integrity.

When I first met Max he was the bubble-blowing delegate for New Zealand Underwater on the then newly formed New Zealand Recreational Fishing Council.

Here was this jovial chap with a laugh as big as his smile and who was a greenie to boot. He was also the environmental officer for New Zealand Underwater, and fought many battles to protect our coastal waters from pollution and abuse.

He was a strong marine environmental advocate, always looking for ways to improve access to good diving opportunities. He was an underwater fisherman, a “spearo” and later an avid angler.

So concerned was Max for his marine environment that he was instrumental in establishing the Aqua Trust, and remained one of its most loyal trustees until his untimely passing.

I understand he was the applicant for the Long Island marine reserve, and he supported and promoted many others. Unfortunately he was to become so disillusioned with the selfish attitudes of the next generation of greenies that he ended up fighting against the deceitful ad hoc processes many of these folk would use to create more marine reserves, while remaining indifferent to the wider community's views.

He was made a life member of NZ Underwater in 1987 for his services to the diving fraternity and the marine environment.

Max was to lead the challenge on behalf of the New Zealand United party with the support of a much younger, bearded skipper representing the charterboat section of the New Zealand Marine Transport Association in trying to stop Ports of Auckland Ltd from dumping toxic dredgings near the Noises group of islands. That was the very place where the NZRFC released over a thousand kingfish a few weeks ago.

“You haven't got a chance,” we were told, as many groups maintained their distance for fear of costs when we lost. Two little Davids took the mighty corporates to task, and two small family homes were on the line, if only our wives knew the risk at the time. Where were the environmentalists? Max was visually disappointed.

The port company had every expert in town, while we relied on Max's skills, local knowledge and anecdotal evidence.

Yes we lost the 10-day hearing, with the judge acknowledging that we had a strong case but not one backed by science. He said there was a stronger case to suck it and see, as he gave approval, with the proviso that if the mound moved, no more dumpings of dredge material would occur within the Hauraki Gulf again. When the opposition went for costs, the good judge agreed with us and ordered that the costs rest where they lay.

The mound would disburse, we said, and it did. And as of today there have been no more approved dumpings of dredged spoil in the Hauraki Gulf. So yes, at the end of the day, Max with his mate won another step forward for the marine environment he loved so much.



Max was a qualified bookkeeper, a trade in those days, and after he retired from the Reserve Bank he set up shop in his basement office and became the Secretary/Manager for the NZRFC in 1990.

He would go on to be one of our strongest advocates in all forums. Max would approach every issue with such a professional determination that he would become known to you all and respected by most. He gave respect for those who earned it, even when he disagreed with one's views, and while he could suffer fools, he rarely did so for long.

Max's work on behalf of the recreational fishing community is far too long to list here today. He was made a life member of the NZRFC in 1999 in recognition of his continuing work with this organisation.

Max was a proud and fiercely independent person. He was the author of his own destiny, and no-one could change that. And yet he would go without if he thought your needs were greater than his. His heart was as big as the man himself.

It was this capacity for giving love and sharing what little he had that endeared him to many, or got him into trouble from time to time. Cross him and you were in trouble, for he made a far better friend than an enemy, as history will attest. But in the years I knew him, he was an honest and caring mate.

His greatest love was Allison, a loving wife who was able to make Max feel proud and loved, even when he was getting a much deserved growling.

Sadly Allison would succumb to a terminal illness, leaving a loving husband and proud father with two beautiful daughters. Never was a bad word said about his girls, Mary and Patricia, for both are living memories of his first love, Alli.

It would be fair to say that Max had a few failings, and cigarettes were his biggest downfall. He liked a tippie and he was proficient at retrieving money on the pokies. Somehow he just knew how to convince a pokie machine to sing his tune.

Max had not kept in the best of health in more recent years. He would hide his pain and still work tirelessly, and would value fishing trips with friends. He was always good company to have aboard.

The recreational fishing fraternity has lost a trusted friend and one of its hardest working advocates, with years of institutional knowledge. None of us is getting any younger.

At the recent conference of the New Zealand Recreational Fishing Council, our Australian guests discussed a scheme they have for training young people in fisheries representation. Max was heard to say, “What a bloody good idea. Just look around (at the conference), not a young one in sight. Just a bunch of old fogies! We need to think about this.”

And so we have, and it's the wish of Max's family that we set up a memorial trust in his name. The Max Hetherington Foundation aims, “To further recreational fishing development by training young people in recreational fisheries advocacy and management” for Fish for the Future. It is a fitting tribute to a trusted friend of the fishing fraternity.

All donations to The Max Hetherington Foundation may be posted to PO Box 51-533, Pakuranga, Auckland. 