

## In brief...

**Battle over prison ships**

Plans to reintroduce prison ships in England have sparked a heated discussion amongst top Conservative Party members.

Floating jails do not feature in the party's draft manifesto, but they are being considered as a means of fulfilling David Cameron's pledge to end the government's prisoner early release scheme.

A leading prison reform campaigner says she had spoken to a senior MP in the party's justice team, who said the proposal had been imposed by Mr Cameron's communications chief, Andy Coulson, undermining a lengthy process of careful policy development.

Frances Crook, the director of the Howard League for Penal Reform said: "There is a huge row going on inside the Conservative Party. What they are concerned about is that they are democratically elected as MPs and have spent four or five years developing carefully thought-out policies on crime and justice based on extensive consultation, and then Coulson comes along and thinks it would be a good idea to announce they are going to have a prison ship.

Britain's last floating jail, *HMP The Weare*, was sold in 2005 after eight years holding prisoners off Portland, Dorset.

The ship's temporary stint as a jail was controversial, with the Chief Inspector of Prisons denouncing it unfit for purpose because of the lack of access to fresh air and exercise.

**Man survives bridge jump**

A man survived a 45 metre leap from the Auckland Harbour Bridge but ended up seriously ill in hospital.

The man apparently drove to the top of the bridge, ran across two lanes and leapt over the side without hesitating, police told local media.

He was seen by a passenger on a passing ferry who alerted the captain. The ferry stopped and retrieved the badly hurt man from the water.

Inspector Dave Walker, said people who jumped from the bridge seldom survived the fall and the man was lucky to be alive, although his condition was "not flash". He said as the man jumped, the westbound ferry was passing under the bridge.

"One of the passengers witnessed him come down and told the ship captain. The deckhand of that ferry pulled him on board.

"Not many people survive that. It depends on whether you have flat water or calm water but it also depends on how you fall," Walker said, adding that a fall from that height was like jumping onto concrete.

**NEW GROUP HEADS NORTHLAND MARINE SECTOR**

THE MARINE INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION (MIA) has welcomed the formation of a new marine industry group, MIA Northern Group, to represent the interests of the sector in Opuā, Whangarei and Marsden Cove.

The chair of the new group is well known marine identity, Dennis Maconaghie of Friendship Yachts.

"This new arrangement will have benefits both ways," says MIA executive director, Peter Busfield, "better support for the sector in Northland from the national body and, with Dennis sitting on the full MIA board, better representation at a national level of issues and opportunities in Northland."

Although not nearly as large as Northland's primary industry sectors, boat building and refitting is an important part of the niche manufacturing sector for which

Northland has long been highly regarded.

Recent studies estimate the value of the sector to be around \$100 million, much of which is foreign exchange earnings. In addition, the sector employs over 400 workers and more than 50 apprentices; it also has one of this country's best training facilities provided by NorthTec at their FutureTrades complex, Busfield says.

There are a number of issues facing the sector in Northland, key among them being to ensure that the Hatea River remains "boat friendly" through regular dredging and navigation upgrades; continued development of appropriate on and off water facilities to handle the increased size and number of boats coming to Northland and continued promotion of the region as a key marine destination in the face of intense competition from other Pacific ports.

**Inland port rail link completed**

CONSTRUCTION OF THE new rail link between the Port of Auckland and the Wiri Inland Port is complete, with the first arriving at Wiri on February 3.

Ports of Auckland managing director Jens Madsen said completion of the rail exchange was a major step forward for the port company and for the Auckland region.

"New Zealand needs top quality infrastructure and a flexible mix of sea, road and rail transport options, if our economy is to grow," said Madsen.

"This is about bringing the seaport right to the doorstep of businesses in South Auckland. Exporters and importers will be able to drop off and pick up containers without having to negotiate the Auckland motorways."

There are also big potential benefits for the community through reduced road congestion, with the rail link forecast to eventually save up to 2.5 million truck kilometres per year – the equivalent of 100,000 central city truck trips.

Madsen said carbon emission modelling by Ports of Auckland had shown big potential savings for businesses close to the Wiri Inland Port.

"A lot of our current customers are based within eight kilometres of the inland port. By using the rail link to the seaport, this group will be able to reduce their carbon emissions by up to 25 percent."

KiwiRail Chief Executive Jim Quinn said the Wiri Inland Port rail link was a natural addition to the rail network given its proximity to the North Island main trunk line.

"It's logical to connect more export industries to major ports to take advantage of rail's natural strength in moving heavy goods efficiently," he said.

"The Wiri link is an example of an initiative to provide the efficiencies our customers are seeking in moving their goods. We are pleased to be able to provide the infrastructure for industries and regions to realize their full potential.

"It's all part of the development of a leaner and more efficient national supply chain which benefits the whole New Zealand economy."

Initially KiwiRail will run four services of 23 wagons a week in each direction between Wiri and the Auckland seaport.

Construction of the rail exchange, which began in June 2009, was undertaken by KiwiRail and Brian Perry Civil. The job included three rail sidings, 2000m of rail track and a hardstand about the size of the Britomart station.

The 5ha of land the rail exchange is on, is owned by KiwiRail. Ports of Auckland owns the adjacent 10ha inland port.

## Research vessel crunched

THE SKIPPER OF *Polaris II*, the University of Otago research vessel, who left the wheel just before it hit part of a fuel wharf at Bluff, has accepted blame for the early morning incident.

Bill Dickson, of Dunedin, said he left the wheel of the vessel at 4am on Sunday, January 31, to turn on the floodlights, but the tide caused the vessel to collide with a concrete structure by the fuel wharf.

"What can I say? It was my fault," he told the *Otago Daily Times*.

The research vessel was due to depart on a trip to Fiordland at 5am that morning, but that voyage had been postponed until



repairs to the starboard side of the vessel had been completed in Bluff.

*Polaris II* was due to depart for Fiordland for a series of postgraduate research expeditions.

One student was on board with the crew at the time of the accident, but no-one was injured.

Alternative arrangements had been made to allow some students to complete research using smaller vessels, but the rest would have to wait for the repair of *Polaris II*.

## ARC RELEASES SHORE SKINKS ON SMALL GULF ISLET

AS PART OF a drive to restore the Hauraki Gulf islands ecology, the Auckland Regional Council (ARC), Department of Conservation, and Massey University have released 80 shore skinks on Crusoe Island (Papakohatu) – a 0.7ha island situated between Motuihe and Waiheke islands.

The Hauraki Gulf is one of New Zealand's most important regions for nature conservation. Its many (some 350) islands large and small, offer an uncommonly high diversity of marine and terrestrial ecosystems and associated species.

While most conservation attention has been given to the larger islands like Little Barrier (Hauturu), Rangitoto and Motutapu islands – small islets also have significant present and potential conservation values.

Like other areas in New Zealand, the biodiversity values of many of these islands have been compromised by habitat alteration, and introduced pests and weeds. Fortunately, recent pest eradication efforts are providing unprecedented opportunities to restore pest-free islands to something close to their former pristine state.

Despite Crusoe Island providing an ideal habitat for shore skink and a number of other reptiles, no lizards are currently present probably due to the previous impacts of mammalian pests – especially rodents. However, the island has now been declared pest free.

This milestone was achieved largely through the personal efforts of ARC chairman Mike Lee who, as part of his post-graduate research on small islands and islets in the Inner Hauraki



Mike Lee (ARC) and Kelsey Nichols (Massey University)



Gulf in 2001, eradicated a large population of mice which had overrun the island and had probably been in residence for decades.

The ARC's biosecurity team has removed the invasive *Rhannus alaternus* (buckweed) which had plagued the island's otherwise pristine native forest. The island is now recovering well and provides a potential safe-haven for native reptiles and invertebrates, and eventually petrels.

Shore skinks (*Oligosoma Smithii*) are small, dark brown lizards that were once abundant in coastal dune land and rocky areas throughout the North Island. However, their numbers are now relatively rare on the mainland and are continuing to decline through the impacts of coastal development and predators such as rodents, cats and stoats.

The transferred skinks were sourced from the Massey University's captive breeding facility, with a follow up release from Tawaharanui Regional Park planned.

It is expected that the skinks will thrive on Crusoe Island, and pave the way for translocations of other reptiles and invertebrates in the future.



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