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PROJECT CRIMSON: AN EXAMPLE OF CORPORATE SUPPORT FOR CONSERVING BIODIVERSITY

(Short Answers in Conservation Science)

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**PROJECT CRIMSON: AN EXAMPLE
OF CORPORATE SUPPORT FOR
CONSERVING BIODIVERSITY**

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Until a few years ago it would have been laughable to think that organisations whose mission was to make money from the exploitation of natural resources could be used to help in the conservation of these resources. The general view was that developers destroyed nature and conservationists hindered development. The history of conservation in New Zealand strongly upholds the distinction, and the consequences on the ground, now, indicate clearly that conservation is still very much the poorer cousin of development.

Formerly, the government glove fitted the farm and forestry hand perfectly, and it was only in the 1980's that a language began to develop which facilitated the inclusion of conservation in this arrangement. Even then the empowering impetus came largely from international agencies like Unesco (and other United Nations agents), IUCN and WWF, and one began to hear about the Integration of Conservation and Development (Nature Conservation Council 1981). But there was no mention of corporate sponsorship.

Then, in "Caring for the Earth" (IUCN, UNEP and WWF 1991), an update from the "World Conservation Strategy" (IUCN, UNEP, WWF 1980) came is the statement: "Industries that use the products of forestry, agriculture, fisheries, or that depend as tourism does on the non-consumptive use of natural resources, have a special responsibility to care for their resource

base ... Industries concerned should ... give support, including financial backing, to international and national agreements and organizations that protect the resource base, and promote research that will allow its sustainable use" (p. 101-103).

And again (p. 172): "But there is a rationale for greater commercial sponsorship of conservation. Corporations in 10 major industries - beverages, chemicals, clothing, food and confectionery, paper and wood products, pharmaceuticals, rubber and plastics, soaps and cosmetics, textiles, tobacco - depend wholly or partly on plants and animals for their raw materials. A significant proportion of these plants and animals is wild. The corporations benefit collectively from conservation of flora and fauna, but do not pay for it. Hence it would be appropriate for them to contribute directly to the costs of establishing and managing protected areas and other measures to maintain the wild gene pools, species, and habitats that form the biological resource base of their industry. "

Far from being a hindrance to development, conservation began to be seen as a means of sustaining development. The green part of New Zealand, facilitating "eco-tourism" for instance, is actually one of the nation's greatest money earners. Concepts like organic agriculture are now being touted as the best way to ensure New Zealand's place as a world food producer, consistent with its "clean, green image". However, conservationists know full well that New Zealand is not clean, nor actually "green" in the figurative sense. They are suspicious of companies jumping on a fashionable bandwagon - preaching environmental awareness with one hand (and paying sponsorship out of the PR budget) and exploiting in the same old way for money, on the other.

"Sponsorships vary ... from committed ... to cynical little tack-ons to a marketing venture where the amount of money going to conservation is small." (Smith 1994)

The truth is that the land has been so devastated by land development, species harvest, the introduction of pests and so on, that conservation organisations like the Department of Conservation and community organisations cannot possibly manage the situation adequately. Broadly based community help is absolutely essential if the existing conservation estate is to become sustainable because, in its present state, it is declining. The hundreds of threatened species, the almost total destruction of some ecosystems (e.g. pohutukawa forest), or of all

indigenous ecosystems in some regions, the predominance of tiny remnants through most of lowland New Zealand, all indicate that a massive restoration strategy is needed. The "conservation estate" is just the core of this, rightly managed by Government using public money. But the real work, of extending these core areas wider into the general landscape, is in the hands of the community. Corporate and other sponsors have become a vital ingredient to begin this process and are likely to be critical for its advance.

2.0 PROJECT CRIMSON

Project Crimson was born through conversations between staff of the Department of Conservation in Northland, and the Whangarei office of the former company NZ Forest Products Limited, now Carter Holt Harvey Limited. Fortuitously the Forest Research Institute had surveyed the condition of pohutukawa and found an appalling state of affairs (Hosking et al., 1989), so that there was a rational basis to discussion. In addition New Zealand was preparing to acknowledge 150 years of nationhood, and companies were seeking opportunities to celebrate our successes.

Project Crimson was born from awareness, not only of one of the most beautiful trees in the world (Platt 1991), but that the trees were dying before our eyes. Only a few offshore islands, like Poor Knights and Rangitoto, and a very few coastal parts of the mainland had any more than scattered individual trees. The pohutukawa community had essentially gone. Now the remaining trees were going; people were worried. Thousands died during the 1980's. Their sombre, dark green canopies befitting of this ancient restless land, each summer coated with the blood of Tawhaki (Orbell, 1985), were replaced by gaunt grey skeletons which, in turn, were gradually smashed to the ground by the once tempered winds.

At first the cause was unclear. Pohutukawa, like so many other trees, had a myriad of factors impinging upon its health. Being a coastal tree, pohutukawa occupied the space that New Zealanders like to frequent, especially in the summer when the ground is dry and vulnerable, the fires are hot and seeking, the seedlings are young and tender. Unwittingly our picnics beneath the giant pohutukawa were preventing any chance of maintaining the trees' health or regeneration.

The coastal landforms attracted towns and roads so that the fringe of pohutukawa were often in the way of settlement and communication. The coastal plains and dunes were also favoured niches for farmland and most of the pohutukawa of New Zealand were burned and felled to make way for stock. The browsing removed any regeneration, the trampling injured roots, the manure altered the nutrient balance and perhaps the invertebrate associates, and the pasture prevented the tiny seedlings from emerging. Probably near to 95% of the coastal pohutukawa forest was lost in this way.

The 'coup de grace' was unintentional. Sixty million years ago the ancestors of pohutukawa escaped from the world of browsing animals by drifting to the Pacific. While retaining its nutritious contents, the ancestor lost its protective chemistry and it abandoned the aromatic strategy that kept the marsupials and cousin Eucalyptus in an evolutionary dialectic. The brush-tailed possum, released from its continental prison, was soon taking candy from our babies and pohutukawa is its most recent and conspicuous victim.

In combination, the forces associated with human development have compromised one of the indicators of our identity. The ecosystem that has protected, stabilised and diversified the coast for a time period older than the Southern Alps has been reduced to a strung out band of geriatric trees who were adults before the slaughter even began.

Project Crimson was born from abject need, and it promised to reverse the trend (the Project Crimson Trust Deed, 1990):

The primary object of the Trust is to encourage and undertake the protection, conservation and restoration of pohutukawa (*Metrosideros excelsa*) especially, but not exclusively, where:

- (i) endangered pohutukawa may benefit
- (ii) locally or nationally endangered, rare, declining or extinct pohutukawa may benefit or be restored
- (iii) restorative work may help to prevent an individual pohutukawa or groups of pohutukawa from deteriorating or becoming further damaged and/or endangered.

Further objects of the Trust are:-

- (a) To support the protection of New Zealand's remaining pohutukawa generally.
- (b) To educate the public in New Zealand, including the commercial sector and authorities, of the conservation status of New Zealand's indigenous pohutukawa and of the restorative and protective acts that will best serve these conservation interests; and to encourage public support of and involvement in such protective and restorative works.
- (c) To assist and co-operate with persons and organisations sharing similar aims.
- (d) To establish policies and a programme of activities on an annual basis and allocate resources including finance aimed to implement the above Trust objects.

Pohutukawa is not an endangered species in the sense of being threatened with extinction (Cameron *et al.*, 1993) and the term is used in a general sense to evoke a life-threatening situation and a loss from the landscape.

2.1 The Project Crimson Trust

The rules of the Trust are set out in its Deed, a legal document that establishes the Trust as a Charitable Trust. The Trust members are selected as individuals rather than representatives of specific organisations, although in practice a range of appropriate types of organisation is represented: Department of Conservation, NZ Forest Research Institute, NZ Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society, Auckland City Council, Tangata Whenua, New Zealand Tree Council and Carter Holt Harvey, the last, the Settlor, occupying the Chair.

The Trust holds four or more meetings each year and produces a quarterly newsletter, "*Pohutukawa*". It has its own logo (currently being redesigned to a bicultural format) and its own letterhead. In addition to the funded projects Project Crimson has also produced brochures and posters, has created a mobile display, coordinated a pohutukawa photographic competition and lent its support to various community activities that celebrate the mana of pohutukawa, such as a street parade in Whakatane. Many newspaper and magazine articles have been prepared (e.g. Mackay, 1991). Westpac, for its week long promotion this year, created an excellent video on pohutukawa. Each of the Trust members contribute

promotional material, media items and the like. A substantial amount of groundwork is undertaken by volunteers, especially, over the last two years by a committed pohutukawa enthusiast, Mr Ted Wilson. The effort that pohutukawa inspires is one reason for the success of Project Crimson.

2.2 Sponsorship for plants

Another reason why Project Crimson is both a success and rather special is that it is sponsorship for a particular **plant** species. To my knowledge it is one of the only such sponsorships in New Zealand, nearly all others being for animals, especially birds such as kiwi, kakapo, kokako, hoiho, and black stilt. Unlike these species, pohutukawa is not threatened with extinction, although one could well argue that the ecosystem, pohutukawa dominant coastal forest, with only 5% of its original area remaining, and even that in decline because of possum browse, is endangered. But, like the birds, pohutukawa is unique and beautiful, with high appeal to people. This makes pohutukawa popular as an icon and as a symbol for corporate identity. It is very much hoped that other plants that are threatened as species or as ecosystems, can benefit from the Project Crimson experience.

2.3 Funding Projects

Each year the Trust calls for projects that might be funded. Attached as Appendix I, is the letter sent out in 1994, to Department of Conservation Conservancies, Councils and Royal New Zealand Forest and Bird Protection Society offices, among others, covering regions that are largely included in the natural range of distribution of pohutukawa. Although there are wider issues of tree surgery, the management of street trees, and advocacy generally, Project Crimson has identified itself fundamentally with pohutukawa in the natural environment. Consequently, Project Crimson has not funded planting projects outside the natural distribution. This has created some ill-feeling and has forced the Project Crimson Trust to develop clear policies. For instance, there is major concern about "genetic pollution". This relates to planting provenances beyond their natural range and relates to the fact that many New Zealand plants have strongly distinct regional forms that are genetically based due to isolation and adaptation to particular local climatic and geological conditions. Research is planned to test the degree of provenance variation in pohutukawa but the general conservative principle has had to be applied - "propagate only from trees that are natural to an area (and

unlikely to be pollinated by outsiders) and plant seedlings only in the area from where they came". For a community project such as Project Crimson, and a loved native plant such as pohutukawa, which has already been moved around by both Maori and Pakeha, the discipline to maintain "genetic integrity" is a major challenge. It raises an issue that I will return to, that of public relations with the Corporate sponsor, because not everyone can be pleased by the ecological realities upon which conservation must be based.

An analysis of the 1994 applications for funding reveals the scale, the range and the Trust's response (Table 1, Appendix II).

TABLE 1 Project Crimson: applications for funding according to organisations and proposed activities; 1994.

Organisations		Activities	
Councils	34	Planting	55
Government Departments (DoC + 1 other)	19	Propagation	16
Conservation and community groups	23	Site development	13
School (includes multiple schools)	2	Tree Care (incl. possums)	5
Individuals	6	Advocacy/Interpretation	7
		Research	4
Total proposals	84	Approvals	36
Total requested:	\$300,000	Total approved:	\$30,000

Several of the applications requested more money than is available for the whole programme, for instance major possum poisoning campaigns or major walkway and tourism facility developments. Project Crimson can never replace the appropriate agency for these major activities. Nor can Project Crimson contribute significantly to capital works such as nursery propagation facilities. On the other hand, a vast proportion of proposals relate to site development, protection, propagation and planting, and Project Crimson has focussed on helping community groups achieve modest goals (Appendix II). Even though the actual total figure provided is only a fraction of that requested, help by providing young trees rather than

money has satisfied a majority of proposals to date. Development of propagation facilities at Paremoremo Prison has proven to be a major success.

The Trust has a number of simple common-sense criteria to assist in deciding which projects to fund. We like to build on work already started successfully, and we like agencies which were previously funded to report on their project. Projects are favoured which have benefits to the public, which involve a variety of community inputs, which have limited alternative funding sources, and which have reasonable public profile.

2.4 Satellite sponsors

As a result of its campaign earlier this year Westpac contributed \$30,000 to Project Crimson. In previous years Villa Maria Wines, by donating money for every bottle of its pahutukawa label, has also contributed a significant sum.

The Trust has received other offers of corporate sponsorship that for one reason or another have not proceeded. In future other approaches will also undoubtedly be made. The Trust has no problem whatever with a multiplicity of sponsors (Article 3 of the Deed), although it recognises that Carter Holt Harvey is the "parent" sponsor and therefore has ultimate control at the present time. Should the principal sponsor pull out for any reason, there is no reason why a new trust Deed could not be drawn up and Project Crimson continue. There is a lot more work to be done than any one, or group, of sponsors can handle, and the work needs to continue far into the future.

3.0 POTENTIAL PROBLEMS WITH CONSERVATION SPONSORSHIP

Corporate sponsors are late arrivals to the conservation scene and are still learning how to wear the hat effectively. The Department of Conservation now has a good deal of experience with the range of issues that can be encountered, from good to bad and DoC has drawn up a set of "Sponsorship guidelines" (Department of Conservation, 1992), based on a Cabinet decision "that private sector sponsorship of work being undertaken by the Department (of Conservation) should generally be targeted at projects other than those that would normally be funded by Crown purchases of outputs" (CAB(191)M14/11). Sponsorship enables the Department to extend its work programme, and raises the profile of conservation generally

and specifically. It is blatantly obvious that in New Zealand conservation is a responsibility for all sectors of the community.

I have been advising on a sponsorship proposal recently which has been placed on hold for a year because the Corporation wishes to build its identity further before implementing the project. It may never do so, and valuable time may therefore be lost, or alternative sponsors turned away. In other words, a sponsor can "capture" a project, own it, and control the timing of it and the level of resources. This dilly-dallying for corporate reasons is not in conservation's interest. Sponsors should be very clear about what they want, before wasting the time of conservation professionals.

A second potential problem is that sponsors desire to support "pleasant" or "saleable" conservation issues. One might be hard-pressed to find a sponsor to eradicate Kaimanawa horses or Russell lupins in a braided river. But some conservation issues are not easy. Marine reserve proposals invoke complex socio-economic and iwi issues and, to date, no sponsors have come forward to assist in the costly and time-consuming studies and negotiations, despite the huge benefits that Marine Reserves will have for all New Zealanders.

Sponsors want to support famous, warm-fuzzy, issues, such as the so-called "charismatic megafauna" - big birds. Apart from the risk of complete failure, there is little risk in upsetting any particular community group. But the down-side of this approach is that the "small and ugly" do not get the financial support they need. There are few examples of sponsorship for endangered insects, or the 50 nationally endangered plant species (and many more at the local level). Part of the problem here is that sponsors like to attach their money to a particular project. It is my understanding that the World-wide Fund for Nature, who attracts sums similar to that coming to DoC, is hoping to increase the proportion of "untagged" money, so that projects with less profile can be supported. A major concern is that individual species attract money whereas the ecological processes that underlie their survival are "out of sight and out of mind".

Sponsors need to be aware that scientific discoveries can change the course of management, and that the outcomes from a project may change. The project needs to be flexible. The objectives of both the conservation agent and sponsor need to be satisfied if sponsorship partnerships are successful, and sometimes there are more than two parties. Nor should the sponsor feel they have "ownership" of the information. Scientific truth should not be allowed to be misrepresented for corporate purposes. Finally, conservation can suffer if battles between corporates seeking to support a project confound a clear and urgent direction. In an organisation like the Department of Conservation, with fourteen conservancies, the prospect of competing corporate sponsors is real, and has on occasion discouraged Head Office from supporting local initiatives.

Project Crimson, like many other sponsorship arrangements has suffered from some of the problems outlined above. On several occasions the scientific community has objected to some action. The Project Crimson Trust has been able to respond to these criticisms by sharpening its policies. In this case, while the Trust might be the watchdog of the sponsor, the public is the watchdog of the Trust.

The Department of Conservation has also worried that Project Crimson contributes too little by way of funds for meaningful conservation achievements. The Trust disagrees, and sees value in a modest beginning and notes that increased funding has been allocated each year. The injection of funds by Westpac is welcomed by the Trust, but again there is the possibility that conservation clarity is confounded by inter-corporate concerns. I believe that, ideally, the Trust should eventually assume greater powers of decision-making, independent of all the surrounding agents, so that Project Crimson has a life of its own dedicated to the conservation of pohutukawa, free from economic and political interference.

One issue that is currently under debate is whether or not to extend Project Crimson to other tree species of *Metrosideros*, the rata. Bartlett's rata is one of New Zealand's most endangered plants (about 20 remaining), but because it has only recently been discovered few people know about it. Northern and Southern rata suffer from possum browse even more than pohutukawa. These species would extend Project Crimson nationwide and allow a far larger community involvement. Carter Holt Harvey is very keen to see Project Crimson

extend to rata and is awaiting the right partnership with other sponsors to develop. The point is that in all aspects, Project Crimson is evolving.

4.0 A VISION AND CONCLUSION

Project Crimson is a successful example of corporate sponsorship. It has started small and is growing; it reaches out to diverse elements in the community and has touched a flame that burns more or less of its own accord. The object of its action, pohutukawa, is loved by New Zealanders; the Project Crimson Trust is relatively independent of the sponsor; and the sponsor is genuine in its conservation ethic. Project Crimson seems to be an excellent model.

I believe that corporate sponsorship of conservation is not only valid, but essential. To date there has been a tendency for agreements to cover nationally important species. Naturally this is the first cut, but I hope for the day when multiple local sponsors commit themselves to local issues. I came across an example in Northland recently, in which a walkway was supported by over 20 local businesses and families. Commitment generates pride and pride generates further commitment and work for the local environment and community. As stated in the Global Biodiversity Strategy (WRI 1992) *"People's commitment to conserving biodiversity springs from their "sense of place, " and the most effective citizen action has been that of people who are intimately acquainted with a region, identify with it, wrest their livelihood from it, take pride in it, and ultimately take responsibility for it."* A huge community effort is needed to restore viability to New Zealand's ecology.

I am proud of the way the corporate sponsors have come to the conservation table. I am pleased that their table manners are improving. I am delighted to see sponsorship occurring at the local level as well as at the national level, and I have a vision for the future when all elements of our community will join hands to work for the restoration of our heritage. Tihe mauri ora!

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APPENDIX I

PROJECT CRIMSON
APPLICATION FOR FUNDING OF PROJECTS 1994

The Project Crimson Trust is pleased to request applications for funding of conservation and restoration projects involving pohutukawa. Applications will be received up to 29 April 1994.

Projects may involve:

1. Conservation of existing stands (such as fencing, pest control and survey).
2. Growing and planting of new trees within the natural range of Pohutukawa and the site preparation and after care essential for the success of planting.
3. Research designed to improve understanding of the ecology, or management options for pohutukawa.
4. Conservation activities for important individual trees, such as soil enhancement and tree surgery.

Projects will be favoured that maximise public involvement (such as schools, service organisations, marae committees and local councils) and offer a significant profile in terms of local conservation achievement. Actions on private land are less favoured unless the owner has agreed to an on-going conservation management programme and the work has wider public value (e.g. landscape).

The Trust is keen to foster pohutukawa plantings of local genetic origin, and therefore forward planning is essential in order to propagate the right stock. Funding this year may establish a project that will take several years to complete.

A project proposal should contain the following components:

1. Project title.
2. Background information on location, area, land tenure, conservation significance, agencies involved in existing and future management.
3. An assessment of needs such as fencing, pest and weed management, plant stocks and labour.
4. Costs.
5. Timetable.

We look forward to receiving project applications. The Trust Board will allocate the funds at its meeting in May 1994.

Yours sincerely

Chairman
Project Crimson Trust

Organisation	Location	Nature of Project	Request	Funded
Waitakere City Council	Piha	Planting	1600	1600
Auckland City Council	Tamaki Drive	Planting	11,000	1600
Keep Coromandel Beautiful Committee	Long Bay Road	Planting	2268	1000
Bledisloe Park Board	Te Puke	Landscaping	1580	1000
Salvation Army	Whakatane	Propagation facility	32,374	1000
DoC, Bay of Plenty	Eastern B.O.P.	Planting	5825	1750
Department of Justice	Paremoremo Prison	Propagation facility	2358	3600
Forest and Bird	Tauranga	Propagation, planting	2358	3600
DoC, Bay of Plenty	Orokawa Scenic Reserve	Brochure	550	550
Thames Coast Protection Society	Thames Coast	Survey, site development, planting, tree care	5000	4000
Opotiki District Council	Various sites	Possum control, fencing, trees, stakes	65,417	4000
Forest and Bird Waikato	Raglan	Pest control, fencing, planting	1900	1000
Project Arborgro	New Plymouth	Propagation		750
DoC, Waikato	Coromandel	Propagation, planting	990	1291
Individual	Auckland	Sculpture	1000	200
Individual	Northland	Propagation	562	562
DoC, Northland	Various	Propagation, possum control	5290	4290
F&B, Mercury Bay	Whitianga	Propagation		200
Pakanāe Nursery	Northland	Propagation	3989	2500
Individual	Auckland	Propagation	235	250
Mimiwhangata Farm Park	Bay of Islands	Planting	260	260
DoC, Bay of Plenty	Bay of Plenty	Visitor leaflets	486	1500
Rotary NZ	Trees for Survival programme	Propagation at 20 schools		1000
Projects for consideration at a later date after more detailed project formulation ("B projects")				
Omokoroa Community Board	Tauranga Esplanade	Site development		
DoC, S&R	Wellington	Mycorrhiza in pohutukawa		
Western B.O.P. District Council	Bowentown Head	Planting		
Mt Maunganui College	Mt Maunganui (Mauao)	Planting		