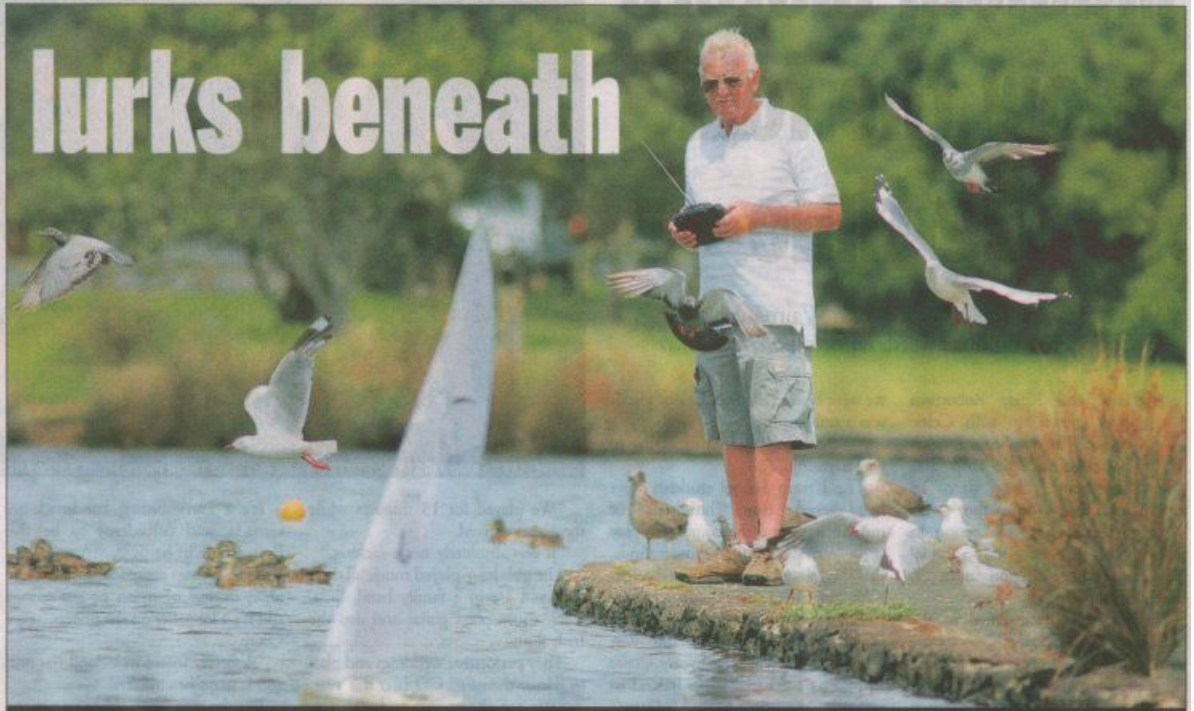


NEWS

Edward Rooney follows his nose to find out where the big stink comes from

What lurks beneath



RAY NIXON IS FED UP WITH THE FOUL-SMELLING WATER AT ONEPOTO DOMAIN

AMOS CHAPPLE

A rank and vile black monstrosity lies below the surface of this picturesque, idyllic parkland pond.

Onepoto Domain hosts hundreds of visitors every weekend. Australian Rules footballers take to the fields and families throng to the large playground and stroll around the ponds. Pigeons, ducks, terns and seagulls waddle, wade and swoop around the spring-fed lake in the ancient crater.

But, whoa, stop right there. Here's where noses get out of joint.

The pond stinks — particularly in summer when the pungent odour of rotting algae and vegetation defies description in mere words.

Ray Nixon is one of dozens of members of the Electrons Club who meet regularly to hold regattas for their magnificent model yachts.

"I've fallen in twice and I can tell you it's awful — it stinks," he shudders.

"The last time I went in, my car keys got wet and set off my car alarm. I had to drive home to Herne Bay in a stinking mess with my alarm going off all the way over the harbour bridge."

North Shore City has spent the best part of a decade shuffling the problem between departments. The woeful waterway has been an orphan: the parks department said it was the stormwater department's problem. But the stormwater department said no, the lakes were not stormwater catchments and kicked the file back to the parks department.

While this exercise in duckshoving went on, the lakes' users were left with no choice but to try to manage the problem.

Model boat groups — including the Electrons, the Ancient Mariners and the Radio Yacht Squadron — have shared this most unappealing

NOT SO SWEET

North Shore's great new park also has a dark secret.

Four ponds in the new Chelsea Heritage Park are heavily silted and have been the sites of regular botulism outbreaks in recent years.

The disease thrives in algae in warmer months and kills dozens of birds.

The four ponds are now North Shore City Council's responsibility. The council has taken over the former New Zealand Sugar

Company land and will hold a celebration of the handover on March 8.

Meanwhile, council officers conceded this month that they knew very little about the problems in the 7ha of ponds.

The stormwater operations manager has been authorised to investigate.

Before silt can be removed from Chelsea or Onepoto, consents would be required from Auckland Regional Council.

duty for 10 years. They have little option but to do it themselves because there are precious few places in the region for model boats of this size. Wattle Downs is far to the south and Gulf Harbour a long way north.

The Onepoto Lagoon Coordination Committee is the latest group in the fray.

"Actually," says Richard Plinston, "that's a flash name for me and my sister."

He needn't be so modest. Mr Plinston is president of the Radio Yacht Squadron and his sister, Dr Carol Bergquist, is a senior analyst of environmental policy at Waitakere City Council.

Last year, Mr Plinston and Dr Bergquist filed a flurry of reports with local and citywide officials to try to embarrass them into action.

"The problem with the pond," noted one report, "is that the silt has built up over many years and this has entrapped dead vegetation and algae, which rots when the water temperature rises. The rotting causes gases that sometimes bring material to the surface, which is unsightly as well as smelling badly."

The model boat groups have become adept at opening water gates at the estuary end of the lakes to let seawater in and out with the tide. This flushes the worst of the algae into Waitemata Harbour but hasn't prevented the build-up of silt that now

entirely chokes the stream culvert at the other end of the lake.

"At the ponds over in Chelsea they get outbreaks of dead ducks that get sick with botulism from the algae," Mr Plinston says. "We've managed to prevent much of that occurring."

Over time pockets of algae have survived the saltwater flushing.

"The worst part is the eastern end where the culvert is blocked; that's disgusting."

Last week, the evidence from Mr Plinston reached critical mass and could be ignored no longer.

The infrastructure and environment committee resolved that council officers carry out investigations required for removing the silt at Onepoto and report back to the committee in November this year.

"Let's hope something happens," says Mr Nixon, as he hauls his boat from the water. He says people whose boats have deeper keels may soon be prevented from racing their models.