



# Estuary passion led to Ramsar status

By Janine Baalbergen

**A local woman's phone call to Switzerland 20 years ago led to the Manawātū River Estuary becoming an internationally recognised wetland/bird sanctuary.**

That woman was Joan Leckie, and her call ensured protection of the estuary under the international Ramsar Convention, signed in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971.

Joan is a passionate conservationist, who felt the estuary with its abundant vegetation and migratory bird life was worth protecting. It was about 2005 when she began on what she soon discovered was a monumental task.

"I just rang the Ramsar headquarters in Switzerland and asked what I needed to do to make the Manawātū Estuary a Ramsar site," she says. "To my surprise the man who answered the phone said he had been here and watched the birds. He reckoned it was definitely worth saving."

She was sent a list of things required to apply for the status.

"Though I started this on my own I very quickly had help. We printed leaflets and delivered them to households in Foxton Beach explaining what we were intending to do."

This was followed by a public meeting where some young men heckled her, saying they wanted to continue running their 4-wheel drives through the dunes and the estuary.

"It was a bit of a shock," she says, but it didn't deter her.

She had to gather information, such as water depth and quality, and produce a vegetation and bird list.

"Lucky for me the Ornithological Society had been keeping records for 20 years and they were happy to let me have their list."

Her paperwork was eventually dispatched



Joan Leckie QSM

to Switzerland. A reply said the local agency for Ramsar was the Department of Conservation. About two weeks later, in 2006, the application was accepted.

A pōwhiri was held near the marine boating club involving the three iwi who had an interest in the estuary.

The icing on the cake, which to Joan was a bit of a shock, was DoC's successful nomination of her for a Queen Service Medal.

Joan says she made lifelong friends during her time working on the Ramsar application. Soon after, the Manawātū Estuary Trust was formed.

While she now lives in Hawke's Bay Joan is still keenly interested in the Manawātū River Estuary and made the trip to Foxton Beach recently to be present at the launch of the newest management plan for the estuary.

The first management plan was from 2007-

2012. A review of that plan resulted in the 2015-2025 version, released late last month.

The focus of the revision has been on strategies that ensure practical activities occur that protect and enhance the estuary. Monitoring will determine the success and need for changes.

The trust now includes representatives from a wide range of organisations. It's not a formal list of contributing parties, but an open group that welcomes all individuals and groups passionate about revitalising the estuary environment.

Each group has a coordinator who reports to the management team, who compile a report every six months. Some groups focus on flora, some on fauna, pest animals, pest plants, or water quality, tackling a few at the time.

Joan is an avid reader of everything to do with the estuary and the team keep her well informed with copies of newsletters and meeting minutes.

"It is such a thrill to see that the whole community now realises how good the estuary is. I am pleased everyone has seen the light."

■ For more information, see [metrust.org.nz](http://metrust.org.nz)