

## **Motu Ngahere scenario**

In 2000 a group of landowners in a rural area got together to preserve a stand of beautiful bush by creating an 'inland island' free of pests. Their vision was for a pest-proof fence around the bush and the gradual re introduction of native birds and other fauna into the area. A local farming couple, Brian and Donna led local conservation efforts by designating some land adjoining this bush area as a QE11 reserve.

Over the next 3 years Brian and Donna formed the Motu Ngahere Restoration Trust, with 5 other local trustees and the support of most of the local landowners. Brian was elected Chair of the Trust and Donna appointed Trust Secretary. A considerable amount of money was raised locally and from major philanthropic trusts and in 2007 the reserve perimeter pest-proof fence was erected. It took another two years to eradicate the possums, rats, stoats, cats and rabbits in the reserve, before native birds and reptiles could be re-introduced.

Once saddlebacks, whiteheads and bellbirds were re-established, the reserve was opened to the public and a series of conservation education projects developed. Currently the centre is open every Saturday and Sunday with volunteer staff, and on weekdays when requested by organised groups. Visitors are asked for donations to cover costs. In the three years since its inception, the area has become increasingly attractive for school groups and tourist coaches. At times it has been difficult to find enough volunteers to staff these visits. Growth has also necessitated provision of some public amenities such as a toilet block and designated carparking. The Trust has use of an old farm shed which acts as office, reception area, kitchen, and information centre. For the last 2 years the local council has contributed a grant to pay a coordinator 12 hours a week.

Trust Board plans for upgrading these facilities have been thrown into disarray by financial problems and other risks. The final cost of the fence escalated beyond the original budget, largely due to unforeseen difficulties with the terrain, necessitating further fund raising. More worryingly, there have been several recent breaches of the fence entailing significant repair costs and a threat to the integrity of the project as whole. Severe weather brought down several large trees, damaging the fence allowing pests to get in. The result is that the Trust is now required to find substantially more money than anticipated, for fence repairs, on-going maintenance, and monitoring for pest invasion (especially rats) inside the fence.

During this period, Brian suffered a stroke and now rarely leaves home. His place as chairperson has been taken by Peter. Donna continues as secretary, though looking after Brian is increasingly demanding of her time, and her attendance and contribution to the Trust is erratic. If an up-graded visitor centre is to be achieved, it is clear to Peter that they need to expand their volunteer base significantly, to charge visitors for entry and to employ staff. Donna and two other trustees oppose this approach. They think the project can continue with largely volunteer labour as it always has, and that all they need to do is to convince the philanthropic trusts to give them more money. Aware of Trustees' responsibility for financial prudence, Peter calls a special trust board meeting to address issues of capacity and capability. He is keen to see what options are available to them, and what the organisation needs to do to stay viable.

1. Identify the stages this organisation has been through. Where is it now?
2. What are some of the options available to Peter and the Board?
3. If the restoration project is to continue, what new ways of working are needed? Use the Building Blocks to frame your discussion.

