

# Pohokura appraisal – Bringing the community alongside

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## Abstract

The 2000-2001 Pohokura appraisal programme, comprising the drilling of two off-shore wells, one onshore well and an extensive seismic acquisition project, was the most intensive activity undertaken in the Motunui area east of Waitara since the building of the methanol plants and their associated pipeline infrastructure. Straddling coastal waters, reefs, cliff tops and farmlands, this area is one of significant cultural, historical and amenity value to the communities of north Taranaki.

Under the Resource Management Act and the Taranaki Regional Coastal and Freshwater Plans, there was a minimal consultation requirement associated with obtaining resource consents for these activities. Clearly though, for assurance of community acceptance and to mitigate any risk of operational disruption due to public concern, a significant and well integrated communications and consultation plan was required. The need was for a plan which could be flexible enough to accommodate the inevitable modifications and rescheduling of the work programme and be robust enough to withstand any potential or real operational mishap that can, and does, happen from time to time.

Of critical importance was the realisation that relationships forged at the early appraisal stage would determine the long-term acceptability of the development of the Pohokura field. Short-term solutions at the expense of long-term relationships could not be risked.

Fundamental to the relationships forged within the community was the early recognition that Joint Venture Partners were fundamentally committed to a long-term sustainability approach to the field development, incorporating social responsibility and community consultation on all activities.

The paper will describe the strategy and plans adopted which ensured the uninterrupted execution of the appraisal plan. Through specific examples, it will highlight the learnings and the framework established for a constructive and socially responsible way forward for the development of the field.

## Introduction

Good afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen. I take it we are all agreed that timely development of the Pohokura field is an imperative for New Zealand, our economy and the livelihood of the majority of us.

To establish the potential of the Pohokura field, Fletcher Challenge Energy (FCE) on behalf of the joint venture partners FCE, Shell, Preusag and Todd, undertook an 18 month appraisal programme, starting in January 2000. This comprised the drilling of two offshore wells, one onshore well adjacent to Methanex and marine and transition zone seismic.

The value of Pohokura to New Zealand is now clear, but what was the direct value of this appraisal programme to the local residents in that area? Those for whom these activities were in their 'back yard'. The answer is, of course, 'not a lot'!

To a person, all those who were affected by or operations would have preferred us not to be there, perhaps with the exception of Methanex! This is understandable and it is not hard to identify with these people and their concerns.

The purpose of this talk is to share some of our learnings during this appraisal programme and give examples of initiatives we took to develop, to understand and to address the valid concerns of those who just 'did not want us there'.

## North Taranaki

First let me provide a little background, for those who are unfamiliar with the area.

The North Taranaki coastal area is one of outstanding natural beauty, which is unique in many ways:

- It is a holiday and recreational fishing area for many in Taranaki.
- It is a rural area with some of the most valuable and productive dairy land in New Zealand.
- It is the rohe of Te Atiawa and Ngati Mutunga iwi.
- It is an area rich in history and has suffered periods of intense warring which have ramifications to this day and which still define many relationships in the region. The issues that David speaks of, issues regarding ownership of land, resources and self determination are critical to many Maori in the area.
- It is an area which has seen the development of the methanol plants at Motunui and in the Waitara Valley.
- There has been previous drilling and seismic activities, and many kilometres of pipelines have been laid over the years.
- It is an area where there has been open conflict and objections at the consenting stage and during operations.

So we had a number of legacy issues with the community to factor into our considerations.

## Community consultation

When undertaking any field activities it is essential to conduct a reasonable level of consultation and communicating before and during operations. For the Pohokura appraisal, we provided Community news sheets and activity bulletins. We held public meetings, local community group meetings, meetings with the local hapu and we undertook many door-to-door visits and modified operations according to individual needs wherever practicable. Is this enough? What is enough?

From the start of the Pohokura Venture there has been a commitment by the partners:

- to actively engage with and work with stakeholders
- to develop sustainable relationships with the community for the duration, whatever that may be – it could be 6 months, it could be 30 years
- to minimise the impact of our operations on the environment
- to respect and safeguard people
- to respond to social needs of those affected by our operations
- to ensure that when benefits can be realised they are
- to be, in essence, good citizens.

Fine words and fine intentions. But what do they really mean? Who decides what they mean, particularly when you are talking to someone who is telling you in no uncertain terms 'to go away'.

My experience is that despite their concerns and wish for us to go away. Nearly all, of the community in the Motonui area are realists, understanding that in essence they have no

ability to stop progress of this nature **where and when it is responsibly undertaken**. With this realisation, what are the non-negotiable elements of responsibility from a community perspective. These have been articulated to me in many different ways but I can probably paraphrase and summarise them as follows:

- Openness and transparency.
- Honesty – 'Tell us the truth, give us the whole picture. Don't just tell us about the end point, tells us what going to happen on the way there'.
- Recognition – 'Recognise that we are part of the equation. Recognise us for who we are. Do not question who we are'.
- Respect – 'Respect us for who we are and what we do. Do not question what we do.'
- Involve us – 'It is our environment, we have a right to be involved in what happens to it.'

Again fine words and quite reasonable. But do they means the same thing to everyone?

It was clear to us that language is very important if we are to communicate and gain understanding. It was also clear to us that what we needed was a reciprocal relationship. If we want understanding and consideration of our business needs we would need to reciprocate and provide understanding and consideration of the communities interests and needs, irrespective of whether or not they had a direct relevance to our operations.

We needed time and an ability and willingness to listen and respond. Hell, where do you buy commodities like that?

Let me give a few examples of some listening and responding undertaken during our appraisal programme.

### Marae workshop

In November 2000, senior executives of the JV Partners and the whole Pohokura management team undertook a 2 day workshop at Owae Marae in Waitara. Its purpose was for us all to gain an appreciation of the local culture of Te Atiawa, local issues and concerns. Importantly too, the workshop provided an opportunity to share and constructively review previous operational activities. What had worked and what had not worked? What had caused the tensions? What had caused the distress? Why there had been sabotage of previous seismic activities? Why had we landed up head to head in the environmental court?

### Community Advisory Group

FCE had a Community Advisory Group, a group of 14 local residents whom we met with regularly, sometimes as often as once a fortnight during high levels of activity. As their name implies they are a conduit for community concerns and for providing advice.

When it became clear that we would be undertaking our marine seismic operations over Christmas, New Year and the peak holiday season, we asked our Advisory Group how we

should handle the communication, primarily to ensure fishermen would not get snarled up in the 4 km array of recorders trailing the vessel. I have to say it was a fiery meeting. All were indignant. All felt we were being unreasonable in conducting the seismic over the festive season, but that was the only period the seismic vessel was available to the project.

After much discussion and clarification that the operation need not disrupt recreational activities, we brainstormed as to how best to communicate with the fishermen from New Plymouth to Urenui, and all those who use the coastal water for their recreation. What should be the content of information sheets and notifications?

The key message we received from our Community Advisory Group was 'You have to front up. If you want people to understand and keep out of the way, get down onto the wharves when everyone is launching their boats and tell them in person. Don't just post leaflets and don't send a messenger'. In fact this is a message we were frequently given: 'if you think we are important, come and see us yourself. Don't send a consultant or contractor!'

From Christmas to the end of January we were in Waitara and the surrounding area talking to those who were interested and concerned. And on the peak holiday weekends we fronted up on the wharves and boat ramps during each high tide warning of the 4 km lines trailing the vessel and the need to keep out of its direct path.

### **Onshore appraisal well**

When we decided to drill the second appraisal well onshore east of Methanex, this raised memories for the neighbours and hapu of a controversial consenting process a couple of years previously. We needed to visit issues which had been the subject of huge tension, concern and conflicting views. There was concern by many in the locality that there had been promises and commitments made by the company which were not reflected in consent conditions. Had we remember these and were we going to honour them?

So, prior to commencing site works, we contracted two local residents and a local hapu member to go through all meeting notes, minutes of public meetings, hui and correspondence and provide a list of all the commitments ever made regarding work on the site. To this we add the consent conditions. From the list we constructed a commitments chart together with a schedule of actions and a monitoring and reviewing programme. This was shared and jointly executed by the Taranaki Regional Council, local residents, Ngati Rahiri and FCE as a joint commitment.

### **Offshore drilling standards**

One of the main concerns of the offshore drilling is that no one can see what we are doing. For onshore drilling we regularly conduct site visits for those interested. In addition local residents and hapu members can ring up anytime and ask for a visit and ask for an update on what is going on. For offshore drilling, clearly the opportunities for visits are limited and these need to be planned well in advance.

So do we have different standards offshore? Are we less vigilant regarding HSE issues? The answer is of course no, but how do we convince the sceptics. To answer these questions we presented to the Community Advisory Group a detailed explanation of our Safety and Environmental Management System, describing the processes and means by which we record, investigate and address all events arising during operations which have, or have the potential for, impacting on safety or the environment. We covered in detail how we selected and managed our contractors.

Prior to drilling our second offshore well, we printed out from our system every event we recorded during the drilling and testing of the first exploration well. We went through each one with the group, covering the investigations and the remedial actions.

### **Partnership monitoring of the environment**

My final example is one of a partnership project between FCE, local hapu and the Taranaki Regional Council. This was to conduct a survey of the reefs along the North Taranaki Coastline.

Whilst it was a project born out of anger and the unfortunate spill from testing the first exploration well it does provide a model for partnerships of many kinds where values, issues and views can be shared. It also demonstrates a future where tangata whenua can become actively involved in monitoring the impact of operations on their environment.

## **Conclusion**

Before I show the video, which speaks for itself, may I end by saying that all the examples I have given here, have involved a degree of risk taking, both for the company and those in the community. They proved to be risks worth taking. Everyone involved took their responsibilities seriously with a positive attitude of working together for improvement.

I can say to our Joint Venture partners that this approach made good business sense in every respect. Many operational uncertainties were removed and the appraisal programme schedules were kept to.

May I say to the community of Motunui and its environs on behalf of our Joint Venture Partners, thank you for sharing your 'back yard'.

## **Author**

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