

Seaside Homes Reduced to Litter

Abandoned homes are being picked off one at a time along the shoreline of my hometown Te Awanga, by the ocean during high and heavy tides. What is left behind is strewn building materials being washed into the sea and being deposited into the shoreline becoming nothing but dangerous litter.

High tides and rough sea conditions batter the shoreline, and over the past ten years has made four homes unlivable along Hawkes Bay. The rough sea causes materials from the houses to be taken away from the shore polluting the waters.

Dangerous building materials are being washed up all along the coastline at popular surf and swimming areas further along the coast. There is a potential to be injured by rusted nails sticking through the



The first home in Haumoana to be destroyed by the sea - photos by Alan Blacklock and Te Ara

sand and shingle, or hazardous building materials like asbestos particles, which is toxic to human health making contact with swimmers. The physical structures of these buildings are surely unsafe for families playing at the beach, not to mention the look of these decrepit buildings, they have become visual litter.

The wild life in the ocean is very vulnerable to the building rubbish washed into the sea, they can eat or get tangled in plastic, lead based paints and insulation.

So, who is responsible for making these dangerous unlivable homes safe for the environment? The home owners, who once lived in, and enjoyed their beachfront home until the sea took that from them? The local council bodies who have deemed these homes unsafe to live in? Ratepayers who enjoy living and visiting the coast?

Local councils are currently looking at creating a Coastal Strategy after the central Government requirement that consideration be given to areas susceptible to possible climate change consequences. Options for coastal areas may be to build a sea wall, rebuild the crest, groynes, formulate an organised managed retreat, or maintain status quo, and continue to watch as homes become condemned.

After contacting the Hastings District Council and the Regional Council it seems there is not currently a team or department responsible for the currently dangerous homes and no one is actively chasing the home owners of the abandoned houses.

I then attempted to make contact with one of the home owners, but I had no response from him. I was interested to know if he had any future plans for his building, and if the councils were helping him make his building safe for the environment.

Local residents created Walking on Water (WOW) in 2009 to find and implement solutions for serious coastal and inundation and unite the Cape Coast Community. The WOW report states this group is opposed to a Managed Retreat strategy, and are actively working with technical Coastal Engineer Steve Moynihan and believe a groyne field of up to seven groynes would be the preferred solution. Beginning with the most vulnerable area in front of the dangerous houses, but currently the cost of

this would fall to residents and would result in considerable rates increases to pay for the groynes. WOW believe the coastline is a regional asset and the cost should be covered by the wider community not just those that live in the direct area.

According to the Environmental Officer from the Regional Council some local residents have taken action to protect their homes so they do not circum to the sea and become dangerous litter. Some of these have been unauthorised protection work which has resulted in enforcement action.

A USA based climate central study puts the number of New Zealanders living within two metres of the rough high tide line at 240,000. They estimate that sea levels could rise another 50cm in the 21st century, but could be greater and up to two metres under higher emission scenarios.

This issue is not only an issue within New Zealand, other areas around the world are also having issues. In New South Wales, two houses have partially collapsed and 66 are at risk due to the rising sea levels. It is said by Jim Dobson from Forbes, that in 30 years the sea levels will have risen so much that what was home to 300 million people will be gone.

While we cannot decide what the rest of the world is going to do about coastal litter due to destroyed homes. In New Zealand, it seems the owners should take responsibility for their homes and clear them away for the safety of the community and environment. But the government or local councils should provide funding to help with this as it was the councils that originally gave the consent for the homes to be built on coast lines. To reduce further damage, and costs associated with damaged homes groynes should be put in place, by council. Our coastlines are for all to enjoy, not a place for broken damaged homes causing dangerous coastal litter.