

Chairman's Report 2017

It is with pleasure to write my first Chairman's report for the Waikato Groundspread Association.

The 2016/2017 season has been a challenge for all operators within the Waikato/Bay of plenty region. With the preceding two years of the low payout for milksolids for all dairy farmers and lower returns for the red meat sector most of us were unsure of what this new season would bring...

Spring started as almost out as being very wet with the September and October period being very wet and in many regions it was difficult to generate any work consistency in regards to volume and work continuity. However as the weather improved so did the returns to farmers and we saw an appreciable increase in demand for services which ultimately put some operations under pressure to meet the ever increasing demand from clients. The spring season resulted in being almost a "perfect storm with challenge from weather, client demand, product shortage and/or outage. It was also apparent that there was an increase in crops being put in which compounded the ability of operators. However as normal we all managed to get through the season and look forward to summer and what the autumn may bring.

Autumn turned out to be much like spring with record rainfall in the March and April period – the worst rainfall for 50 years across the Waikato/Bay of Plenty region – much of what was reported through the media with many Civil Defence Warnings and home evacuations.

In reflection of the year I personally have concluded that the business of Groundspreading has performed well and met the challenges that have been presented. One thing for sure is that the demands from farmers have changed for ever.... Their expectation of our industry capability is extreme with many farm management decisions being made off farm.

For me personally taking on the role as Chairman posed it's own challenges. I selected a new look committee to provide focus on what I saw as key industry issues for the wider industry and our branch. The focus areas as I saw it was

- Health and Safety
- Marketing & Promotion
- Fertiliser Quality (including supply)
- VDAM rule change
- Waioira Healthy River Plan

Over-arching the focus areas of above I saw my biggest challenge being engagement with members and growing the membership. Being brutally honest with myself I am not confident I achieved any greater degree of engagement. I focussed on the key issues for Waikato members such as the Healthy River Plan and the submission of the plan promoting Groundspread as a key mitigation strategy for farmers. The decision from the Regional Council will have a direct impact on all operators.

To engender engagement I sent regular newsletters but with little feedback it is difficult to gauge any increase in engagement from members. It is pleasing to note however that we did gain a new Associate member and had members return from "the cold"

In regard to Health & Safety it is pleasing to note that we have had no significant incidents that have resulted in serious harm – everyone has returned home safe each day. It is noted from the Chair that there have been a number of incidents occur throughout the year that have not been reported. It is a good learning opportunity when we consider the valuable lessons we can take from such experiences.

I would like to acknowledge the input from Jackson Cook who held the role of Health & Safety for the Waikato committee. His updates relating to the new legislation to members were a valuable contribution – this included information from other industries that had relevance to us all.

In conclusion the year has been a real challenge for everyone. Industry needs to be very professional and adopt change – this is the catalyst for improvement. Change is not well embraced in this industry with legacy being the norm. It is important that we find a collaborative way of approaching industry challenges and have a single voice when dealing with external third party influences – this should be a priority for the incoming committee.

Graeme Martin

Chairman – Waikato Groundspread Association