

Ten-year study of environment draws to close

By Naomi Arnold

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A WORLD-LEADING Motueka environmental management project is winding down this week, but the lessons it has taught about understanding the connections between land, river, sea and people are likely to be lasting.

For a decade, the Integrated Catchment Management project has studied the entire catchment of the Motueka River, from hilltops to Tasman Bay, involving scientists, farmers, council staff and river users.

This week a workshop at the Rutherford Hotel in Nelson will bring together those involved to share knowledge gained during the past 10 years.

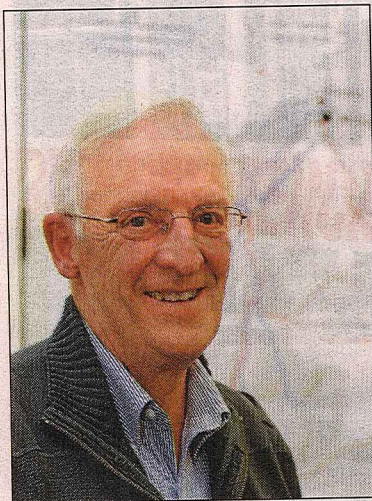
A special guest at the workshop will be Dr Gene Likens, director of the Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies in New York.

Dr Likens advised on the initial ICM setup in 1998 and has run a similar catchment management project, the Hubbard Brook Ecosystem Study, in New Hampshire, for 47 years.

His study has provided some of the longest environmental records in the world, discovered "acid rain", and led directly to former United States president George H W Bush signing the 1990 Clean Air Act amendments, which addressed acid rain, ozone depletion and toxic air pollution.

Dr Likens was disappointed the Motueka project was coming to an end. "It's a huge shame, to put it politely," Dr Likens said.

"Motueka is much more complicated [than the Hubbard Brook study] because of all the land use, but that's what makes it



World leader: Dr Gene Likens says ending the project is a "shame".

a very exciting place to work and focus a lot of attention for 10 years. I think that's a nice period of time, but isn't long enough to understand how things work."

Dr Likens said the ICM project was "a remarkable opportunity" given that there were very few like it in the world.

"There are few places it's been done well and we were excited to see it develop," he said. "What you want to do is develop a greater understanding so the management can be informed, particularly in a complex system like this. This is a really wonderful example."

The project had a mix of funding including some from the Government's Foundation of Research, Science and Technology and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Programme director Andrew Fenemor said funding priorities had changed and funding would

end in September. The ICM team would be split up, which was "unfortunate".

However, he was keen to focus on the positives. "It's not like we're just suddenly packing our bags." Some groups would continue monitoring the river environment in other projects.

Mr Fenemor said some of ICM's achievements had been connecting science and policy, improving the water quality of the Sherry River by 50 per cent, and learning how to work with people, including a group of farmers that had formed a community around managing the river, due to ICM's interest and support.

He said it would be "a real achievement" if through the efforts of ICM, stakeholders and the council, people began to realise that "what they did on their little bit of land" affected the river downstream, including aquaculture in Tasman Bay.

"One of the main highlights from this programme has been a much better understanding that catchments extend offshore; it doesn't stop at the river mouth.

"This catchment has an influence over hundreds of square kilometres of both the seabed and the water column of Tasman Bay.

"Understanding those connections has been a big achievement of this programme and that's ongoing."

Mr Fenemor said one of the "big findings" of ICM wasn't just the science.

"It's about how do you actually motivate people? How do you take that body of knowledge and people react and act on it?

"You learn to talk and learn to trust, and that takes time."