

## Updating 'boy who cried wolf' fable

Who'd be a meteorologist, eh? Especially when the wonders of modern technology are telling you something nasty is headed this way and you're obliged to issue warnings based on the worst-case scenario just in case it actually happens.

If you don't and it happens, bedraggled people will gather in halls afterwards and demand answers. Oddly, they probably won't be demanding them from the actual meteorologists, but from an army of other culprits comprised mainly of local and national politicians. Whether those in the frontline of abuse secretly transfer the blame to meteorologists later is a moot point. We never hear.

It reminds me of economists and psychics. The latter are openly regarded with scepticism, but economists get away with the same lack of precision as weather forecasters. Remember when Roger Douglas and Richard Prebble sold us on the trickle-down theory in the 1980s?

For those too young to know, it was based on an economic forecast that restructuring the economy would lead to some hardship but would be worth it in the end because wealth would trickle down to every level of society. That the ground shifted somehow and the trickling went up instead of down is now but a bitter hallmark of history.

I'm reminded of it as I think about what just happened with Cook. Like the master mariner, the cyclone didn't behave as predictably as predicted and we were left with references to that fable attributed to other prominent historical figures - Aesop, Aristotle and William Caxton - the one about the boy who cried wolf.

A version was played out on TV current affairs in the safety of an Auckland studio as it became clear the studio was not going to be hit by Cook. One presenter lambasted those in charge for causing one and a half million Aucklanders to panic and create worse traffic jams than usual, while his mate said better to be safe than sorry.

Make no mistake. Cyclone Cook was a nasty bit of work and those living on the country's east coast certainly felt his lop-sided breath. Here in Taranaki, despite the weather people warning us we could get 140kmh winds - variously from the west around to the east - we had no winds at all and light rain.

We should be thankful, I suppose. As a weather buff (whatever that means) I got as jumpy as a met person when Dan the TV Weatherman began referring nervously to the great navigator's namesake early in the week.

We were all still reeling from images of Edgcumbe's broken stop-bank, and this new threat was headed our way without us having the memory-erasing benefit of a couple of weeks of intervening overseas disaster news.

One big question concerned Cook's likely path - would he go down our eastern coastline, as most of his predecessors did, or might he veer west? That's what happened with the last monster system to damage Taranaki, Cyclone Bola in 1988. It blew grass off paddocks.

A cyclone's ferocity is sustained by warm seawater, and despite this year's dodgy summer we still have sea temperatures around 19 degrees, warm enough for old boys like me to venture in without a wetsuit. Cyclone fuel for sure.

So, while Cook edged south, I was as skittish as Danny Boy. His met mates were, too, to the extent they warned that the entire country faced the biggest storm since Giselle sank the Wahine in

JT column for April 22, 2017 – weather warnings

Wellington Harbour in 1968. If you saw a map of the tightly concentric circles of low pressure hugging Cook's hips you could only agree.

As a result, New Plymouth was uneasy on the Thursday morning of Easter eve. Supermarkets and petrol stations got busy earlier than usual. Slow traffic got thick quick. The people who come twice a day to administer pills to a sick relative rang to say they couldn't risk staff being out that evening and we'd have to do the administering ourselves. Unheard of.

I spent \$70 on hardware to lock down what I think might be a weak point in our deck roof. We shut all the windows. We braced. We waited. We woke periodically in the night to check a website showing Cook's whirling progress. We listened to people calling in to radio with stories of angst and wreckage.

By morning, Cook was attending to a different island, and we'd moved on to other things. I wonder what we'll do when warnings of the next storm-of-the-century come through?