

Rising sea may get most of us

I'm thinking back a couple of decades to when the great climate debate emerged and sceptics dismissed claims we're on track to destroy civilisation with our reckless use of natural resources.

Their criticism of what they regarded as merely a political movement was based on seemingly logical arguments that it was cyclic and the Earth's climate had been cooling and heating up for eons.

Maybe, but the "recent" icy times were when humankind lived uncomplicated lives, which was something of an advantage if you had to move somewhere warmer. There wouldn't have been a lot to carry, there weren't so many people, and nobody was going to lose their expensive home.

The current cyclic change, if that's what it is, is going to wreak havoc on the property market, let alone all the other effects on things like food production, island-dwelling, transportation systems, seaside restaurants, and freedom camping.

I found an interactive map on the internet that shows the height above sea level of any land location you hover your mouse above, so I thought I'd see what's left of Taranaki if a recent prediction of a 70-metre sea level rise eventuates.

In a rush of blood to the head and with complete disregard for others, I anticipated our place in Lower Vogeltown in New Plymouth - on a sort of inland plateau well above the sea - could become seaside property. Imagine the gain in value.

Yes it would, but not for long. We're at 63 metres. Depending on the pace of the Tasman Sea's encroachment, we would be esplanade for a while, but eventually waves would be breaking seven metres above our back deck.

The beach would be further inland, about halfway up Carrington St before it gets to the shops on the corner of Huatoki St. Pukekura Park and the Bowl of Brooklands would be well submerged. The kids at St Pius School on Brooklands Rd would be able to surf-cast during lunch breaks.

As you will have gathered, the whole of New Plymouth's city centre, as well as suburbs like Fitzroy and Moturoa, would be like Atlantis. The battle between city retailers and Waiwhakaiho Valley shopping centre with its free parking would be resolved for good. Taranaki Base Hospital land would be under seven metres of water, but nearby Francis Douglas College would be nicely placed, although its front entrance might need a seawall.

Port Taranaki's land is only about 10 metres above current sea level, so that's gone. The tops of Paritutu Rock and the former New Plymouth Power Station chimney would stick out of the sea as shipping hazards, while nearby Mt Moturoa would be an island.

Merrilands would become the new seaside suburb, and by sheer good luck my watering hole, The Stumble Inn, would be on the beach front, although that might result in it getting too

crowded. Bell Block, Waitara and seaside towns as far as Mt Messenger (a roadless island) would disappear, and the coastline north would shift inland by a kilometre or three.

South of the city, a few bits of State Highway 45 might survive as is, but expensive real estate at Oakura would be drowned, with the sea lapping the foot of the Kaitake Ranges. The community board out there would have a lot more to worry about than new subdivisions.

Heading around the Taranaki coast, the highway would be a seaside drive for much of the way to Opunake, but then would have to come inland a kilometre or so. There would be no Opunake. Many hectares of farmland would be lost.

Hawera would be okay, being more than 100m above sea level. It might have a case for becoming the capital of the province, if Stratford or Inglewood didn't get in first. New Plymouth would face prohibitive expense trying to hang on to that title.

If the above all sounds fanciful, then it probably is for those old enough to read newspapers in print or online. But my grandchildren might see it, depending on what, if anything, their parents can do about climate change. Some believe we have a decade to get this sorted.

Climate man Jim Salinger says 2018 was our warmest year on record. *Taranaki Daily News* water temperature readings at Fitzroy Beach seem to be hitting 20 earlier than ever each summer - although I almost felt relieved last weekend when I dived in and it was freezing. Maybe it was the wind.