

Front page:

Works halted over penguin risk

JANNA SHERMAN

WORK to buffer Revell St properties from fresh erosion has been called to a halt to stop a blue penguin habitat being bulldozed.

Massive seas last week topped the existing, temporary rock works, causing slumping and erosion in behind.

Under emergency works, contractors moved in on Friday and began clearing vegetation to replace the rock from above.

However, heavy machinery

ground to a standstill on Saturday when known blue penguin zones were encroached.

Inger Perkins, of the West Coast Penguin Trust, said about 100m of vegetation had been cleared before she was made aware of the work.

There were nesting sites just north of where diggers got to, she said.

However, the whole area was a known penguin habitat as flagged by GPS mapping in previous consents.

She hoped by being the end

of molting season, the risk of any of the birds being killed or injured had been reduced.

West Coast Regional Council chairman Peter Haddock said the rating district had authorised the work, but it was subject to getting approvals from both the penguin trust and Department of Conservation.

"I can only apologise for what's happening. I didn't realise it was happening today," he told the *Guardian* on Saturday.

The engineer in charge was

to meet Ms Perkins on the beach, and alternatives were being looked at.

"Obviously if we could work off the beach that would be the best thing."

Westland Mayor Helen Lash said she had signed off on the works on Friday. They were being done to be preventative in between big tides.

"I was told it was urgent and it needed to be done. I was in the middle of a civil defence situation and I was working off the information I was given."

She was unaware one of the

conditions was informing the trust and DOC first.

"I'm greatly disappointed that the conversations that should have happened didn't happen," she said.

"I'm also a little concerned about pushing things through under emergency works when they shouldn't be.

"Knee-jerk reactions are not good enough.

"Someone needs to be asking some very strong questions."

| Continued Page 2

Page 2:

› From **Page 1**

Revell St resident Kerry Jeffs said contractors had previously worked from the beach around the tides.

The removal of vegetation was unnecessary. He believed it could have continued as far as north as the next set of groynes, which was the area being surveyed on Saturday.

“As we know, the storm’s over now, so how about just going and reinstating from the beach instead of creating all this drama ripping out vegetation . . .

“To me all they needed to do was backfill (the temporary rock wall) and let it do its thing.

“Yes, it has eroded but last time was a lot worse,” he said.

“Driftwood was actually on my lawn.”

Temporary buffering was carried out between 2019 and 2021 when homes north of the seawall were losing land rapidly.

About 16,000 tonnes of rock was installed in sections between Stafford St and Richards Dr.

The armouring was



Locals watch on as a digger works to clear vegetation and form an access road from behind Revell St properties to allow emergency rock protection works to be carried out. PHOTO: JANNA SHERMAN

challenged at the time by locals in the Hokitika Coastal Protection Alliance lobby group, which was formed in opposition to a permanent extension of the seawall.

It labelled the 2021 works — which cost about \$530,000 — a “beat-up”.

Chairman Mark Mellsop-Melssen said previously the Hokitika beach was always either building or eroding, and a few hundred metres south the beach was naturally rebuilding.

However, a site inspection in May last year, and

subsequent report which formed part of the tardy consent application, said the temporary buffering had done its job.

In some places the beach had built back up to cover the rock and vegetation had returned.