

Lick (or two) of paint will get beacon shining again

\$200,000 makeover is planned for the beast DoC inherited from the Maritime Safety Authority

BY ANNE BESTON

ONE of the country's most recognisable beacons for boaties is in for a major facelift — and many would say not before time.

"I've seen lighthouses around the world and this one is an absolute disgrace," said Auckland businessman Ian Forsyth.

A picture of the rusting Cape Brett lighthouse in the Bay of Islands, published in the Herald on August 1, also angered a Devonport man who asked how much longer it would be left to decay.

The answer is a year at most, after a \$200,000 boost to the Department of Conservation's historic buildings fund. The department took over responsibility for the lighthouse from the Maritime Safety Authority.

"We inherited the beast," said Kerikeri-based DoC staffer Katrina Upperton.

Repainting the exterior of the 14m, cast-iron tower would be a challenge, she said.

"They always put lighthouses in rugged and remote spots. But this one is iconic. For boaties, once you round the cape, it really is like you are home."

She hoped the restoration would be done next year, possibly during autumn when the weather was usually more settled.

"You get severe sea conditions up there," she said.

"Most of our supplies will be by boat using the public landing at the bottom of the cliff."

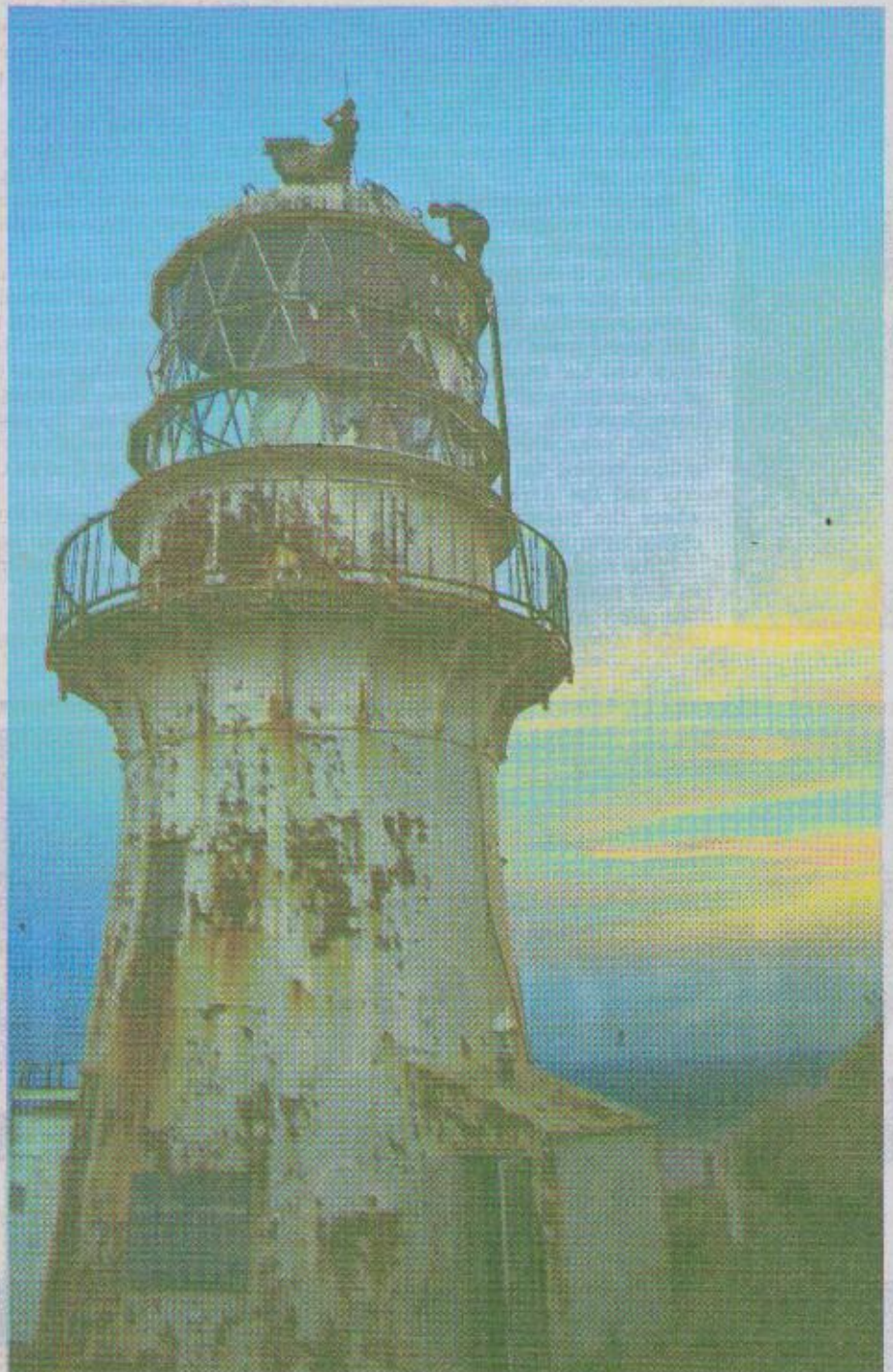
The department had consulted Australian experts about the work because it was "fairly specific", but there was also plenty of local knowledge to call on.

The lighthouse was likely to get its original white colour back, but whether the black top would be restored was under debate.

"In such a harsh environment, to paint it black could be a maintenance issue for us," she said.

Once the repaint was done, DoC hoped for further financing to renovate the interior of the lighthouse, which had most of its inner workings intact. "The dream is to get funding for stage two, and I think a lot of people would support that."

She said tourist operators had expressed interest in guided tours of the lighthouse.



RUST NEVER SLEEPS: The decaying lighthouse at Cape Brett has been called a disgrace, but it should be looking good next year after a challenging facelift.

"It's surprising the number of people who have a historical connection to it and eventually we'd like to do some research with those people."

The lighthouse was commissioned in 1910. Keepers left in 1978 when a fully automated beacon was installed, and the keepers' cottage is now used for overnight visitors.