

BEFORE THE AUCKLAND UNITARY PLAN INDEPENDENT HEARINGS PANEL

IN THE MATTER of the Resource Management Act 1991 and
the Local Government (Auckland
Transitional Provisions) Act 2010

AND

IN THE MATTER of Topic 081b and 081c Rezoning and Precincts
(Geographic Areas)

**STATEMENT OF DIANNE GATWARD
ON BEHALF OF
THE LONG BAY-OKURA GREAT PARK SOCIETY
AND
OKURA ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP**

Weiti Precinct and Okura

10 February 2016

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

1. My evidence will discuss the importance of ensuring the protection of the waters of the Okura Estuary and the Long Bay – Okura Marine Reserve.

INTRODUCTION

1. My name is Dianne Kay Gatward. I have lived at 23 Long Bay Drive, Torbay, North Shore since 1978. I am a retired teacher and careers counsellor. I have been a teacher for over forty years, the past 26 years being at Long Bay College. I have been a member of the Long Bay – Okura Great Park Society (the **Society**) since its inception.

PROTECTION OF THE LONG BAY – OKURA MARINE RESERVE

2. I have direct experience as to how important protecting the Long Bay Okura Marine Reserve and the open space vistas from the Regional Park are to the wider community's spiritual and mental health. If Auckland aspires to becoming “the most liveable city”, then protecting the Long Bay Okura Marine Reserve from intensive development is a given.
3. When speaking with the public about the Society's involvement with the Unitary Plan process and in particular the necessity to retain the present position of the RUB at Long Bay Okura, people cannot believe that after three Environment Court cases (at a cost of over \$500,000) and the area being an Outstanding Natural Landscape, and an area of Special Ecological significance, that the possibility of moving the RUB is even being considered.
4. Just yesterday, I witnessed an experience that exemplifies the importance of protecting the Long Bay Okura Marine Reserve from intensive development. A friend and I were walking the beach in the morning, along with many others. My friend went in for a swim at the northern end of the beach. I kept walking, only to be caught up later by my friend who, rather excited, wanted to share a peak experience he had just had while swimming. This 90-year-old man was on a high! While swimming in the waters of this Marine Reserve, a big snapper had lazily swum around him and when he put his hand in the water this beautiful fish had nibbled his fingers. Honestly, just writing that now brings tears to my eyes.
5. The Long Bay Okura Marine Reserve is a treasure to be preserved at all costs. The Environment Court has recognised this, not just once, but three times.

6. The Okura estuary is an outstanding example of a soft sediment estuary. It is alive with marine life and sea birds. Walking the mud flats at low tide there are hundreds of indentations left by sting ray. Flocks of birds cover the shell banks and mud flats around to Weiti. It is a fragile environment that locals respect. If intensive development occurs, the pressure on this sensitive area will degrade the quality of the marine reserve without a doubt.
7. Over the years I have spoken with many people who treasure this area as a space where they can escape the city, recharge their batteries and, without sounding too dramatic, feed their souls. Protecting the Long Bay Marine Reserve from further development ticks all the boxes for the public's health and wellbeing.

8. CONCLUSION

9. I am not against development providing much needed housing for Auckland's growing population. However, there are large areas inland designated for development under the proposed Unitary plan. People from all over Auckland appreciate the natural beauty and outstanding recreational opportunities that the Long Bay Okura area already provides.
10. Visitors from overseas are in awe that such a precious resource has been created. People from all over New Zealand enjoy what this area provides. Future generations will thank you for preserving it and protecting the Marine Reserve so that they too, might be able to swim with a snapper.

Dianne Gatward