

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 PETER TOWNEND
ON BEHALF OF
THE LONG BAY-OKURA GREAT PARK SOCIETY
AND
OKURA ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP**

10 February 2016

SUMMARY

1. My evidence discusses the importance of the Okura Estuary and the Long Bay – Okura Marine Reserve as a natural treasure to be preserved and protected.
2. I tell of my experience, growing up in the East Coast Bays and my long connection with Okura and the Okura Estuary.

INTRODUCTION

3. My name is Peter Townend.
4. I am the Chairperson of the Dacre Cottage Management Committee (DCMC), which maintains one of New Zealand's oldest buildings and reserves. Dacre Cottage is located at Karapiro Bay on the edge of the Weiti Precinct. DCMC has organised many working bees where we have worked to protect the area from pests, planted and maintained over 12,000 trees, and repaired and maintained the buildings.
5. I am also the Chairman of Keep Okura Green (KOG), an organisation concerned with protecting the Okura Estuary and Long Bay-Okura Marine Reserve and their catchments. KOG has been involved in several Environment Court cases successfully gaining positive outcomes for the Okura environment.
6. I have had a long interest in water-related sports and activities. I was the founder of the Auckland Kayak School and co-founder of Canoe and Kayak Ltd. I hold a number of top kayaking instructor awards. I am also the founder of NZ Kayak magazine.
7. In my voluntary capacity I founded the Yakity Yak Club, which has supported over 11,000 members over the past 25 years.

MY RELATIONSHIP WITH OKURA

8. Since the late sixties I have been coming to the Okura Estuary on holidays and then in the early eighties, I started living in the village.
9. An elderly friend tells of his time as a young man in the thirties, living in Rothesay Bay and coming to the Okura Estuary overland on foot, past Long Bay, and camping on Friday nights. The purpose of the trip was to fill mum's larder. The catch regularly

consisted of rabbit, flounder, mullet and sting ray wings. The sting rays were harpooned with sharpened fire hardened Manuka stakes and he still remembers somewhat shame faced at memory of watching these harpoons move around the estuary until they stranded at low tide and he could walk out and remove the wings of the still living 'ray.

10. In the sixties fish life were so abundant my family still talks of catching mullet in a hat. In the eighties we used to net in the estuary with a catch of never more than two fish, the fish had all been eaten.
11. Now it is common on the kayak and boat trips in the Estuary to see schools of mullet so plentiful that you can almost touch them. I have surfed on top of a school fleeing over a reef in the inner estuary. Several customers and friends have had a mullet land in their lap while paddling. We've experienced the sound and sight spectacle of dolphins herding mullet and kahawai up on Karepiro Beach, so the fish in their thousands are flapping on the sand and the dolphins are in so shallow they almost strand themselves. This summer we had Orca chasing 'rays in the outer estuary so shallow their tails were thrashing the water. Numerous times in recent years we've had to shut down the outboard as we are trailing blood at low tide as the narrow channel is so full of fish that they cannot clear the prop.
12. It is now common to have stingrays gliding past our kayaks and indeed while standing in the water having to push a toe against their wing to get them to give a little bit more room to me.
13. This summer a highlight was our success in protecting the nesting habitat and helping threatened NZ native shore birds raise their chicks. Watching the Variable Oyster catcher parent taking on a hawk in an avian dog fight to draw the hawk away from its young. The New Zealand Dotterel parents dragging their "broken" wings along the beach leading walkers away who are too close to their chicks. When a safe distance is achieved, the miracle of nature, and the wing is fixed and off they soar back to their brood.
14. I'd like to share a story about an experience my family had one night swimming in the Estuary and of which I wrote for an edition of NZ Kayak two years ago.

Lying on your back in the warm waters of our local estuary with the heavens twinkling overhead and the phosphoresce lighting up you and your kids' bodies, is a thing of magical wonder.

The recent late evening high tides have seen a plethora of people gathering at the water's edge and launching into this wonder land. Last night was one of the highest tides this year in the Waitemata at 3.6m and the moon was thankfully absent, making the ideal environment for a stunning show. The bow wave, wake and paddle splashes were augmented with the skipping fish fleeing our path, all leaving bright illuminated lines and illuminated pond ripples lighting the way into the darkness. These ripples then light up any flotsam they came into contact with, making a surreal light show on the water.

The night is not quiet as the kids and adults all excitedly explore this natural wonder. The shouts of, 'look at this' and, 'look at me, I am covered in stars', and 'here is a great patch', and the call of parents and kids checking on each other. My 11 year old yelling, 'watch me' as I toss her in the air or she dives off my shoulders, trying to make the best light show to amaze.

This excitement and enthusiasm all adds to the environment of amazement by all who dare to adventure into the adventure of night kayaking (and swimming). That so much is happening that is hidden in plain sight of us all and we just need a small spark of motivation and some training to venture out safely and to be absolutely stunned by the beauty of nature.

CONCLUSION

15. In the Long Bay – Okura Marine Reserve, marine, estuarine and terrestrial life is fighting back and winning with the help of the local community and Department of Conservation. But even now we have reported thousands of tons of sediment being dumped into this environment, cattle grazing in the estuary, mangroves growing faster than we could imagine and more development planned or being asked for. Concrete and soil recovery business being approved in the catchment with a sediment control plan that was less than 100 words and one sketch on a A2 being satisfactory to council.
16. Will we look back in 50 years, as my elderly friend is doing now, with a grimace at what we let happen to our place?

17. We cannot let the Estuary degrade, or even be at risk of becoming degraded. Our experts tell us that the impact of further intensification around the Okura Estuary does cause great risk of leading to adverse effects on the waters of the estuary and the wider Marine Reserve. This should not happen. The protections need to be more stringent, rather than left to the greater risks that further intensification will incur in spite of the mitigating provisions that are being proposed.

18. I just hope that the Panel sees fit to see the significance of the Okura Estuary and the Marine Reserve and provide as strong as protection for them as it possibly can, which would exclude further intensification in the Okura and Marine Reserve catchments.