

**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 (Geographical Areas)

**JOINT STATEMENT
OF LEZETTE AND GEOFFREY REID
ON BEHALF OF
THE EAST COAST BAYS COASTAL PROTECTION SOCIETY,
THE OKURA ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP
AND
THE LONG BAY-OKURA GREAT PARK SOCIETY**

**Terrestrial Ecology
Weiti Precinct and Okura**

10 February 2016

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

1. This is a joint evidence statement by Lezette and Geoffrey Reid. The purpose of this report is to provide evidence on terrestrial ecology in relation to submissions on the proposed Weiti Precinct and Okura developments on behalf of the East Coast Bays Coastal Protection Society, the Okura Environmental Society and the Long Bay – Okura Great Park Society.

INTRODUCTION

2. This is a joint statement by Lezette and Geoffrey Reid. We provide an introduction to ourselves below;

Lezette Reid

3. I am Lezette Reid. I am the Chairperson of the East Coast Bays Coastal Protection Society (the **Society**) aka Friends of Okura Bush.
4. I have a Diploma in Public Relations (Damelin, SA 1979), Cert in Counselling Th. Massey University, Akl, (2004) and a keen interest in natural biodiversity.
5. In my role as Chairperson of the Society I consult with biodiversity experts, liaise with the Department of Conservation, form strategic plans, inform and engage the community on the restoration and enhancement of the Okura Bush Scenic Reserve (the **Reserve**) and surrounding areas.

Geoffrey Reid

6. I am Geoffrey Reid. I am the Deputy Chairperson of the Society.

7. I have trained and carried out ranger work with the Department of Conservation. I have extensive plant knowledge and experience in seed collection and a good understanding of freshwater ecology. In addition, I have wide-ranging experience in conservation work including revegetation, bio-invasive plant and animal control.
8. I have been involved in multiple conservation projects throughout New Zealand ranging from bird and reptile surveys to kauri rot disease - soil and canopy surveying, as well as nursery projects.

The land restoration projects I have been involved with include;

- Great Barrier Island, Department of Conservation - Argentine Ant eradication
 - Matui/Somes Island, Department of Conservation - weed eradication
 - Paremata Flats/Cable Bay, Forest and Bird - weed control and reforestation
 - Melienium Kauri Project, Waipoua Forest Trust - seed collection team and plant eradication coordination
9. I am currently working alongside Dr Mike Joy to better New Zealand's Fresh Water quality.

BACKGROUND

10. The aim of the Society is to preserve and enhance the biodiversity of the Long Bay-Okura Marine Reserve and its Catchments. The Society has undertaken to be the guardians and nurturers of the area.
11. The Society is working to protect the Reserve and the surrounding areas from predators and invasive weed species and also to bring awareness to the wider community of the ecological significance of our local environment.

12. Three years ago, after realizing that there was virtually no birdsong in the Reserve, the Society embarked upon a weed eradication programme and a multi species predator control plan.
13. This Programme has developed significantly since its inception. The Society now has a large team of volunteers servicing a network of high quality traps weekly. The Programme is funded by the Society, Auckland Council and the Hibiscus Bays Local Board.
14. In 2015 the Society removed 1,600 mice, 500 rats, 150 possums and 45 mustelids from the forest and along the coastline. Due to resulting decrease in browsing mammals the density of seedlings on the forest floor have increased significantly and there has been an increase in bird life.
15. The Society's recent bird survey count (Attachment A) in the Reserve recorded 29 species. Birds are responsible for a high percentage of seed distribution. Having a healthy amount of seedlings in the undergrowth will ensure the positive future of canopy cover in years to come.
16. As part of the Programme the Society organises volunteer weeding days to create a weed free buffer zone on land surrounding the Reserve.
17. After the first year of predator control and community involvement, Society volunteers identified an Auckland green gecko (*Naultinus elegans*) in the Reserve. Since this time a forest gecko (*Mokopirirakau granulatus*) and one ornate skink (*Oligosoma ornatum*) have been found as well. These are all "At Risk" species. These species are highly important and the full extent of their role in our forest ecosystem is still being researched.

ECOLOGICAL VALUES OF THE OKURA BUSH SCENIC RESERVE

18. The Regional Policy Statement Review 2012 outlines the Long Bay, Okura and Karepiro areas as being a diverse area of estuary, saltmarsh, sand spits, headlands, beaches, well buffered coastline of high natural character. The area includes the best example of taraire on coastal hill country in the Rodney Ecological District, one of the two best areas of coastal pohutukawa on cliffs, the best example of kanuka on a headland, and the only example of oioi (*Leptocarpus similis*) on sand in the district. In addition, the area contains a pohutukawa-kowhai-taraire sequence with a high diversity of species.
19. In addition, the area provides habitat for spawning fish, reef herons and a variety of coastal and migratory birds including white-faced heron, pied stilt eastern bar tailed-godwit and North Island dotterels. The area contains good ecotones and sequences from Okura River inland including stands of saline-coastal pohutukawa-taraire forest. The inter-tidal flats at Weiti River Estuary (NZWS 731) and the Okura River Estuary (NZWS 732), are rated as of moderate-high value. A wide variety of coastal and migratory birds are found as well as common forest birds (NZWS 733).
20. The Okura estuary is part of the Long Bay-Okura Marine Reserve. Within this area are a considerable variety of intertidal substrates which together form a complex array of habitats supporting a variety of animal and plant communities. The communities living on the wave-cut platforms, cliffs, and beaches at Long Bay/Okura have been studied over a long period and are in reasonably good condition. This is also a known location of pingao (*Ficinia spiralis*), a threatened plant of mobile sand areas.
21. The intertidal areas within the Okura Estuary and outside its entrance range from fine mud to sand and are used as a feeding ground by several hundred wading birds. Many of these birds roost on the sandy

area at the entrance to the estuary at high tide. A variety of other coastal birds feed and roost within this area. Saltmarsh and mangrove line the estuary.

22. In the Okura Estuary, although the area of saline vegetation is small, it is used by banded rail (*Gallirallus philippensis*), a threatened and declining, secretive coastal fringe bird. The banded rail's habitat quality is enhanced by the adjoining terrestrial vegetation which provides shelter for the birds and offers potential nesting sites. This saline vegetation and other intertidal areas grade into one of the two best examples of coastal pohutukawa forest on sheltered cliffs with some outstanding examples of buttressed root trees forming a storm cliff along a Parnell grit exposure near and around Karepiro Point, then into taraire forest on coastal hill country, and finally into kanuka forest on a headland. Both of the latter are considered to be the best examples of their types in the district.
23. At Karepiro Creek, the marine environment grades into significant coastal saltmarsh on stabilised sand above Mean High Water Springs. The Department of Conservation has selected this area as an Area of Significant Conservation Value (ASCV). The Okura River provides habitat for giant kokopu and long-finned eel (NIWA fish database).
24. There is a high diversity of species and good regeneration in many places. These include in the Reserve, Karepiro Forest, Weiti Precinct's significant Ecological Areas, the intertidal flats of Karepiro Bay, Significant Ecological Areas on Haigh Access Road and the Cheniers at the mouth of the Wade River.
25. Within the Reserve there are interesting ecotones and sequences from the exposed coast to the sheltered hills. There is a notable sequence of pohutukawa to kowhai along the Okura escarpment from Dacre Point which merges into the best example of taraire forest on coastal hill

country in the District. There are many other associated species, the most noticeable being a small stand of mature kauri, and scattered karaka and the best example in the District of kanuka forest on a coastal headland. There are large stands of kohekohe, hinau, pigeon wood, nikau and puriri. There is also a small 'tongue' of manuka from a previous fire. As a whole, the forest is of regional and national significance.

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT IN THE WEITI PRECINCT

26. The Society has concerns that the landholder of the Weiti Precinct is not currently complying with the environmental protections and enhancements required as outlined in the Operative District Plan (ODP).
27. The ODP requires extensive enhancement, planting and protection of the existing areas of native forest in the Karepiro Bay catchment and provides planting standards for this re-vegetation.
28. The ODP states the following in reference to the PAUP Weiti Precinct:

The Weiti Special 8 Zone in Auckland Councils District Plan Operative Rodney Section 2011 (ODP) allows limited development and for a total of 550 lots at Weiti including 150 in the Karepiro Policy Area and 400 in the Weiti Policy Area. The special zone in the District Plan was designed to allow for limited development in exchange for significant ecological protection and enhancement and retention of the green belt at Weiti.

29. However, the Society is dismayed that the enhancement of Weiti Precinct's green belt is not being carried out. Instead, following the felling of the exotic Pine forest, the mess that has been left behind is very unsatisfactory. There appears to be no plans for re-planting as

required by the ODP, nor control of weeds that are spreading rapidly now that the canopy cover is completely gone.

30. Multiple species of privet, wild ginger, pampas, moth plant and wilding pines, to name a few, are smothering the landscape and spreading into the undergrowth of the neighbouring Okura Bush Scenic Reserve as well as into the Significant Ecological Areas in the Weiti Precinct. As a result, these remnant patches of forest are being degraded resulting in a loss of biodiversity to ecological areas which have a regional and national level of significance.
31. The Society has repeatedly expressed their concern regarding the lack of weed control in the Weiti Precinct with the landholder's staff and has been advised consistently that there are no funds available for weed management.
32. The Society was also disappointed to discover that the agreed re-vegetation sites have not been re-vegetated to any meaningful standard. No weed management plan is being followed and it is known that some of the replanted species were not eco-sourced. A large percentage of re-vegetation plantings have died and been taken over by weeds.
33. The PAUP Weiti precinct provisions regarding sub-precinct B, which provides for more intensive development than allowed in the ODP, requires that the vegetation cover be retained, that key natural features are protected, and that adverse effects of development of the natural environment and Coastal Marine Area are avoided, remedied or mitigated.
34. The Society is concerned that the landholder has used the promise of environmental enhancement and the provision of a Greenbelt to obtain further development rights in the Weiti Precinct, however he has shown little intention of carrying out these environmental requirements.

35. In addition, the Society questions the landowner's intention of retaining the green belt area as he appears to be taking the approach of applying for development in incremental stages, with no sign of any end to this. The Society is concerned that if more and more development is permitted, eventually there will be no green belt left.
36. As the landholder currently appears to be unable to comply, or carry out the environmental requirements of the ODP, the Society believes it is inappropriate that the landholder should be permitted to carry out further intensification of the Precinct above the 550 houses currently permitted in the ODP.

EFFECTS OF FURTHER DEVELOPMENT ON THE RESERVE

37. Further development in the Weiti Precinct and/or urbanisation along the southern Okura coastline would cause an increase of predators such as cats and dogs visiting the Reserve and an increase of noxious weeds. This will have a negative impact on the biodiversity of the Reserve and the achievements the Society have made as a collective.
38. The Department of Conservation advise that 60,000 people enjoy walking the Reserve's walkway annually. This high number of visitors is already having an adverse effect on the root systems of some very significant trees.
39. The Society does not consider that any further development is appropriate in the Weiti Precinct and in Okura as it will cause a marked increase of visitor numbers to the Reserve. Increased use of the walkway would result in further damage, stress and potential death to stands of trees, such as 500-year-old kauri and taraire
40. In addition, residents of the new subdivisions at Weiti are likely to want access from their homes through the Reserve down to the coastline. This will result in numerous informal tracks being formed throughout

the Bush. Unfortunately, this will subject areas of the Reserve that currently have no public access, and are in a pristine condition due to their isolated position, to threats such as weeds, damage from people, and predators such as dogs and cats.

41. The Society notes that Dotterels (*Charadrius obscurus*), classed as Nationally Threatened, roost on the banks of Karepiro Bay. The Northland Dotterel population is about 1400 birds (Heather & Robertson, 1996).
42. The Society has been encouraging breeding of the Dotterel by carrying out predator control and roping-off likely breeding areas from public access.
43. An increase of visitors to the area will cause increased stress to the Dotterel. This will force the birds off their nests at high tide in an attempt to get away from walkers on the beach. Unfortunately, this results in the temperature of the eggs the birds are sitting on to fluctuate resulting in unsuccessful breeding.

CONCLUSION

44. If further development is permitted in Weiti and Okura there will be greater stresses on the terrestrial ecology in the area as outlined above. As a result, ecological degradation is certain to occur.
45. The Society concludes that it cannot support an increase in housing density above the 550 houses currently approved in the Operative District Plan for the Weiti Precinct.

ATTACHMENT A

Bird Count Okura Bush 12th October - 12th November 2015 East Coast Bays Coastal Protection Society

As the Society has very little data on the bird population in Okura Bush we felt it was necessary to establish a baseline in order to measure the impact of the trapping.

Anecdotal reports are that the bird song appears to have increased since the trapping began, but we were eager to identify which birds are regularly residing/ visiting Okura bush.

The initial plan was to do a count each season. This needs more discussion with the volunteers.

Methodology

- 5 Minute Bird Count (5MBC)
- Stations set 250m apart avoiding areas where duplication may occur ie. where the track winds back on itself & where there were steps (for safety reasons).
- All observations were made from the track.
- Volunteers were recruited following the AGM
- Training was offered to volunteers as we were reliant on people being able to recognise bird calls & not on seeing the birds. This was one session, lasting approx 1hr 30mins, visiting 5 stations, waiting for 2 mins to allow the birds to settle prior to completing the 5MBC & comparing findings. This was done under the guidance of an expert to assist us with bird call recognition. It was also useful to discuss unusual calls.
- Stations were marked with flagging tape & named ie. OB1 - OB17
- A notebook was used to record the birds & data then transferred onto a spreadsheet. We also asked that volunteers did a hard copy just in case of computer problems.
- Methodology, recording template for the data, written instructions, trap number close to stations, & GPS co-ordinates were emailed to participants.
- The counts were to take place between 12th October - 12th November.
- All counts to be done between 8am - 12MD
- Windy, rainy days to be avoided
- Any bird seen, heard or flying at the named station was to be recorded. If a bird was first seen it was recorded as seen. If a bird was first heard it was recorded as heard. it was important to try to avoid counting the same bird twice.

- 17 stations were identified the last one being on the ridge overlooking Karepiro Bay.
- No counts were done on the Stillwater side of the Okura Bush Walk.

The Society obtained 7 sets of data

Of 34 species on the count list 29 were recorded as being present.

Of the 5 species not recorded during the count:-

Tomtit was seen & heard (but not a count day). This was very exciting as 2 observers heard tomtits in different places so hopefully there is a possibility that there are a few around.

Morepork are nocturnal.

Kaka have been heard during the day near the car park Haigh Access

Bellbird & Starling were not observed.

The following are the totals of birds seen or heard during the counts;

Tui	324
Grey Warbler	193
Eastern Rosella	132
Kingfisher	95
Chaffinch	80
Fantail	79
Silver eye	79
Blackbird	65
Pheasant	44
Shining Cuckoo	39
Myna	36
Kereru	32
Goldfinch	20
California quail	19
Skylark	16
Greenfinch	16
White faced heron	10
Spur- wing plover	10

Birds numbering <10 were Barbary dove, Black backed gull, Harrier, House sparrow, Magpie, Mallard, Paradise shellduck, Song thrush, Spotted dove, Welcome swallow, Yellow hammer