

Proposed Natural Resources Plan for the Wellington Region

Hearing Stream 3

Water Allocation, Natural Form and Function

Comments from S35/FS2

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Personal Introduction

1. I hold a Master of Arts degree with Honours from the University of Canterbury, majoring in Economics and Political Science. My professional career included nineteen years with the Reserve Bank of New Zealand, seven of those at the Level of Chief Manager. I served for two and a half years as Adviser to the Australian Executive Director at the World Bank in Washington DC.

2. My wife and I have owned property on Terrace Road, in the Reikorangi district near Waikanae for 41 years. This currently amounts to just under 430 hectares. It ranges from terrace flats to steep forest clad mountain ridges. Over the years our farming strategy has evolved from a relatively high input, intensive form of pastoral farming on the non-forested areas to a low intensity form of pastoral farming combined with a continuing programme of tree planting focussed on small, high value specialty timber woodlots including indigenous species.

Summary of today's Comments

3. My main focus today is on the Plan's definitions for Natural Wetlands, Outstanding Natural Wetlands and Significant Natural Wetlands. The first of these explains in some detail what the term covers and what is excluded. Submission S152 noted however that the definition did not clearly distinguish between wetland areas of exotic vegetation (which should be excluded) and wetland areas of indigenous vegetation (to be included).

Outstanding Natural Wetlands, Significant Natural Wetlands

4. I support the approach adopted with respect to these special Wetlands. Explicit identification of the areas included in these classes of wetlands in Schedules leaves no doubt as to what is included and what excluded. Creating a scheduled list provides affected communities or persons an opportunity within the hearing process to ask for additional areas to be added (or if included inappropriately, to ask that they be removed). One small concern relates to the treatment of Wetlands which over time change in size as encouraged by some policies. Any proposed future change in size of a scheduled wetland should be subject to the same opportunity for Community consultation before adoption.

Natural Wetlands

5. The proposed definition has features which I think are important. It makes clear that not all wet areas or ponds fall within the definition. I live in an area which might be described as enjoying an adequate rainfall. Or it might just be called a high rainfall area. On average over the past 20 years our annual rainfall has been about 1700mm. This year we have had that much in the first 8 months. If damp gully heads and wetted pasture were not excluded from the definition of **natural wetlands** we would have a serious problem with the definition.

6. But the wording of what is included is problematic. A natural wetland “is a permanently or intermittently wet area, shallow water and land water margin that supports a natural ecosystem of plants and animals that are adapted to wet conditions”. There are areas of our farm, more often wet than dry, which support natural ecosystems of blackberry, buddleia, snails, rabbits and other exotic pests which would be caught by that definition. I looked at the exclusions list but find it hard to identify one which would exclude them. It is hard to justify excluding those ecosystems on grounds of their beauty or amenity.

7. I believe the intention is to provide a definition and policy setting where relevant areas of indigenous flora and fauna are accorded protection. I hope it is not to provide regulatory protection for exotic plant and animal pests that happen to reside in the wet areas of our farm. I would support any move to make that clear by way of suitable amendment to the current wording.

Minimum Flow or Water Level

8. The definition of minimum flow and water level would be improved if it made clear that rural people who depend on a stream or river for their water supply are still entitled to draw water to meet their household needs and the needs of their livestock for drinking water even if WRC imposes minimum flow restrictions on a water way.

Objectives and Policies

9. I believe there are no Rules specifically directed towards Natural Wetlands so it is tempting to take the view that it does not matter. However there are Objectives and Policies requiring action which, among other things, apply to Natural Wetlands. So a definition which accurately reflects the Council’s intention is important.

10. Objectives O17, O23, O24, O28 all refer to natural wetlands. O17 requires the natural character of natural wetlands to be preserved and protected from inappropriate use and development. O23 requires the quality of water in natural wetlands to be maintained or improved. O24 requires natural wetlands to be suitable for contact recreation. And O28 requires the extent of natural wetlands to be maintained or increased and their condition restored. The requirements embodied in these objectives are certainly of sufficient importance to make me concerned that the definition of what is in and what is not should accurately reflect what is intended.

11. Policy P37 provides an illustration of this point where it states:

“Activities in and adjacent to **natural wetlands** shall be managed to maintain their values including:

(a) As habitat for indigenous flora and fauna, and.....”

If the uncertain meaning of **natural wetland** referred to in Paragraph 6 above is allowed to remain then the purpose of P37 becomes confused by the requirement that their values be maintained. If

the definition refers only to indigenous natural wetlands then the meaning in P37 is clear and I support it.

12. Policy P38: Restoration of wetlands states:

“The **restoration of natural wetlands** and the construction of artificial wetlands to provide habitat for indigenous flora and fauna, and to carry out the physical and ecological functions of **natural wetlands**, shall be encouraged.”

if exotic ecosystem wetland areas are not excluded from the coverage of the **natural wetlands** definition this appears nonsensical.

13. Policy P48, Protection of outstanding natural features and landscapes and Policy P49, Use and development adjacent to outstanding natural features and special amenity landscapes raise different but also serious concerns.

14. The P48 heading appears to indicate a wide-ranging policy for protecting outstanding natural features and landscapes. But the actual text of the Policy creates confusion by its initial focus on CMA followed by references which, particularly in the case of **natural wetlands**, appear inconsistent unless the definition is changed. Avoiding adverse effects on natural features and landscapes might well require activities to modify a **natural wetland** if exotic flora and fauna are, by definition, able to constitute a **natural wetland**. I believe the S42A report proposes to make no change to P48 “As the identification of outstanding natural features and landscapes is still being undertaken”. So a Policy, which is already confusing, is made even less certain because where it applies has not yet been adequately identified. I think we can do better than that.

15. The P49 heading seems to indicate a Region-wide scope but the text of the policy seems to be addressed specifically to CMA sites. In this case the S42A report confirms a narrow interpretation of the scope of the policy (the natural feature or landscape must be adjacent to the CMA) while the heading implies a wide scope. Clearly the heading needs to be changed to better reflect the intention of the policy.

16. I thank you for the opportunity to address you today and will be happy to answer any questions.