

**Statement of Margaret Niven to
Greater Wellington Regional Council - Commissioner's Hearing on
Council's Proposed Regional Plan
19 June 2017**

Thanks

Thank you for the opportunity of speaking to your Panel today, with regard to the Greater Wellington Regional Council's (Council) Proposed Regional Plan (PRP).

Introduction

Firstly I will introduce myself.

Currently I am a deer farmer, living 7 kilometres east of Otaki, on the northern side of the Otaki River. My husband and I farm around 400 deer and a small number of sheep on the beautiful 200 acre deer farm we purchased 5 years ago.

Prior to moving to the Kapiti Coast I worked in Wellington for 30 years in central government, mostly in policy, planning and senior management roles. For example, I was Director Policy and Advisory for the Education Department and Corporate Planner for the Department of Conservation for 5 years.

One of my greatest joys is being matriarch to my family and having my children and grand-children staying with us on our deer farm. Every school holidays we have young children enjoying the fun of staying on our farm and visiting the Otaki beach, river and other local attractions.

Getting involvement in numerous Kapiti Coast organisations and working as a volunteer has enabled me to meet new people and make a contribution to the Kapiti Coast community. For instance, I am the Forest and Bird representative on the Friends of the Otaki River – Executive Committee.

Over the last three years I have welcomed Kapiti District Council officers, Council contractors, including ecologists, landscape architects and a management planner onto our property. I have also been one of the rural Pilot Group of farmers who assisted KCDC and a member of a rural reference group.

Key Issues

I will focus on a few of Council's policies that would have a serious and significant adverse impact on our family farm and private lives.

1. Council's over-regulation through the PRP

When I was alerted to the massive amount of over-regulation in the PRP it took me considerable time to determine what the potential adverse impacts might be for our family farming enterprise. As you will be aware the PRP is a very complex Plan and parts of it are difficult to understand.

A few examples from our deer farming property can help illustrate this point.

The PRP proposes having many different land categories and overlays on our 200 acre property, with each of these categories having different sets of rules and regulations that we must understand and comply with.

I understand that there are only two or three map overlays that Council is required by law to map on farms and all the others are discretionary and **not mandatory**. Council has mapped both extensive and unjustified land categories (that are optional) on our farm. This situation is not helpful and has major financial impacts on our farming operations. It also creates uncertainty for us in managing evolving land issues and planning for the future development of our farm.

I believe that productive activities such as farming should be able to continue to occur in the Wellington Region without having overly prescriptive rules that hinder us by imposing excessive regulation.

We do not believe our deer farm needs to be micro-managed indirectly by people who know very little about deer farming, as it is already an excellent deer farm.

I again ask that all non-mandatory classifications and map overlays be removed from our farm, to enable us to achieve the best possible farming performance, while being responsible stewards of our land and environment for future generations.

2. Unilateral Takeover of Private Land

I am very concerned about **Council's policy** of trying to unilaterally takeover private land, including approximately 15 acres of our farm. In the latest Council - Otaki River Resource Consent Application Council wishes to take control of an estimated 15 acres of our farm without asking our permission, so the GWRC can undertake a wide range of activities on our private property, for a period of 35 years. The attached Annex shows the estimated 15 acres.

According to the GWRC application these activities may include:

- I. earthworks
- II. removal of vegetation
- III. works outside the river beds
- IV. discharge of silt and water
- V. diversion of water, as associated with those activities
- VI. and allowing other people to access our property, without our consent.

We strongly submit that GWRC should not undertake any of these activities on our farm without our express written permission.

3 Serious Adverse Impacts

The proposed mapping and Council's classifications would stop us from exercising our right to manage our working farm in a normal manner and enjoy the pleasures of living in a private rural area.

We submit that the extent of the proposed River Corridor, proposed Application Area, and proposed Buffer Zone need to be limited to the Crown Land adjoining our boundary and not extend onto our private property.

To help illustrate the serious and significant adverse impact of the proposals I will share an example.

At the eastern end of Rahui Road we have a sheep paddock that extends from the Rahui Road gate up a steep escarpment to a flat paddock that would be about four 'building-stories' higher than the Otaki River.

This sheep paddock contains a farm track that we drive our quads on. In the future we wish to be able to upgrade this farm track to a private road to provide a second means of vehicle access to our home.

At the moment we only have one road vehicle access to our home and that is via Waimanu Road. Unfortunately Waimanu Road is subject to slips every winter that block road access to our farm until KCDC contractors clear the slips. We are very concerned that at some stage in the future we could completely lose our road vehicle access to our home via Waimanu Road.

In addition, the drawings of the proposed Otaki River Corridor show it running through large areas of our farm - that are at least four building stories higher than the

Otaki River. Currently we have deer grazing in three of these large paddocks and we make bailage in one of them.

These discretionary classifications drawn over our paddocks by GWRC are clearly inappropriate and could be seen as a "land grab".

We submit that the proposal to have three discretionary classifications of River Corridor, Consent Application Area, and Buffer Zone on our property clearly has a major adverse impact on us, as they would stop us continuing to develop and practise farming best practice and jeopardise the access to our home.

4. Policy Impacts on Animal Welfare and Safety of People

As we farm deer we are very aware of poachers and shooters trespassing on our property and harming our animals and intimidating us. We have reported serious activity to the local NZ Police (e.g. Stag being shot with a bow and arrow).

Consequently, we strongly oppose the proposal in the Otaki Consent Application that GWRC could allow the public to access the proposed River Corridor that GWRC has drawn on our property.

In addition, we **strongly oppose the proposed policy of allowing tanga whenua** to have information on potential food resources on our private property. We do not wish to have strangers counting our deer: the number of wood pigeons or other potential food resources.

We submit that any public access to the proposed river corridor near our farm, facilitated by GWRC, should only apply to areas where it is on Crown land or we have given written permission.

5. Excessive compliance costs

In central Government there is an objective of minimising the compliance costs imposed on people and enterprises by the regulations and rules of responsible authorities. I consider the PRP is imposing excessive and unnecessary compliance costs on its rate-payers including us and other farmers.

I have spent an enormous amount of time trying to understand the Council's requirements and help others to understand why they have significant adverse impacts on our farming operations.

We also pride ourselves on **avoiding, remedying or mitigating any adverse effects on the environment.**

I respectfully ask that the Panel consider recommending that the PRP include another objective stating that all its rules must be practical and not increase compliance costs unnecessarily.

Concluding comments

My requests in my original submission on the PDP remain unchanged and I hope the Panel will consider them positively.

In addition I request that the Hearings Panel, favourably consider the additional requests included in my statement today.

Thanks for listening to my statement today

Margaret Niven

19 June 2017

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3 Co

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