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KEEP RANGES NON-COMMERCIAL

The Waitakere Ranges are under a 2-pronged attack from Waitakere City Council in an attempt to commercialise them, and the Waitakere Ranges Protection Society are having to continue the battle to protect them, despite the passing of the Heritage Area Act in 2008.

On Tuesday this week WRPS will make submissions to the ARC to support their stance not to allow commercial concessions to operate on the new Hillary Trail through the Ranges. The ARC has been under pressure from WCC to allow commercial operators to operate on the trail and advertise it overseas.

“Our concern is that this will just bring yet more visitors to the Ranges and in the absence of a visitor management strategy their impacts will be uncontrolled and will damage the very values and heritage features they come to see” says Society President John Edgar.

“The Ranges are a delicate ecosystem and cannot support busloads of tourists and the infrastructure development that commercial operators will demand to support their businesses. This is Auckland’s park and a wilderness area. The Hillary Trail is intended as a backpacker experience for local people, it is not the Milford Track.”

At the same time as wanting to open the Ranges up to more tourism Waitakere City Council have also notified 3 District Plan Changes that have the potential to undermine the Heritage Area Act and introduce commercial activities on residential sites throughout the Ranges, Foothills and in the Regional Park.

“Plan Change 36 will have a devastating effect on the Ranges and totally change the character of the villages over time. Local people have not been adequately informed or consulted and we believe it should be withdrawn” says Secretary Mels Barton. “Anyone will be able to open a shop, takeaway, café, battery chicken farm, tourism business and many other commercial activities anywhere in the Ranges as of right. There will be no public notification or opportunity for people to object if these Plan Changes go ahead. It’s blatant commercialisation of the Heritage Area via the front door and Council are trying to ram it through before the Super City arrives. It’s not what the residents want and they don’t even understand that it is happening because there has been no community engagement”.

Anyone can make a submission on the Plan Changes by visiting the WRPS website and downloading the Guide and simple form at:

<http://www.waitakereranges.org.nz/news/index.htm>

Submissions close on Friday 12 March at 5pm.

Comment:

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