

The Waitakere Ranges Protection Society Incorporated

Submission to the Auckland Council on the Draft Annual Plan 2014-15

By **The Waitakere Ranges Protection Society Inc.**

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The Society wishes to speak to this submission.

Introduction

1. These submissions are presented by the Waitakere Ranges Protection Society Inc (“the Society”). The Society was incorporated in 1973. Its purpose is the conservation and protection of the Waitakere Ranges and to oppose any activity that may threaten or adversely affect the natural environment in the Waitakere Ranges.
2. The Society’s executive members include people with a wide range of skills in diverse areas including the sciences, the arts, Local Government and the law. The Society has the benefit of high quality *pro bono publico* assistance from a number of professional advisers.
3. The Society has had significant involvement over the past 40 years with respect to reviews of and changes to the various relevant District and Regional Plans, especially the Waitakere City District Plan, the formation of various structure plans and the resolution of planning consent applications under the Town and Country Planning Act and resource consent applications under the Resource Management Act, both at the Council level and on appeal to the Environment Court.

Submission

The issues the Society would like to comment on, which mainly apply to the Waitakere Ranges, are as follows:

1. The Society supports the Community Outcomes relating to the Waitakere Ranges, including
 - Green Auckland
 - A beautiful Auckland that is loved by its people

The Waitakere Ranges provide important amenity, refuge and respite to the people of Auckland, and are a storehouse of and anchor to the ecological values and health of a large part of the Auckland region. As such the environmental integrity of the Ranges is essential to Auckland’s well-being.

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With some qualifications discussed below, the Society supports the Draft Annual Plan budget allocation of \$49,244m, including \$12,812 capex for ongoing conservation programmes and environmental and heritage protection in Regional Parks.

2. The Society supports the relevant Draft Annual Plan 'Key Priorities':
 - a) Protect and enhance indigenous biodiversity and natural heritage, including 8 ha of new habitat
 - b) 62,000 ha under community pest control,
 - c) 50% of the region with less than 5% possum counts
 - d) Reduce PTA spread.
 - e) Continue working on Project Twin streams and Manukau Harbour water quality.

Our comments on these priorities are as follows:

- a) Communities must be adequately resourced to carry out such extensive pest control, and Council budgets must be realistic so to enable plant and animal pest reduction whether this work is done at contractor or community level.
- b) The target of 50% of the region with less than 5% trap counts is too low. If 5% is an average then this allows much higher possum counts in most of the region and is an inadequate overall target. Given the importance of the Waitakere Ranges ecosystems as an anchor for the 'North-West Wildlink' this area should have its own target, which, to be ecologically sound, and to protect the forest and its inhabitants should be at a much lower level. A 1.5% trap count would seem reasonable given the ecological values of the Waitakere Ranges and is comparable with what was being achieved under the old ARC.

Provision for targeted rates for possum control which were removed from the last Annual Plan should be reinstated. The Society refers in particular to the South Kaipara Targeted Rate that had the support of the community and which provided a possum control buffer for the Waitakere Ranges.

We note that possum monitoring in the WRHA in 2012 showed a Residual Trap-Catch count of 6.58% - 2% higher than the standard of the time. The Council noted this increased possum count was possibly due to an influx from outside and North West of the Regional Park, requiring an ad hoc response. The Society submits buffer control of possums should be managed in a systematic, rather than ad hoc way, and the South Kaipara Buffer right down to the Waitakere Ranges was important to this end.

- c) The Society is aware that pest control budgets were cut in the last financial year, and the evidence of that reduction is seen in reports of increasing possum numbers throughout the Ranges and communities. We submit that appropriate budgets must be set to keep on top of possum numbers in the Waitakere Ranges and in buffer areas beyond.
- d) The Society submits that the priority of 'reducing PTA spread' should be reworded to refocus attention on the treatment and remediation of PTA as well as halting its spread. We suggest the following alternative wording

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‘Proactively investigating and applying remedies for PTA to save Kauri in the Waitakere Ranges, with a view to forest recovery and reduced spread of PTA’

- e) We support continuation of Project Twin Streams and Manukau Harbour Water Quality programmes.
3. The Society also submits that the Council should act as proactive stewards of Maui’s Dolphins in the Manukau Harbour and off the West Coast. Maui’s dolphins are the World’s rarest and smallest marine dolphin, and are concentrated off the Auckland region’s west coast. They are affected by water quality, pollution, boat strike, and primarily, set net entrapment. The Council with its coastal management role, should take a lead in education and advocacy in the dolphins’ interests.
4. We support the Regional Parks budget of \$28,492m opex and \$14,241m capex for additional Regional Parks acquisition and submit that provision should be made for additions to the Waitakere Ranges Regional Parkland.
5. The Society also submits that the Governing Body should investigate and rectify the apparent loss of the Te Henga/Bethells Quarry rehabilitation fund. The former Waitakere City Council collected around \$1million worth of royalties from quarry operators over many years for quarry remediation upon closure. Unfortunately with the amalgamation of local government in Auckland, these funds seem to have been ‘lost’. WRPS and Forest and Bird have had regular meetings with Auckland Council to discuss concept plans for rehabilitation, but these will require the reinstatement of these significant funds. To further rehabilitation, and in good faith with the quarry operators and the community, we encourage the Council to recover these funds and correctly allocate them to quarry remediation. As key stakeholders, we would appreciate being kept up to date with this process.
6. The Society are also concerned to avoid impacts from inappropriate recreation and sporting events in the Waitakere Ranges. We thereby submit that the Local Board and Governing Body take a precautionary approach to the granting of consent to ultra-running and marathon events in the Waitakere Ranges. We were concerned that despite being key stakeholders in the Ranges, the Society was not consulted about the latest application, granted on a non-notified basis, for the Lactic Turkey ‘Hillary Trail Ultra’ event. Given the risks facing the forests from PTA/Kauri Die Back Disease, and problems of displacement of other users, during previous consultation many stakeholders including ourselves, had requested such applications be declined. We submit that in the public and environmental interest, further applications be fully notified and all concerns be publicly considered before consent is granted.

Thank you for considering our submission.