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I am writing on behalf of the Waitākere Ranges Protection Society (WRPS) to submit on Auckland Council's Have Your Say consultation opportunity *Driving on Muriwai Beach*.

Background on the WRPS

The WRPS was incorporated in 1973. Its purpose is the conservation and protection of the Waitākere Ranges and to oppose any activity that may threaten or adversely affect the natural environment in the area, including the coastal and marine environment.

WRPS and its members are strong advocates for the conservation and protection of the natural environment of the Waitākere Ranges and WRPS was one of the key groups promoting the concept of the Waitākere Ranges Heritage Area (WRHA) for 35 years before it was achieved through an Act of Parliament in 2008.

Introduction

The WRHA is of local, regional and national significance due to its unique heritage features outlined in the Waitākere Ranges Heritage Area Act (WRHA Act) which (s7

(1) (2)) sets out that the heritage area is of national significance, with heritage features including that the area provides a diversity of habitats for indigenous flora and fauna; (s7 (a)) its terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems of prominent indigenous character and (l) its distinctive local communities. The WRHA is also unique because of the population it services; New Zealand's largest metropolitan area with a relatively low proportion of accessible natural/non-built environments. The WRHA Act clearly states that among the heritage features (s7) of the area are: (g) the opportunities that the area provides for wilderness experiences, recreation, and relaxation in close proximity to metropolitan Auckland (m) the Waitākere Ranges Regional Park and its importance as an accessible public place with significant natural, historical, cultural, and recreational resources. It is therefore of significant and increasing value as it constitutes an essential public amenity for an increasingly urbanised population.

The WRHA Act sets out objectives which include to protect, restore and enhance the WRHA and its heritage features. Adverse cumulative effects of activities on the WRHA's heritage features must also be recognised and avoided. Auckland Council is also obliged, when considering decisions that threaten serious or irreversible damage to a heritage feature, to endeavour to protect the heritage feature.

Specific submissions regarding vehicle access to Muriwai beach

WRPS feels strongly that Muriwai Beach should be permanently closed to recreational vehicle use. This is due to environmental concerns of the area which are hugely impacted by vehicle use, safety concerns for children, horse riders and the drivers of the vehicles themselves, and the increased fire risk indicated.

Health of the sand dunes

The sand dunes ecosystems in the area are ranked as endangered and critically endangered, and we do not see how these rankings could improve if recreational vehicle access continues.

The 12 threatened and at-risk species within the Muriwai Regional Park, including the rare Muriwai gecko which is endemic to the site, and the white-fronted tern, need to be prioritised over recreational vehicle access which undoubtedly causes damage to the fragile dune systems. 4WDs illegally tearing through Muriwai's dunes are the biggest threat to the survival of some of these species.

Shellfish concerns

Toheroa a native surf clam, gathering of it has been banned since 1979, however in the 40-50 years since, toheroa hasn't recovered.

Driving on the beach crushes the clams, as well as exposing them to predators and damaging heat.

Safety of children, locals and visitors, and horse riders

There have been complaints lodged with the council about on-beach drivers' failure to stick to speed limits, crashes, and abandoned wrecks. Vehicle wrecks are not uncommon and cause significant hazards for beach users. The safety concerns for children, horse riders, and all other beach users must be prioritised over the enjoyment of recreational vehicles on the beach.

Fire risk

The adjacent forest is at very high fire risk over the summer months. 145 fires between 2015 and 2020.

Muriwai Regional Park's outstanding ecosystem and biodiversity values, including critically threatened and endangered species and ecosystems, and its classification as a Biodiversity Focus are and prioritisation for threat management are clear considerations for the elimination of recreational vehicle use on the beach. WRPS would like to see permanent closure of all three vehicle access points to the beach (with exception of surf life saving and other emergency vehicles).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "AM Fomison". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'A' and 'M'.

Anna Maria Fomison
President
Waitākere Ranges Protection Society