



Hearing Opening Statement

Hearing 18: Rural Zone Subdivision

Prepared by: John Turner

Date: 29 September 2020



Qualifications and experience

- 1 Good morning Chair and Commissioners. My name is John Turner I am the ecology technical expert who has been assisting Ms Overwater in matters relating to Conservation Lot subdivision. By way of introduction I have outlined my qualifications and experience in the paragraphs below.
- 2 My full name is John Paul Turner, I am Technical Principal – Ecology with WSP Ltd (previously Opus International Consultants Ltd), a position I have held for 2 years. I was previously Principal Ecologist with the same company, a position I held for 19 years.
- 3 I have the following qualifications and experience:
 - (a) BSc (Hons) Applied Science, specialising in environmental sciences, from The Polytechnic, Wolverhampton;
 - (b) 31 years' experience as a professional ecologist, having worked as an ecological consultant for 10 years in the United Kingdom, before taking up my position with WSP in New Zealand;
 - (c) extensive experience and expertise in valuing vegetation, habitats and species as part of many ecological impact assessments of a wide range of projects including major infrastructure within the Waikato, as well as technical peer reviews for Regional and District Council's;
 - (d) direction and interpretation of data from a number of long-tailed bat surveys and long-term bat monitoring projects within the Waikato;
 - (e) a high level of familiarity with the ecology and values of Waikato District having lived Hamilton for 22 years with the majority of my work focussed within the Waikato Region, including over 20 years involvement in various aspects of the ecology of the Waikato Expressway; and
 - (f) full membership of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, the United Kingdom's main professional institute for ecologists, which I have held since 1995 and full membership of New Zealand Ecological Society.



Opening statement

- 1 The intent of the conservation lot subdivision rule is to provide for incentivised subdivision where indigenous biodiversity is legally protected in exchange for a rural-residential subdivision. In considering the basis for this exchange it is important to recognise that the value of any given area of vegetation or habitat lies on a continuum from extremely high to minimal, dependent upon a wide range of biological and physical variables. Within the Waikato District those areas of vegetation or habitat worthy of meeting a recognisable level of value are those meeting the criteria listed in Appendix 2 of the proposed District Plan (Criteria for Determining Significant Biodiversity). These criteria are based on Section 11A of the Waikato Regional Policy Statement (WRPS). Sites where one or more of the criteria are met are classified as Significant Natural Areas (SNA's).
- 2 If the intent in incentivizing subdivision is to provide for greater protection and enhancement of biodiversity within the Waikato District in a meaningful way, then focus on those areas that meet recognised and agreed minimum criteria seems to me to provide an appropriate focus. This been the basis of defining areas that could be protected in exchange for subdivision.
- 3 Based on my recent site visits across the District as part of the District Plan review work I have been undertaking in connection with SNA's, and having lived and worked as an ecologist in Hamilton and the surrounding district over the past 20 years, it is clear that while many SNA's are being enhanced and protected by property owners, greater incentivisation to provide protection and enhancement of the best of what remains in private ownership within the District would be highly beneficial.
- 4 I have provided advice to Ms Overwater in a number of key areas concerning conservation lot subdivision:
 - Whether identified SNA's need to be a "contiguous" area in order to qualify for subdivision.
 - Whether there is benefit in reducing the minimum size requirement for an SNA to be eligible for subdivision within the Hamilton Basin Ecological area.
 - The merits of the proposed conservation lot subdivision rules aimed at promoting restoration and enhancement planting through its provisions.
- 5 In considering the question as to whether areas of vegetation or habitat within a property needed to be contiguous I looked at examples across the District where areas of vegetation/habitat were fragmented within properties but collectively could still provide a meaningful contribution to the protection of biodiversity within the District. This led to my advice to Ms Overwater that the requirement for areas to be contiguous be removed provided each fragment individually met the criteria in Appendix 2.
- 6 The Hamilton Basin area has significantly less ecological features compared to the area outside the Basin and often those features are of smaller size. On this basis reducing the size threshold to qualify for subdivision lots make sense within this area to ensure that there is incentive to protect what is a scarcer resource.



- 7 There are many examples of SNA's across the Waikato District where small fragments of vegetation/habitat would benefit significantly from restoration and enhancement planting. These fragments still contain a representative range of species that if protected by fencing and added too by planting could provide a meaningful contribution to biodiversity within the District. Restoration can also provide an opportunity to connect smaller fragments. The rural subdivision rules provide incentives to increase the area and viability of small fragments as well as connect fragments.

- 8 In addition to providing advice to Ms Overwater on these key questions I have also provided advice to assist her preparation of her rebuttal. The questions that she posed to me related to the value in protecting features not identified as SNA and whether there was merit in dropping the size threshold for wetlands. My responses to these questions are detailed in my memorandum to Ms Overwater dated 24th September 2020.

- 9 That concludes my opening statement. I welcome any questions the Panel may have for me.