

**Before the Environment Court
At Auckland**

In the matter of the Local Government (Auckland Transitional Provisions Act 2010 (**LGATPA**) and the Resource Management Act 1991 (**RMA**)

And

In the matter of appeals under section 156(1) of the LGATPA

Between **Weli Yang, Zhi Lu & Jing Ni**

(ENV-2016-AKL-000196)

Okura Holdings Limited

(ENV-2016-AKL-000211)

Appellants

And **Auckland Council**

Respondent

And **Weiti Development Limited Partnership**

Section 274 Party

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**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF DIANNE KAY GATWARD
ON BEHALF OF THE LONG BAY - OKURA GREAT PARK
SOCIETY INCORPORATED**

28 JULY 2017

And Long Bay-Okura Great Park Protection Society

Section 274 Party

And Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society Incorporated

Section 274 Party

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1 SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

- 1.1 My evidence will discuss the importance of retaining the Rural Urban Boundary in its present location in order to protect the unique environment which borders the Okura Estuary and the Long Bay-Okura Marine Reserve.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 My name is Dianne Kay Gatward.
- 2.2 I reside at 23 Long Bay Drive, Torbay, Auckland, and have done so since 1978.
- 2.3 I retired after 26 years from teaching at Long Bay College in 2005 where I was also the Careers Counsellor and Dean of Year 13. I have been a member of the Long Bay-Okura Great Park Society (the **Society**) since its inception. My deceased husband, David, was convenor of the Society for many years, strenuously campaigning for a Great Park. I have served on the Executive of the Society for a number of years, standing down in 2016 for personal reasons.

3 RETAINING THE RURAL URBAN BOUNDARY TO RETAIN AND PROTECT THE UNIQUE ENVIRONMENT WHICH BORDERS THE OKURA ESTUARY AND THE LONG BAY-OKURA MARINE RESERVE

- 3.1 Given the increasing intensification of development in the North Shore, Rodney and the wider Auckland catchment, the importance of having access to the natural world for spiritual wellbeing and mental health cannot be overstated. Being out in nature and being able to feel that one has escaped “the built” environment reduces stress, promotes relaxation and provides rejuvenation. The Okura Bush scenic reserve, with its native flora and fauna, its beach access with rare and endangered wading birds, the wide-open vistas from the northern parts of the Long Bay Regional Park, all contribute to that sense of being away from it all.
- 3.2 That sense would be totally lost by permitting suburban development on the land adjacent to the Long Bay Regional Park. Lifestyle blocks are preferable as they still maintain a relative country feel.
- 3.3 As someone who has walked this area almost daily for over thirty-nine years I can attest to the spiritual and mental health benefits which this spe-

cial environment provides. I have regularly met people who come especially to this area from Auckland City to unwind. The many walkers, joggers, runners and bike riders who take the hill track up to Piripiri point remark on its outstanding beauty and sense of isolation. Visitors from overseas marvel that such a treasure as the Okura Estuary and the Long Bay Marine Reserve can be enjoyed so close to New Zealand's largest city. It is a rare treasure that must be protected and preserved for generations to come.

- 3.4 Three Environment Court cases have declared this to be so.
- 3.5 The Okura Estuary and the Long Bay-Okura Marine Reserve form part of the Te Araroa Trail, a walk that brings tourists from all over the world. On a number of occasions I have met and spoken with young adventurers who comment how lucky we are to have such a relatively unspoilt environment on the edge of Auckland.
- 3.6 The Okura Estuary, with its native bush backdrop, is an outstanding example of a soft sediment estuary. It is alive with marine life and sea birds. Stingrays wallow in its mud flats, flocks of birds inhabit the shore line around to Karepiro Bay. Over 70,000 people walked the Okura Bush walkway to Karepiro Bay last year. That experience would be significantly altered if the rural urban boundary was moved enabling intensive suburban development to occur on the opposite side of the Okura estuary.
- 3.7 I appreciate the need for more housing to be available for Auckland's growing population. However, there are many other areas where this need can be met. I also doubt that the proposed development on the Okura estuary will be a solution for first home buyers.
- 3.8 The integrity of the Long Bay Marine Reserve will be threatened if the rural boundary is moved and development subsequently allowed to occur. With more extreme weather events predicted, the risk of run off polluting the Marine Reserve is increased. Run off control measures have not been sufficient in the past and recent events at Weiti have proven that is still the case.

4 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 Providing housing in an area recognised as an Outstanding Natural Landscape is not "best use" for this land.

- 4.2 Best use of this land is for it to remain a sanctuary for wildlife and an environment which can provide pleasure, relaxation and renewal for both body and soul for the many people who visit this precious resource, so close to the existing urban areas of greater Auckland City.
- 4.3 As Jodi Mitchell's lyrics so poignantly point out: "You don't know what you've lost 'til it's gone"
- 4.4 This Court has the power to avoid that mistake.

Dianne Gatward
28 July 2017