

**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 KATHY ALLEN AND JOHN
McCARTHY 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**

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Our names are Kathy Allen and John McCarthy.
- 1.2 This evidence is a joint statement written in opposition to the proposed land and housing developments along the southern edge of the Okura River, and in support of maintaining the current requirements of the Auckland Unitary Plan in respect of this area.

2 OUR VIEWS AND CONCERNS

- 2.1 We have been using the Okura Estuary and the Long Bay Marine Reserve for recreational purposes for over 20 years. We live locally in Mairangi Bay, have two (almost) grown-up children, and respectively work in the agriculture research and development field and in the philanthropic sector.
- 2.2 Our children who are both active and skilled recreational outdoorspeople (rock climbing, tramping and kayaking) grew up experiencing the beauty and fun of the Okura-Long Bay area and learned their first outdoor skills within the safety and convenience of this special place.
- 2.3 We have been life-long trampers both within NZ and overseas. We regularly (at least twice a month) walk/run the Okura Bush walk track to keep fitness levels up for our longer 'expeditions'. We've appreciated the countless hours of work that Department of Conservation staff along with many local groups have put in to planting trees, maintaining and enhancing the track, and preserving the birds and other wildlife through trapping.
- 2.4 As members of the Dacre Cottage Management Committee (located at Karapiro Bay, along the Okura bush walk) we have also been involved in helping to restore and maintain the Cottage and its grounds for the use of local walkers, Te Araroa Trail hikers, community groups, school parties, and a wide variety of sportspeople and recreational groups – trail runners, and kayakers in particular. We have spent hours of work as a group raising funds, painting, building, weeding, lawn mowing, and repairing the grounds and buildings during numerous working bees over the last 15 years. In addition, Committee members have helped to plant around 12,000 native trees along the length of Karapiro Bay. We have also met thousands of individuals

and families over those years who have highly appreciated both the work we have done, and also the effort being put in to preserve an area they regard as a highly-prized community asset.

- 2.5 Our family - along with those thousands of other families – recognise how fortunate we are to still have this almost pristine piece of wilderness preserved. It is worth emphasising that this area represents the last remaining area of undeveloped wilderness available for recreation on the City's east coast. The next piece of land like that is beyond Mahurangi – almost an hour's drive away.
- 2.6 For families who are unable to travel far out of Auckland, or who have small children who are being introduced to their first day hike, or receiving their first education about the natural environment, the Okura-Long Bay area is very special. In addition to the many recreational values, those families appreciate the rare opportunity to experience so close to a large city the diversity of the natural surroundings - in both the bush and marine environments.
- 2.7 We are already seeing the serious impact the new housing development behind Karapiro Bay and the Todd Property earthworks on the southern edge of the Okura River are having on the ecology of both the surrounding land and marine environment. Large amounts of sediment run-off from those developments have already spread down the streams and other watercourses that feed into the estuary and the Marine Reserve. Despite controls being put in place by the developers, on any rainy day this creates large swathes of brown, muddy water stretching across the estuary, down the River and out into the wider Hauraki Gulf. The recently-produced Hauraki Gulf Marine Spatial Plan noted that:
- “Water quality is one of the greatest areas of concern affecting the health and mauri of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park. The most common known causes of water quality degradation trace back to contaminants that are washed from the land into the coastal marine area through freshwater runoff.”*
- 2.8 We simply do not understand or accept that it can be permissible to add to the degradation of the marine environment by intensifying the developments around this fragile area.

2.9 We are aware that Todd Properties has offered to build an extension of the Okura Bush walkway around the southern edge of the Okura River in mitigation of their proposed housing development. This offer has apparently been received positively by the management team for the Te Araroa national trail. We appreciate Te Araroa's position, and were we in the same position as them of constantly seeking to upgrade and improve the connectedness of the existing Trail we would probably find the offer from Todd Properties an attractive proposition. However, we would raise these points in response:

- We are aware that the Te Araroa Trail builders have spent considerable time and resource trying to avoid this exact situation in other areas of NZ. In other words they try to re-route the Trail wherever possible away from the built-up environment, away from roads and traffic and urban noise in order to create a wilderness-type experience along the Trail.
- Were the Te Araroa team offered the opportunity to have the Trail extended along the southern edge of the Okura River without a housing development being built immediately adjacent to it, we imagine they would jump at the chance.
- We have met dozens of Te Araroa Trail hikers over the last few years who have commented on the beauty and tranquillity of the rural view across to the southern side of the Okura River from the existing track on the northern side of the River. A housing development on the southern side would completely ruin that view.

2.10 Importantly, the Okura-Long Bay area provides an opportunity to 'get away from it all' for a few hours without the intrusion of suburban life, and without really having to leave town. As the pressures of modern day living increase for families and others in the community, these opportunities become more important for maintaining the mental health of the community.

2.11 Several research studies have shown the benefits of exposure to urban greenspace on physical and emotional health compared to more urban environments. Of note are the particular benefits for children's psychological and cognitive functioning, and especially as a protective factor against stressful life events. Other studies indicate support for what has been called 'green exercise'. These have shown the significant physical and mental health benefits of exercising in

green landscapes when compared with exercising in non-natural environments - eg in gyms or urban environments - even over relatively short periods of time.

2.12 Once development starts to encroach on areas that provide those opportunities, the benefits from their wilderness values are lost. And once lost, that wilderness value is impossible to recreate.

2.13 In a recent article in 'Backcountry' (the bulletin of the Federated Mountain Clubs of NZ), the President of FMC Peter Wilson, wrote:

"In New Zealand, and on the one third of the land we've set aside for conservation, we've in effect preserved a culture and a way of life that is separate and independent from the market-driven world most of us inhabit. That welcome escape, the transition from city to backcountry that occurs at every road-end frontier on every weekend or holiday, is our transition back out to reality again. As long as we keep doing this, we'll stay Kiwi. The value of our back country will only grow over time and it's worth preserving on its own terms. In fact, to attempt to defend the backcountry using anything else would demean it. Wilderness is a truly non-renewable resource."

- *Backcountry*, Number 207, March 2017, p7

2.14 From a local perspective, the Okura-Long Bay area is part of Auckland's backcountry. We urge the Court to keep it that way, and thank the Court for the opportunity to submit our views.

Kathy Allen and John McCarthy
28 July 2017