

Hearing Statement of Robert Anker

30<sup>th</sup> August 2023

## PROPOSED CHANGE 1 TO THE REGIONAL POLICY STATEMENT FOR THE WELLINGTON REGION

Good morning Commissioners. Thank you for hearing me.

You have already heard from my friends and neighbours. We speak not only for ourselves but also for our community.

My name is Bob Anker and I live on the western side of Katherine Mansfield Drive, Upper Hutt.

I purchased my land and built my home in 1985 – some 38 years ago.

The land was bare, marginal grazing land, practically devoid of trees as was the entire Katherine Mansfield development.

As a typical towny who obtains land, I planted trees. Lots of trees. My neighbours, who followed me, did the same.

We have totally transformed the area and have seen an exponential increase in the quantity and variety of birdlife.

All of us are invested in our land and have acted independently of any local or regional authority. Our actions have been those of stewards and guardians of the environment.

The only threat to our being able to continue in the peaceful enjoyment of our land has come from the Regional Council. Both the form and manifestation of this threat has already been outlined today.

Compared to the GWRC our relationship with UHCC has been good.

The Mangaroa peatland community has endured repeated attempts by GWRC to gain control over the peatland area of about 350 hectares, all of which is in private ownership. We have documentary

evidence of a determination by GWRC ecologists to get control of the valley, initially as a 'significant natural wetland,' when that failed as a Significant Natural Area, and now as a Nature Based Solution.

It was in the light of concerted action by GWRC officials, supported by Cr. Ros Connelly, that we read RPS Change 1 and found the definition of Nature Based Solutions in the glossary at the end of the document. The level of concern generated in our community can be measured by the response of 62 individual submissions.

The list of Nature Based Solutions examples, which included peatlands, also prompted us to use LGOIMA to ask for information.

Our request was as follows.

***Papers and presentations prepared for workshops with regional councillors and / or territorial authorities considering the peatland as part of a climate change strategy.***

The response, drafted by Matt Hickman and signed off by Al Cross, dated 16<sup>th</sup> November 2022 stated:

***Peatland has no mention in the climate change strategy or climate action plans.***

We considered this to be disingenuous and following our complaint to the Ombudsman, GWRC response was reiterated on 13<sup>th</sup> July 2023.

Meanwhile, on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2023, Pam Guest presented to the Commissioners for the Upper Hutt IPI hearing.

As part of her Climate Change submission, she cites "Nature Based Solutions".

**Objective CC.4:** Nature-based solutions.

**Examples include :** protecting peatland to retain carbon stores.

**Policy CC.12:** Protect, enhance and restore ecosystems that provide nature-based solutions to climate change.

We are now left wondering which arm of GWRC we should believe. We are accustomed to the Regional council speaking with forked tongue. They consistently give us no reason to trust what they say.

The RPS references peatland – there is no definition of peatland.

There is an area known as the Mangaroa Peatland but the RPS does not refer to any map that identifies the extent of this feature or any other peatland in the Greater Wellington region. Among the responses to our OIA there is the statement that GWRC views the Mangaroa Peatland as a regionally significant ecosystem. We have never been informed what factors make it a significant ecosystem. Lived experience has taught us that such classification leads to problematic interference. The Mangaroa Peatland is private land. It is a farm, it is home to over 75 families. GWRC gives lip service to but fails to give effect to the Whaitua concept and I quote – You ask me – what is the most important thing in the world? It is people. It is people. It is people.

In July 2015 the Proposed Natural Resources Plan was notified. It was another 8 years before it was signed off by Daran Ponter and yet it is still an inchoate instrument. We understand that there will be a Change notified in November, a bare 4 months after sign off.

The NRP, operative 9<sup>th</sup> July 2023, references ‘ Buffer zones’ but does not define the dimensions of any such zone. Neither does it specify any rules that apply within the main area or the buffer zone. Buffer Zones are of material interest to our community. Once more we seem to be dealing with the rationale that first we are being asked to concede to the concept of buffer zones and then GWRC will make up the rules afterwards.

Both Pam Guest and Mr Farrant propose changing the wording from ‘protecting’ to ‘maintaining’ peatland. They claim that maintaining is less onerous whereas protecting is more regulatory. Our feeling is

that the opposite is the case and we consulted an RMA barrister for his legal opinion.

We are advised, and I quote:

Standard rules of statute interpretation apply to Regional Policy Statements.

In resource management law, maintain is often used as a proper catch all, inclusive of protection.

Maintenance of something is used to include protecting, enhancing, and restoring depending on the context.

The overall outcome of maintenance is to keep something in the same state as it currently exists which requires active steps to ensure that it remains in its intended state.

Whereas protection refers to actions to preserve or avoid harm to a particular thing.

This opinion seems to be at odds with the statements made by Pam Guest and Mr Farrant. Additionally, if as stated by Al Cross, ***Peatland has no mention in the climate change strategy or climate action plans***, why are they going to such lengths to change phraseology.

Why am I here talking to you today on behalf of myself and the wider Mangaroa Peatland community. a community of over 75 families?

First, we want to be able to **trust** GWRC.

Second, we are looking for **consistency**.

Third, we are the stewards and guardians of our land. Start treating us as such and engage in timely and meaningful **consultation**.

Fourth, please start treating our community with **respect**.

The relief that we seek is for all references to peatland be struck out from the Regional Policy Statement Change 1.

Thank you for hearing me. I shall be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.

