

BEFORE THE

Waikato Regional Council

IN THE MATTER OF

Healthy Rivers Wai Ora
Plan Change 1 and Variation 1A

STATEMENT OF

Susan Helen Rowe
(On behalf of Susan Helen Rowe and the Gowan Rowe Family
Trust)
5579 Highway 22, Waingaro

Date 15 July 2019

Contact for Service:

Name: Sue Rowe

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STATEMENT OF Susan (Sue) Helen Rowe

SCOPE OF STATEMENT

- a. Overview of our farming business and the capabilities of our hill country properties.
- b. Objectives of PC1 and how they will translate to our farming business.
- c. Specific parts of PC1 I am commenting on.

d. Attachments

Ref 1. Aerial Farm Photo

Ref 2. Existing Riparian Fencing

Ref 3. Existing Bush Area and SNA

Ref 4. Pond Sediment Trap

Ref 5. Unfenced Tributary to Kahururu Stream

Ref 6. Farm Aerial Images with Water Courses

Ref 7 & 8. Kahururu Stream in Flood

Ref 9. Farm Photo

- 1) My name is Susan Rowe. The Gowan Rowe Family Trust and I jointly own 372.655 hectares at 5579 Highway 22, Waipa District.
- 2) This land is currently not subject to PC1, however I strongly oppose this proposed plan change in principle because if it was approved it would no doubt be applied throughout the district and would have a detrimental effect on our current farming operation and livelihoods it supports.
Our home farm is a 370 hectare moderate to steep hill country sheep and beef farm that runs a maximum of 3500 stock units. The farm has been owned by our family since 1977. Approximately 12 hectares is planted in 25 year old Pinus Radiata and we have a further 35 hectares of native bush marked as Significant Natural Area. Effective land area is approximately 320 hectares. **See Ref 1. Aerial Farm Photo**
- 3) In the earlier years of running this farm, due to its historical management, size, topography, high interest rates, low market prices, it struggled to be an economic unit. This required me to work off farm to subsidise costs and help educate our three children.
- 4) Some of our neighbouring properties (approximately 2100 hectares) were sold to forestry in the early 1990's because of these fine margins. Our farm is our home. We love our rural district and the local support helped us get through these tougher years.
- 5) In 2010, following my husband's death, my son Ben Rowe and his partner Karyna Young chose to return home from Australia and lease the family farm. They purchased a house and 20 hectares directly opposite the home farm which is run in conjunction with the land they lease from me. They also lease another adjoining farm of 183 hectares, taking their entire farming operation to approximately 576 Hectares.
- 6) Like most of the other farms in the Waingaro / Te Akau District, our farming operation is now intergenerational. Ben, Karyna and their three little boys are passionate about the land and enjoy their current lifestyle in our district.
- 7) The intention is for Ben and Karyna to purchase the farm over the next few years. I would like to achieve this farm succession exercise with confidence and not be fearful of the implementation of PC1 which would result in a significant change to Ben's current farming systems and a significant drop in land value as a result of the proposed restrictions.
- 8) Any proposed land use restrictions on hill country land would need to be practical for the day to day farm management and unfortunately PC1 doesn't provide this in my opinion.
- 9) Our property relies extensively on farming bull beef to supply the dairy farming service bull industry and if Ben can't run beef or is restricted to sheep only on the steeper topography then his business will simply become uneconomic. He will unlikely be in a position to renew the lease and will certainly be unable to purchase the farm.
- 10) Farming this land is difficult but our long experience and intimate knowledge of the particular property allows us to better manage the land and finding the right balance between protecting our environment and making an income to live off.

- 11) Under the management of my late husband and now Ben, we have actively fenced off a number of water courses on the property, mostly with two wire electric fences to prevent larger stock entering the larger water courses. We have developed a troughed water reticulation system that extends to approximately 40% of the farm. Considerable capital has been spent to make our operation more efficient and sustainable and we intend on continuing this work into the future when financial returns allow us to do so.
- 12) We find that 1 - 2 wire electric fences work well in hazardous areas because it prevents cattle from entering water courses and becoming stuck, yet allows sheep to pass under the wires and maintain this buffer area from weeds. These fences are also less likely to be damaged during floods.
- 13) In our experience when erecting a conventional wire fence, the waterways are no longer visible as they are now covered in blackberry, privet, willow-weed and other invasive noxious weeds. They are not as they were, visibly clean and free flowing, as when we purchased the farm in 1977. It is all good and well to say that these areas need to be maintained more for weed control but this would be require another labour unit. **See Ref 2. Existing Riparian Fencing. (Noxious weeds on left of image)**
- 14) We have also put some Significant Natural bush areas on the farm under protective covenants and gained subdivision entitlements to offset the costs of fencing them. **See Ref 3. Existing Bush Area and SNA**
- 15) The farm is annually fertilised and as a result, the soils are more fertile and the pasture is more resilient to what can be very challenging seasonal conditions such as this recent summer drought.
- 16) The front third of our farm is easy to medium contour. The back two thirds is undulating and steep and contains the head water tributaries that flow towards the front of the property, discharging into the Kahuhuru Stream.
- 17) The farm also supports a full time worker and his family and provides me with a regular lease income, so in total the farm supports three families.

Hill Country Farming

- 18) The success of hill country farming has always relied on a variety of animal types and the flexibility to switch between depending on the financial returns at the time. Restricting our type of farm and topography to only sheep would simply make the farm unviable and would have detrimental effects on our family and livelihoods.
- 19) We believe that we have a well-established commitment to care for the land. We appreciate that hill country needs careful management particularly in the wetter months and we manage stock rates accordingly by selling pre autumn or by grazing heavy cattle off the farm at winter grazing blocks.
- 20) Like most other hill country farmers, we use sheep irregularly to graze the steeper land more intensively for pasture and weed maintenance; however cattle are rotated through paddocks more frequently allowing the grass to recover more quickly for the next rotation. Leaving behind longer grass would help filter out any sediment that may be caused by the heavier stock and would largely settle before reaching the watercourses. The harder hill country relies on flowing natural

permanent and intermittent streams and ponds in the steep gullies for stock survival, especially during the summer months. The watercourses towards the front of the property approaching the main stream, are predominantly more vegetated swamps and any sediment from the steeper country would be further filtered before reaching the main stream, most of these swamp areas are already fenced off to prevent stock becoming stuck. Ponds throughout the farm also allow the sediment to settle. **See Ref 4. Pond Sediment Trap**

- 21) The healthiest looking streams on our farm are the ones that are able to flow freely and where the animals can keep the boundaries clean and weed free. **See Ref 5. Unfenced Tributary to Kahururu Stream**
- 22) These watercourses do occasionally become murky with suspended sediment during periods of high rainfall, but this will occur irrespective of this proposed plan change.
- 23) Permanently fencing off our water courses and especially in areas with a gradient up to 25 degrees is unpractical and unjustified in our opinion.
- 24) Compliance would be time consuming and financially crippling for properties such as ours and would outweigh the very marginal benefits and outcomes it may bring.
- 25) Due to the steep gully contour that surrounds our water course, we will also need to sacrifice a lot of grazing land to practicably erect a fence.
- 26) To propose fencing off our water ways and create a water reticulation scheme on the steeper hill country in one breath, and then being told to retire the land in the next, makes any return on capital investment obsolete and the farm may as well be converted to forestry.
- 27) Unless I am missing something, there appears to be no factual evidence that larger stock such as cattle on steep hill country cause more sediment to enter water ways and effect its quality and the fish life downstream.
- 28) We believe that the works required by diggers and bulldozers to install troughs and prepare practical fence lines around our water courses will likely cause more sediment runoff than cattle would ever do in our lifetime. The environmental cost of erecting a fence outweighs the improvement it may or may not bring.
- 29) As a sample of what this proposed plan change could cost us, I have had a surveyor measure the total length of water courses on our home farm using the Regional Council GIS drainage maps. As mentioned, most of the water courses on our property are tributaries to the main Kahuhuru Stream which generally runs along the western and northern extent of our farm, parallel with State Highway 22. In total we have approximately 14.4 kilometres of water courses within our farm marked on the Regional Council Map. Most of this stream length would require fencing both sides which equates to approximately 26 kilometres of permanent fencing required. **See Ref 6. Farm Aerial Images with Water Courses**
- 30) At a conservative fencing rate of \$25 per meter on our topography where tractors cannot easily access, this gives an estimated cost of \$650,000 just for the fencing alone. I would say the bulldozer and digger work required would easily be another \$100,000 and the ongoing costs to plant trees and then maintain the fenced off areas with weed control would be tens of thousands a year also. With up to a 10m

buffer from the edge of streams on both sides, there could be up to 50 hectares of land lost for production. Will we be compensated for this land grab?

31) So the upfront costs for us to be compliant with PC1 would be upwards of a million dollars which is probably over a third of the total farm value.

32) And then when the next big flood occurs, which happens 4 – 5 times a year on our property, the Kahuhuru Stream swells from 3 – 4 metres wide to in excess of 100 meters wide. The watercourses are filled again with suspended sediment, fences are destroyed and nothing would actually be achieved through this very expensive and marginal exercise on our type of topography.

See Ref 7 & 8. Kahururu Stream in Flood

33) These figures simply don't stack up for an operation our size. I fear the only option for us would be to sell the farm for forestry and three families would lose their incomes and livelihoods.

Comments on Specific Parts

34) Restricting Land Use Change

Restricting land use change along with NRP would severely effect the viability of our land. The effects of any future land use changes should be executed through a well researched and effective Environmental plan and not a blanket rule for all.

35) Nitrogen Reference Point (NRP)

We understand the objective is to reduce nitrogen leaching, phosphorus loss, sediments and bugs entering into our waterways. On our hill country we don't believe Nitrogen is the main problem. We need to focus on what containments are being lost and how to contain them.

36) The restrictions imposed by this rule far outweigh any environmental gains and will only impede on our ability to fund the capital works required to comply with PC1. If NRP is capped we will not be able to change our land use in order to maintain a sustainable business. This is critical for our class of land.

37) We need actual facts on our water quality for our sub catchment area and then we will know what we have to work with. We are happy to comply with that if we do indeed have a problem.

Farm Environmental Plans (FEP)

38) We support the use of a FEP as a realistic tool to be used to enhance our farm and to encourage a supported educated approach to improve water quality. However we value the ability to make own decisions and we need to retain our independence and flexibility.

39) We are also concerned at the cost to the regional councils for setting up this plan.

40) Applying for resource consents to change our land use will become a logistical nightmare. Farming is a 7 day a week occupation and we have spent 41 years working hard to make our farm productive, and financially and environmentally sustainable. Survival of sheep and beef industries is vital to all the consumers and communities it supports.

Summarising Points

See Ref 9. Farm photo

- 41) The PC1 proposal sounds great in theory but whether it will work in reality is another matter. For flatter more intensive dairy farming areas or horticultural areas that are heavily stocked and heavily fertilised, yes the provisions of PC1 may be appropriate but not for our type of land.
- 42) Hill country farms like ours cannot be farmed intensively and pasture generally needs a long time to recover following grazing. They aren't extensively fertilised like dairy farms due to cost and topography. In my opinion, the provision of PC1 is a politicised knee jerk reaction that is targeting the wrong industry. The significant adverse effects on the people it will impact on the most have not been considered.
- 43) We are concerned that much of our lovely district will become a pine plantation forest because it is no longer economical to farm plus comply with PC1 recommendations.
- 44) Not only would PC1 cost us upwards of a million dollars to become compliant, we would have less productive area to farm, and would be unable to run more productive animals such as bull beef. The land value of our main family asset would be drastically reduced.
- 45) Farmers are the best carers of the land, we are proud of our farm and it is in our best interest to keep a clean environment. We look forward to building on the environmental gains we have already achieved as economic conditions allow us and hopefully without the unjustified and unnecessary burden of PC1.

Thank you for your time