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Draft National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity

I am writing on behalf of the Waitākere Ranges Protection Society (WRPS) to submit on the proposed National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity.

Background on the WRPS

The WRPS was incorporated in 1973. Its purpose is the conservation and protection of the Waitākere Ranges and to oppose any activity that may threaten or adversely affect the natural environment in the area, including the coastal and marine environment.

WRPS and its members are strong advocates for the conservation and protection of the natural environment of the Waitākere Ranges and WRPS was one of the key groups promoting the concept of the Waitākere Ranges Heritage Area (WRHA) for 35 years before it was achieved through an Act of Parliament in 2008.

Introduction

The WRHA is of local, regional and national significance due to its unique heritage features outlined in the Waitākere Ranges Heritage Area Act (WRHA Act) which (s7 (1) (2)) sets out that the heritage area is of national significance, with heritage features including that the area provides a diversity of habitats for indigenous flora

and fauna; (s7 (a)) its terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems of prominent indigenous character and (l) its distinctive local communities. The WRHA is also unique because of the population it services; New Zealand's largest metropolitan area with a relatively low proportion of accessible natural/non-built environments. The WRHA Act clearly states that among the heritage features (s7) of the area are: (g) the opportunities that the area provides for wilderness experiences, recreation, and relaxation in close proximity to metropolitan Auckland (m) the Waitākere Ranges Regional Park and its importance as an accessible public place with significant natural, historical, cultural, and recreational resources. It is therefore of significant and increasing value as it constitutes an essential public amenity for an increasingly urbanised population.

The WRHA Act sets out objectives which include to protect, restore and enhance the WRHA and its heritage features. Adverse cumulative effects of activities on the WRHA's heritage features must also be recognised and avoided. Auckland Council is also obliged, when considering decisions that threaten serious or irreversible damage to a heritage feature, to endeavour to protect the heritage feature. The proposed NPS-IB would attend to this protection and enhancement of the WRHA and support the overall purpose of the WRHA Act 2008, which WRPS strongly commends.

The draft National Policy Statement on Indigenous Biodiversity (NPS-IB) and the WRHA

In the WRHA Act (s9) Relationship between this Act and the RMA 1991 states that if a conflict arises then the RMA prevails. Because the purpose of the NPS-IB is to confer clarity and direction of the RMA it will have great significance to the WRHA.

Kauri dieback

A noticeable omission from the draft NPS-IB is any reference to kauri dieback or management of such pathogens. Te Kawarau a Maki's rahui, with support from Auckland Council has now closed some of the forested areas of the Waitākere Ranges to protect trees from kauri dieback disease and prevent its spread. Kauri dieback disease is threatening one of New Zealand's most iconic species. It is the single greatest threat to conservation values in the Auckland region. The disease could, if not successfully managed, eliminate kauri from the region and from New Zealand. The Department of Conservation lacks the resources to manage its own lands, which leaves Auckland Council's regional parks in the Waitākere and Hunua Ranges as the "last chance for kauri" on the mainland of the Auckland Region and possibly in New Zealand. There is currently little understanding of the disease, its spread and management.

Specific submissions

Section 1.7(3) Maintenance of indigenous biodiversity

In protecting and maintaining indigenous biodiversity, the NPS-IB should support the protection of indigenous biodiversity as well as indigenous vegetation or significant habitats connected with them. WRPS thinks in this regard the NPS-IB should, for example, specifically mention the goal to reduce the impact of exotic introduced

species and pathogenic pests (eg Kauri dieback) that compete with or feed on indigenous biodiversity.

Section 3.6 Precautionary approach

Local authorities must adopt a precautionary approach toward proposed activities where – a) the effects on indigenous biodiversity are uncertain, unknown or little understood (kauri dieback management approach here a good example/rahui track closures a good example of precautionary approach). Or b) those effects are potentially significantly adverse.

WRPS thinks the inclusion of the precautionary approach in the proposed NPS-IB is appropriate and strongly supports this.

Section 3.7 Social, economic and cultural wellbeing

3.7(c) in implementing this policy statement, local authorities must recognise that people are critical to maintaining and enhancing indigenous biodiversity

The heritage features of the area are of course the main reason why visitors come to the Waitākere Ranges, and the area is of great social and cultural wellbeing to the communities of Auckland. Public education is crucial for compliance with protective (and precautionary) measures, with an example where more education and effective communication is needed is around the general confusion and lack of understanding from members of the public of the significance of kauri dieback and the rahui placed by Te Kawerau ā Maki.

When visitors recognise and respect the heritage features of the area, they are more willing to observe codes to limit damage. Where the differentiation of the area is not understood or respected, it is hard to get compliance with codes that limit damage. Where these heritage features are celebrated and understood, they also inform – and can even inspire - infrastructure design, shape decisions around visitor attractions, economic opportunities, what activities are encouraged, the management of concessions, and so forth.

However it is a concern that there is much public misunderstanding around the reasons behind the track closures in the Waitākere Ranges.

Public education, especially of locals, is critical to improving compliance with understanding. Part of this should involve supporting and respecting the rahui in the WRHA through providing appropriate signage and information, developing better biosecurity stations at high volume areas and ensuring that they are properly maintained at all tracks, and providing continuing education on the issue of kauri dieback and how to prevent its spread in the WRHA. While the forested area is closed and the rahui in place Auckland Council should encourage use of other parks and reserves within the region.

Section 3.16 Restoration and enhancement

The NPS-IB needs specific management approaches to, and mention of, the issue of pathogenic pests. WRPS submits that “recognising the need for effective pathogenic pest management” should be added alongside “recognising the need for effective weed and animal pest management”, in the list of actions of restoration and protection under the proposed NPS-IB, as laid out in the discussion document.

3.3 Tangata whenua as kaitiaki

The NPS-IB has a strong emphasis on the recognition of tangata whenua as kaitiaki. WRPS strongly supports the involvement of and collaboration with tangata whenua in identifying taonga, and developing objectives, policies and methods that recognise and provide for Hutia Te Rito.

Are there opportunities that are accessible for tangata whenua in a meaningful way, and not just a token offers of engagement?

WRPS recognises that Auckland Council’s support of Te Kawerau ā Maki rahui is an example of the recognition of tangata whenua as kaitiaki and hopes to see this sort of tangata whenua-led guidance more.

Section 3.5

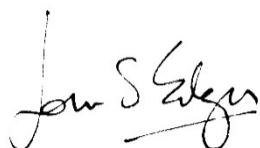
WRPS supports that the NPS-IB has a specific focus on ensuring that NZ’s indigenous biodiversity is resilient to the impacts of climate change.

Conclusion

WRPS welcomes the discussion document on a proposed NPS-IB. It seeks to address the current crisis our indigenous biodiversity is facing, by providing national direction on how to maintain indigenous biodiversity under the RMA and supports the overall aim to resolve uncertainty and under-valuing of indigenous biodiversity under the RMA.

We strongly support the precautionary principles and emphasis on restoration and enhancement, however would like to see this extended to include pathogenic threats such as kauri dieback and myrtle rust.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John S. Edgar". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

John Edgar ONZM
President
Waitakere Ranges Protection Society