

Waikato Regional Council

IN THE MATTER OF Healthy Rivers Wai Ora Plan
Change 1 and Variation 1A

STATEMENT OF Richard (Rory) Ronald Sherlock

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STATEMENT OF Richard (Rory) Ronald Sherlock

Scope of Statement

1. This statement:
 - a. Introduces our farming business and the ways we farm to the natural capability of the properties.
 - b. Specific parts of the Plan that I am commenting on
 - c. **Attachments**
 - Ref 1- Farm Map**
 - Ref 2- Conservation 12**
 - Ref 3- Conservation 7**
 - Ref 4- Conservation Kawa**
 - Ref 5- Conservation - new Strip**
 - Ref 6- View 16N - 20S**
 - Ref 7- Pdk 23S**

Introduction

2. I am a director of a farming operation that owns a drystock property of 490ha in SC16 Priority 1 purchased in October 2016. It also owns an original unit of 660ha at Waingaro that is not subject to PC1.
3. My wife and I farmed the Waingaro farm, a hard hill country block until 2014 having purchased it from my parents in 1975.
4. In 2014 it was sold to the next generation and farmed as a company by our two sons and daughter, all in their forties. It is managed by one of the sons.
5. The aim was always to have a strong economic enterprise. This involved establishing strong well managed pastures to provide feed for the stock with minimal seasonal variation, maximum competition for weed species and minimising erosion losses.
6. Strategies to help these aims and dictated by the nature of the country were to run a higher ratio of sheep to cattle and achieve higher rates of subdivision than would be typical on this type of country (84 paddocks for 585 effective ha) *see 1- Farm Map*.
7. Pastures are rotationally grazed for the greater part of the year. Since 1980 there was only 1 year (2008 75%) when full maintenance fertiliser was not applied to the grazed area.
8. The heart of the farm is the approx. 80 ha of predominantly Mairoa Ash of which 50% is cultivatable (*see 1-Farm Map area within red line – smaller paddocks*).
9. The balance of the farm is steep with predominantly greywacke based sedimentary soils. A valuable characteristic of these areas has been the permanent steams in most gullies.
10. Losses of soil, and nutrients, including major and minor elements and ‘bugs’, are a loss of natural capital and elements that will likely need replacing at considerable cost and effort.
11. A problem is the potential for extensive slumping erosion where the small areas of valuable ash country transitioned to the steeper sedimentary derived soils. Through an agreement with the Waikato Valley Authority (registered against the land titles) we had help with the materials for planting and fencing these areas in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s (*see 2- Conservation 12, 3-Conservation 7*). *Over time this has been extended (See 4- Conservation Kawa, 5- Conservation Strip)*.
12. Five separate areas of native bush have been fenced to exclude stock totalling 46ha.
13. It should be noted that the implementation by the Waikato Regional Council of comprehensive possum control scheme for the West Waikato has markedly improved the health of our bush and the conservation plantings.
14. Some of our streams flowing into the Waingaro Stream are filtered by wetlands such as seen in *6- View 16N – 20W*. Others exit the property through steep sided gullies without this opportunity.
15. For most of the streams on the property there are few points in any paddock where the stock of any class access or cross them, so for most of their length stock can’t or won’t enter them.
16. Cattle are a valuable tool on this country helping to maintain strong nutritious pastures. With their large stomachs, older cattle particularly, can handle poor quality surplus pasture in the summer much better than sheep. Care is needed to ensure they don’t cause erosion and the ingress of weeds such as gorse. The need for them

has been reduced by more intensive subdivision and matching seasonal feed demand better with livestock sales and purchases.

17. Paddock subdivision with fencing is a well proven strategy for increasing pasture utilization and controlling weeds and thus profitability. However, building and maintaining fences on steep hill country is difficult and expensive so that the point where the extra return doesn't cover the cost (*see 7- Pdk 23S*). Electric fencing has been invaluable.
18. In the 73 year this family has owned the farm its productivity has improved and its soils are more fertile and its pastures are more seasonal resilient. Significant land bush areas have been protected.
19. Over the years this farm, largely because of its size, has been a economic unit and with Sue working off farm as a teacher and some off farm investment, has enabled us to raise our family and provide for our future but typically there have seldom been large annual cash surpluses.
20. The new ownership decided to purchase additional property to make better use of the management overhead, to spread compliance costs and to increase the area of croplable land to give the enterprise more summer flexibility.
21. In October 2016 the 490 ha, SC16 farm was purchased. This is generally a better unit with more easier contour land with good andesitic ash soils. However in recent years it has been farmed below its potential. An earlier owner has created a QEII Trust of one native bush area and fenced off 2 additional bush areas. Various gully bottom areas have been fenced off creating lakes and wetlands which provide a 'filter' for the run-off from the surrounding land.

Specific parts of the Plan that I am commenting on

Nitrogen Reference Point

Stock Exclusion

22. For much hill country and steep hill country this is a very blunt instrument where the objective is to reduce N, P, sediment and bugs and most unlikely to achieve a result commensurate with the costs. *(see para 15 and 17 above)*
23. The focus needs to be which of these 'contaminants' are being lost from the property and how best to prevent or contain them. Detail of what constitutes an excludable water body and what is 15 or 25 degree sloping land together with exemptions for animals crossing waterways for ridden or led horses or feral animals may have some relevance but are in danger of taking our focus from the true goals.
24. A well planned and executed FEP has a much greater chance of reducing the offending contaminants and enhancing a profitable farming enterprise. It has a much fuller tool kit available which well may include fencing some parts of waterbodies.

Farm Environmental Plans

25. We support the use of FEPs as a realistic tool to do our bit in achieving the long term objectives for our waterways.
26. We are concerned that the focus is on achieving better management of N, P, sediment and bugs as against implementing prescriptive rules.
27. We are concerned at what the cost setting up the initial FEP will be and what the cost of administering the whole process may mean to the farmer and Regional Council rates.
28. We would support amendments to the rules to allow farmers to make changes/amendments to the FEP with this being subject to audit only in most cases.
29. We look forward to when we can have technology which can continuously monitor these nutrients in a waterway economically at the farm level.

Closing

The implementation of PC 1 will mean a huge change to our farming systems. While I too want to see improvements to our waterways I'm seeing potentially huge costs if the Change is not well handled and I fear for what the effects may be on our local communities and indeed how our rural landscape may look. Waterways are only one part of our farm environment.













