

Good morning commissioners. Thank you for hearing my submission.

My name is John Hill and I farm on the Mangaroa Peat, which has been farmed and drained for over 100 years.

I am here to express the feelings and concerns of our community of over 60 families.

I wish to give examples of how GW has treated us in the past, and why we have little trust in them.

GW have tried to take our communities land, all in private ownership, first as a Wetland, then as a Significant Natural Area and now possibly as a Nature Based Solution.

Al Cross stated, as late as 13 July 2023, peat has no mention in the climate change strategy or action plans. However it seems once again we have been misled, peat has been used in the glossary as an example of a Nature Based Solution.

GW has a history with our community of not following policy. They gave abatement notices to us and our neighbours because they decided our valley was a wetland, SIMPLY because it was peat, completely disregarding the actual definition of a wetland to suit their own agenda.

The resulting court case found no substance to GW claims. The judge stated the case was without merit.

GW alone have wasted over a million dollars of rates payers money on a case that should never have been pursued. The families have still to this day not received any support or reimbursement for their losses.

Two years of uncertainty under GW terror has not come without severe consequences with broken families, mental health struggles and financial challenges that may not be overcome.

The judge in the court case told the people involved they were entitled to the peaceful enjoyment of their land. This new RPS could be used to defy the courts wishes.

It is clear ideological views within GW are still taking a forefront and common sense is being ignored.

During this time, it was rumoured the court case was part of a broader attempt by GW to flood the Mangaroa Peatland. Ross Connelly, our Upper Hutt regional councillor for GW, met the community and was invited to allay our fears, but doubled down and told us the GW science team was intent on recreating a wetland and even though houses would be flooded, she supported the idea. She then proposed the owners of houses effected would be given compensation. Despite the science, the history and the lives that were being destroyed, GW marched on.

This is only a very small sample of how GW has acted with regard to our community.

Since the court case we have been reassured as a community by regional and local councils that we can continue with normal farming practices and people in the community can use and enjoy their land. We are still nervous as can be seen by the 62 submissions presented.

We have experienced GW making up their own rules as they go along, effectively ruling by fiat. Examples: If the soil was peat, it was a wetland. Pasture in GW definition was only allowed 6 grasses. Drains being labelled as streams.

Policy has been weaponised in the past to try and create an ideological wetland by GW who seem intent on experimenting at others expense, is this another attempt?

What do we want!!!

1. That the 60 families can have confidence that the courts judgment will be upheld, that we will be able to live in the peaceful enjoyment of our land.

2. We would like Nature Based Solutions clearly defined. The policy should be written in a way that it cannot be broadly interpreted and weaponised by the regional council to circumvent independent analysis, court ruling and moral boundaries.

3. We also hope hearing this again will reinforce to GW the urgency to make amends with this community and expedite the payments of compensation to those so badly affected by this debacle. The families and the developer. It is not acceptable to hand off the problem to an insurance company and not own your mistakes. Holding people to ransom after such a damning judgment is still ruining lives.

4. The relief that we seek, for fear of retribution, is for all references to peat land be struck out from the regional policy statement.

I have written this as I believe it to be so and are happy to answer questions on the above, possibly with the help of my colleagues

Thank you for listening.