

## **Plan Change 1**

### **Hearing Stream 3 - Rural land Use**

**Diane Strugnell**

**28 May 2025**

#### **Slide 1**

Thank you for the opportunity to address this Hearing on Rural Land Use as part of Plan Change 1.

I am currently running a beef breeding unit on my 267ha property in Te Awarua-o-Porirua. The farm is within the upper catchment of the Pāuatahanui Stream with some of its main tributaries starting on the farm.

#### **Slide 2**

From 2014 to 2019 I was a member of Te Awarua-o-Porirua Whaitua Committee. Over this time I came to learn more than I ever thought it was possible to learn. This included learning from an amazing range of people – fellow Committee members, Greater Wellington staff, freshwater scientists, consultants and modellers (some of who have been part of these hearings) and from my own community. It also made me think a lot harder about the land and water I have responsibility for and my own farming practices.

#### **Slide 3**

One of the key mandates for the whaitua committee was that all our decisions were by consensus, not majority, so I felt that the recommendations which formed the WIP were truly considered. This included the recommendations associated with rural land use where we very much wanted to see the development of rules and policies that would recognise the challenges while supporting farmers to address the freshwater and land management issues in the whaitua. It was important that these were based on good data, made sense and where it is apparent what actions are required – focusing on the use of carrots rather than sticks.

#### **Slide 4**

As Mr Sharp outlined in Hearing Stream 2, as members of the Whaitua committee, we were chosen for our ability to “reflect the interests of a wider group within the community.” As the only rural person on our Committee I was not only required to represent the rural interests but was also involved in presenting our recommendations to the farmers of Te Awarua-o-Porirua. This is a slide from one of the presentations we made, introducing our farmers to the concept of Farm Environment Plans - a concept that was quite new to many of them.

### **Slide 5**

Not only did we have Committee buy in to the WIP but we also had general agreement from the rural community. The number of farmers in our whaitua is small, known to me and I am known to them! At our final consultation with farmers, we also had representatives from Federated Farmers and Beef & Lamb NZ present because we wanted buy in from all so that the submission process would be collaborative rather than confrontational. Unfortunately, when it re-emerged from Policy, Plan Change 1 bore little relationship to our WIP recommendations. So it has been heartening to see that, following on from the submission process and the Section 42A reports, we are beginning to look at something that aligns more closely with where we started.

### **Slide 6**

When considering our whaitua I think it is important to acknowledge our uniqueness. We are not, and never will be, a Waikato, a Canterbury, a Southland or even a Wairarapa. We operate in a farming environment where our number is few compared to the nearby urban population and we are under close scrutiny from that population. Access to rural services is more difficult and this has also included the access to support from our Regional Council. They have supported farmers in the Wairarapa for decades but those of us here for less than one decade. I think it is important to acknowledge that, as Mr Willis has indicated, land use change is highly unlikely, except maybe towards more urban or lifestyle block development.

### **Slide 7**

With direct reference to Plan Change 1, I particularly want to acknowledge the changes that have been made to the maps and the terminology associated with erosion risk. This photo is of one area on my farm that was mapped as highest erosion risk. As I find whenever I am trying to fence on such parts of the farm, there are reasons why this is steep hill country – the rocks have not worn away and the fact that the rocks are still there indicates that its erodibility is possibly low. Definitely its ability to grow anything is marginal. Whilst this does not mean that there aren't areas that do have erosion potential, especially in my case, surficial erosion, it does mean that putting forward one method for addressing erosion and sediment loss (that of revegetation) has severe limitations if I want to actually see effective change.

### **Slide 8**

On Monday, Mr Peryer spoke about the suite of options for addressing erosion and sediment control. I found it interesting looking at the effectiveness percentages and to then consider these alongside the practicality of implementing them. It has been helpful to go back to our WIP recommendations, looking at the data and then, with the

knowledge of my farm and its streams, identifying possible solutions that are effective and achievable.

#### **Slide 9**

As noted previously, there has not been a long history of land management support in our whaitua. Mr Peryer paid his first visit to my farm in November 2016 and, with his support, I have been working on a voluntary Farm Environment Plan since 2017. With Greater Wellington's farm management knowledge predominantly based on the Wairarapa experiences, it has taken time and a lot of effort on Mr Peryer's part, to adapt some of the solutions and methods to farming "this side of the hill". Pole planting has been a tried and true method in the Wairarapa and some of my pole planting has been effective.

#### **Slide 10**

However the planting done the following year on a different site was less successful. It is in one of the areas considered to have more potential erosion risk and, although more exposed, I had been hopeful.

#### **Slide 11**

However there is no comparison with the pole planting done on the land that is not mapped as having potential erosion risk even though it is providing other benefits.

#### **Slide 12**

Instead, in the catchment area where the poles did not take, I have, with the support of Mr Peryer and the Environmental Restoration team, been exploring other options such as this debris dam. There are now three on this stream, of which this is the largest, acting to slow the water down and thereby reducing stream bank erosion further down.

#### **Slide 13**

My farm is within the Takapū FMU. Hindsight is a wonderful thing and if, when the Whaitua Committee was considering the FMUs, I understood then what I see now, I would have argued strongly for a different configuration.

The Takapū FMU includes all of the Pāuatahanui Stream catchment which is rural and enters the Pāuatahanui arm of the harbour. Also within the Takapū FMU is Duck Creek which originates within Greater Wellington's Belmont Regional Park and enters the Pāuatahanui Inlet through urban Whitby. Another part of the Takapū FMU has Cannons Creek and the Takapū Stream which enter the Onepoto arm of Porirua Harbour through the Kenepuru Stream and Porirua Stream respectively.

The monitoring site for the Takapū FMU is taken as Elmwood on the Pāuatahanui Stream. Likewise the Pouewe FMU monitoring is undertaken at Snodgrass on the

Horokiri Stream but Pouewe also includes Little Waitangi, known as Ration Creek, and the Kakaho Stream.

All of this starts to become problematic when different sets of rules are being applied to different part-FMUs within the Whaitua and it begins to not make sense. I am not suggesting that we don't have issues to be addressed but when it is fairly well accepted locally that Kakaho Stream and Duck Creek contribute significant amounts of sediment into the Inlet to not capture these within the same sets of requirements does not seem right.

#### **Slide 14**

I have listened the evidence of Mr Blyth in this Hearing and read some of the evidence from Hearing Stream 2 related to sediment in Pāuatahanui Inlet and visual clarity in Pāuatahanui Stream.

My understanding from Mr Blyth's evidence and that of other expert witnesses, as well as from the modelling done for the whaitua committee, is that modelling is an inexact science with lots of variables and assumptions – these may be the best assumptions available but they are assumptions nevertheless. I noted that one of the witnesses on Monday, in response to one of your questions, answered that it was “a little bit grey”. It is difficult to accept “a little bit grey” when this has a significant effect on how policies might impact on me. Then it becomes not just an academic exercise, it has real impacts.

#### **Slide 15**

Mr Blyth noted the very small difference in clarity between the Pāuatahanui Stream at Elmswood

#### **Slide 16**

and the Horokiri Stream at Snodgrass. The latter is in Pouewe FMU, the former in Takapū. I also note from the technical evidence of Dr Meladonis and Mr John Oldman in hearing Stream 2 that the rate of sedimentation in the Pāuatahanui Inlet, the receiving environment for both FMUs, is less than had been included in the whaitua modelling when taking natural sedimentation rates into account. I therefore question why the two FMUs should be treated differently.

#### **Slide 17**

I would also like to ask whether Plan Change 1 could just use Schedule 36 for Certified Farm Environment Plans in our whaitua.

To have both Schedule Z and Schedule 36 plus for some an Erosion Risk Treatment Plan is confusing. Listening to the Hearing on Monday, it felt very confusing and the explanations from the expert witnesses did not give clarity. If the requirement is for

farmers to have certified farm plans then I think we should have just one document, Schedule 36, which we can refer to and know what is required of us without needing an interpreter.

#### **Slide 18**

Schedule Z very much has a focus on nutrient risk and sediment as its transport risk. In our whaitua intense farm practices are not used. The topography does not encourage cultivation or cropping, stock density is low and pasture types do not encourage break feeding or supplementary feeding of livestock. We do not have irrigation, effluent storage or effluent disposal practices and there is very little fertiliser application.

#### **Slide 19**

There is going to be a cost associated with having farm environment plans certified and looking at the qualifications of those who are listed by Greater Wellington, there is a definite emphasis and presence from the fertiliser industry which seems totally at odds with farming as it is carried out here.

I know that farmers will want to minimise the cost of having a certified farm environment plan and it appears that this is a “one-off cost”. I had expected that there would be some way of making these “living documents”, reflecting changes over time, refining or redefining the actions required. What stops this becoming an expensive “box-ticking exercise” with no review of outcomes?

#### **Slide 20**

In considering the emphasis of Schedule Z, the requirements of Schedule 36 and of the ERTTP (and not even thinking about what might nationally become required), I strongly believe that if we want to have our farmers taking up Farm Environment Plans then they should be straight forward and easy to understand. There will always be those who choose a different path and that is why the rules do need to be there. I know that the “fall back position” has been talked about, that is, if someone chooses not to have a Farm Environment Plan then they will be required to apply for a resource consent to farm which could be more onerous and costly, but why start from that position? Why not work from the position that we took, as a whaitua committee at the outset, of encouraging positive engagement in processes.

#### **Slide 21**

Finally I would like to stress the importance of Plan Change 1 in ensuring that Greater Wellington continues to provide support to farmers in its region. The financial support, under the different mechanisms outlined by Mr Peryer, does assist and demonstrates the Council’s commitment to assisting farmers to address the environmental issues. But this is truly secondary to the support from the Environmental Restoration Team – the ability to discuss, share knowledge, learn, to talk through the issues and possible

solutions, these do not all have to have dollars behind them and are hard to quantify or measure but I believe are invaluable and what has me “on board” way more than any policies or rules.

**Slide 22**

It is up to us collectively to find the balance between regulatory responsibility, economic livelihood and healthy land and water.

Thank you.