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SUBMISSION ON PROPOSED PLAN CHANGE No.1 - WAIKATO and WAIPA RIVER CATCHMENTS

INTRODUCTION

Sharon and Andrew Welch live at Huka Falls Road Taupo. We have a dairy farm of 361 hectares at Reporoa, trading as Welch Farms Ltd. This farm was converted to dairying from an intensive sheep and beef operation in 2008. There is approximately 26 hectares in trees or retired from grazing. The main dairy platform is about 300 hectares, the balance area being steeper hills and grazed by dry stock, sheep and the dairy cows occasionally. Currently the farm winters approximately 775 dairy cows and 100 sheep. There are four water springs or seepage areas on the farm. Three of these are used to provide domestic and stock water but the springs proper and the overflow seepage areas are fenced off to exclude stock.

Prior to farming at Reporoa Andrew Welch was employed as a Field Officer Farm Valuer for the Department of Lands and Survey in New Plymouth. During this time of employment he undertook further study in Land Use Capability, Land Inventory and Catchment Control. This study was put to practical use in Land Use Capability surveys in East Taranaki. For several years Andrew Welch was a Councillor for the Taupo District. During this period he was closely involved with the development of the policies and strategies for the protection of Lake Taupo. Also he was the Council representative and later a Community member of the Upper Waikato Catchment Liaison Committee for the Regional Council.

POINTS OF OPPOSITION TO THE PROPOSED CHANGE

There appears to be little recognition that the waters of the Upper Waikato have been substantially modified by man-made activity. The creation of hydro dams prevents a free flow of water and consequently sediment cannot drain away as it would naturally occur in a normal river system. The reduced flow rates allow algae to grow which reduces clarity and in some instances can produce toxins. The major towns and industries on the Waikato River discharge untreated stormwater direct into the Waikato River. At times of heavy rainfall untreated sewerage can infiltrate into the stormwater system adding further E. coli contamination. This parameter is the easiest to deal with and should have higher priority compared to nitrogen and phosphorus.

In the Upper Waikato there are many areas of volcanic activity. These areas are adjacent to the river. Arsenic and other minerals such as boron and mercury have freely and naturally entered the waterways. In the 1950's the development of the Wairakei Geothermal field permitted the discharge of geothermal waste direct to the river. This has exacerbated the problem, further contaminated the waters and in some parts on the river not allowed the harvest of edible cress and fish.

In the Central Plateau Upper Waikato areas there are many very productive and profitable Maori owned farming corporations. Multiple ownership of these properties has not been an impediment to their success. Some of the lands have been rightfully returned to Maori under Treaty Processes. However these properties must be treated the same as everyone else and be subject to the same recommendations and changes. Multiple ownership of some land has prevented development or change of land use and the proposed plan change (PC 1) makes provision for this land to be exempt but there are many other lands, for example ordinary freehold, farmed for one reason or another under very conservative extensive systems that would be disadvantaged and not allowed to move to an intensive type of farming enterprise.

There is some confusion on how benchmarks will be established. Reductions in mineral discharges are suggested but these need to be based on a sound and credible scientific basis. It has been well documented that the "Overseer" programme is a work in progress and modifications are suggested regularly. There is a high range of variability. It cannot become a hard and fast rule. As the programme improves there must be an allowance to alter the benchmarks for individual properties. We should not rely on the reduction in nitrogen alone to allow permitted activity status. The other three contaminants: pathogens, phosphorus and sediments get into the water bodies by different means.

There is a lack of science and monitoring at the sub catchment level.

The proposed plan change will affect the prosperity of the regional communities. It is highly likely that jobs and the population in rural areas will decline. Some economists have suggested that job and income losses will cost around half a billion dollars a year. Why cripple local economies so that people can swim the entire length of the Waikato twelve months of the year? Compromises are essential.

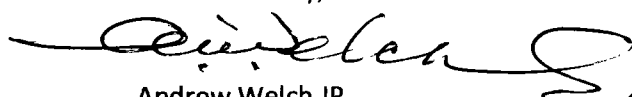
Some of the drains and tributaries in the Lower Waikato have huge populations of koi carp. This species of fish causes massive sedimentation and pollution but strangely the plan change fails to recognise this fact. The Waipa is a muddy river. Should there not be a lower standard below Ngaruawahia.

CONCLUSION

There needs to be scope and flexibility to make adjustments as science advances and knowledge accumulates. We all want cleaner rivers but we must have the right framework and clear measurable targets. People and authorities from urban and rural areas must work together and the costs must fall on all citizens, not just the farmers. The heavy hand of regulation should be avoided as it drives unintended behaviour and a negative culture. Deregulation and clear boundaries are more likely to create an environment for innovation. Limits if they are set appropriately should drive improved farm efficiency and innovation as well as reducing environmental impacts. If regulation is introduced it must be considered at the outset. Systems to monitor, audit and report must have administrative flexibility and sustainability.

I wish to be heard to speak in support of this submission

Yours faithfully,



Andrew Welch JP

6/3/17