

**BEFORE THE HEARINGS COMMISSIONERS FOR THE WAIKATO DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**UNDER** the Resource Management Act 1991

**AND**

**IN THE MATTER** of hearing submissions and further submissions on the Proposed Waikato District Plan

**PARTIES REPRESENTED** **MIDDLEMISS FARM HOLDINGS LTD**

**BUCKLAND LANDOWNERS GROUP**

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**RURAL TOPIC – HEARING 18**

**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE FROM MYLES DESBOROUGH GOODWIN FOR  
MIDDLEMISS FARM HOLDINGS LIMITED**

*8 Sept 2020*

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## **MAY IT PLEASE THE PANEL**

### **1. Summary**

1.1 This evidence supports the submissions by Middlemass Farm Holdings Ltd and the Buckland Landowners Group. It outlines what has been, and is being, achieved in the way of creating landscape scale ecological corridors as a result of the application of the Auckland Council natural area protection rules.

1.2 It finds that the Auckland Plan rules, and previous Rodney Legacy Plan rules, have been instrumental in creating opportunities for large scale ecological protection and restoration that have resulted in significant environmental benefits.

### **2. Introduction**

#### 2.1 Qualifications and Experience

2.1.1 My Name is Myles Desborough Goodwin and I am a Director of Cato Bolam Consultants Ltd. I have a BSc in Environmental Management and a MSC in native plant ecology.

2.1.2 I have worked with Cato Bolam for the last twenty years, specialising in rural planning and terrestrial ecology. The bulk of my work has been in the Rodney Area, but also in South Auckland and Northland. My role involves visiting rural landowners and advising them of their subdivision options, which often relate to the protection of areas of bush and wetland, the planting of bush areas or the restoration of wetlands. I also grew up on a farm in Northland and have wide farming experience. I currently own a small farm in the Makarau Valley and have undertaken bush planting, bush protection and wetland restoration projects myself. I therefore have wide experience in the application of the Auckland Council District Plan (Rodney Section) and the Auckland Unitary Plan rural subdivision rules.

### **3. Code of Conduct**

3.1 I confirm that I have read the Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses contained in the Environment Court Practice Noted 2011 and I agree to comply with this. I confirm that I have considered all the material facts that I am aware of that may alter or detract from the opinions

that I express, and that this evidence is within my area of expertise, except where I state that I am relying on the evidence of another person.

#### **4. Environmental Benefits Achieved using the Auckland Council District Plan (Rodney Section) and Auckland Unitary Plan Environmental Protection Rules.**

4.1 My evidence relates to how the Auckland Council rules have helped create a network of protected ecological corridors across parts of the Rodney District. The rules under these plans allow for the creation of new titles from protecting larger bush areas (2ha starting point), protecting significant wetlands (starting from a 0.5ha area) and planting native bush, with a starting area of either 5ha or 6ha depending on the Plan being used. The older Plan encourages the restoration of degraded wetlands to a state of significance, so they can then be used to support a subdivision application. This has resulted in very significant improvements to water quality in many rural areas as the large wetlands created have significant benefits in regard to water quality, flood control and wildlife habitat.

4.2 Over time, I have found that the application of the rules means that Individual covenants created on properties can link together, creating protected corridors. Examples of where these are occurring are appended. The plans in **Appendix A** show existing covenants (pink) and uncovenanted area identified as Significant Ecological Area (SEA) as green. There are also many good quality areas, or easily restorable areas not shown as SEA that can add to the networks.

4.3 The maps in **Appendix B** (South Kaipara Head) and **Appendix C** (Rodney Central), show many covenants that have occurred on separate properties in separate ownerships linking up. While there is not (yet) an unbroken east/west corridor, networks of linked covenants are creating robust stepping stones for the movement of wildlife from central to coastal areas, or from the coast to central areas. It is expected that these will become more and more robust as time passes, with there being an ongoing increase in direct linkages. These linkages and steppingstones create wider ecological benefits that are greater than the sum of the parts, as each area exchanges flora and fauna, and grows more resilient to environmental stress as the contiguous area grows larger.

4.4 These environmental results have not relied on any specific Council goal to create protected corridors but are the natural result of the application of the rules. Wetland and bush systems often span property boundaries due to, for example, wetlands occurring down a gully that

passes through several properties, so the restoration and protection of the wetland creates a continuous ecological area that spans several properties. The same can occur with bush as remnant bush is often left on steep slopes, which again can span several properties. Steep slopes are also ideal places for planting, especially where the planting links to other bush areas. Therefore, it is common for planting to be placed on steep slopes where it links to other bush areas, or connects separated bush areas, thus extending corridors.

4.5 The rules related to creating titles from environmental protection have been in place for around 25 years in the Rodney District, so the process is still gaining momentum. The uptake of the use of the provisions has also been relatively modest, as was noted by the Court in the *Cabra* Hearings, but notwithstanding that, the method was found to be an important restoration opportunity. There has not been a “floodgate” of applications in the Rodney area over the past 20 years.

4.6 Over time I would expect to see many more corridors created and extended, with the corridors merging into each other. These will create east/west linkages and north/south linkages and networks across the region. This will have large benefits for the movement of wildlife, and hence the movements of seeds throughout the areas. This results in greatly increased resilience as an uncommon plant or animal can spread. Therefore, a fire, or other disturbance in one area that makes a local population extinct, does not actually make the species go extinct as the species has been able to spread. It can then move back and repopulate the disturbed area once regeneration occurs to recreate lost habitat.

4.7 The protection of these areas has very little adverse effect on rural productivity. In regard to wetlands, most are already areas of low agricultural productivity due to their wetness, and the consequent damage done by stock. It is not environmentally appropriate to graze areas such as this in any event. Regarding bush planting, most planted areas are steeper slopes, also of lower value for production. Most rural landowners do not want to plant their productive land. The Auckland Unitary Plan also directs planting away from prime or elite soils.

## **5.0 Conclusion**

5.1 To conclude my view is that the Auckland Plan rules have created a framework that has provided the opportunity for widespread environmental protection and enhancement that has, and is, resulting in connected ecological areas extending across the landscape. This has had many environmental advantages regarding ecological resilience, species distribution, wildlife habitat, water quality and land stabilisation. These gains would not have happened without the enabling rules in the Auckland Plans.

Myles Goodwin

Cato Bolam