

# Fight to protect Hamilton's rare bats heads to Environment Court

8:41 am on 31 August 2020

Share this

- [Share on Twitter](#)
- [Share on Facebook](#)
- [Share via email](#)
- [Share on Reddit](#)
- [Share on Linked In](#)

Riley Kennedy

[riley.kennedy@rnz.co.nz](mailto:riley.kennedy@rnz.co.nz)

Environmentalists worried a population of bats could be pushed to extinction by a housing development are taking their fight to court.



The long-tailed bat (pekapeka) Photo: Colin O'Donnell / Forest and Bird

There are about 60 critically endangered long-tailed bats - pekapeka - living along the Waikato River.

The proposed new subdivision of Amberfield on the south side of Hamilton will house more than 2000 people but there is concern the new residents could push out the pekapeka already there.

The Department of Conservation, Forest and Bird, and local group Riverlea Environment Society are taking the matter to the Environment Court today to challenge Hamilton City Council's consents.

The pekapeka - one of New Zealand's only native land mammals - are dark brown and weigh between 8 and 14 grams with a wingspan of 25cm.

Andrea Graves from Riverlea Environment Society said there were only two species of bat in New Zealand.

"It is very rare to have them in a city," she said.

"The bats are asleep in big trees during the day and are active at night."

William Jennings, the lawyer acting on behalf of Forest and Bird, said the aim of the court hearing was to get the best outcome for the pekapeka.

"We are pushing to make sure the area can still provide for the bats after houses are built," he said.



Waikato River Photo: Unsplash / Callum Hill

The bats can be found in Hammond Park which lies along side the Waikato river - directly opposite the new development.

All parties in the case agree the bats fly between the park to Amberfield but there is debate over whether their habitat will be protected.

Graves said the society wanted the subdivision's design to protect the bats.

"That will mean the bats can keep using their land after houses and roads spring up," she said.

"They will be able to use it as a flyway from Hammond Park to get to the gullies in the west, that they need to get to to forage."

She said the bats, which are currently hibernating for the winter, may not have anywhere to go when they wake up.

She said they were one of Hamilton's best kept secrets.

"A lot of people have tried to get the word out but there are still lots of people in Hamilton that don't know they are around."

Hamilton City Council and DOC both declined RNZ's request for comment saying the matter was now before the court.

The hearing is set to take five days.