

**BEFORE AN INDEPENDENT HEARINGS PANEL
THE PROPOSED WAIKATO DISTRICT PLAN (STAGE 1)**

UNDER the Resource Management Act 1991 (the Act)

IN THE MATTER OF Hearing 21A: Natural Environments – Indigenous Vegetation
Habitats (Proposed Waikato District Plan)
submissions and further submissions

**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE FOR MICHAEL WOOD FOR WAKA
KOTAHI (THE NZ TRANSPORT AGENCY) – PLANNING AND
CORPORATE**

DATED 22 OCTOBER 2020

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Waka Kotahi (the Transport Agency) is a submitter and further submitter on the Proposed Waikato District Plan (PWDP).
- 1.2 The Transport Agency lodged several submission points (742.185, 742.5, 742.6, 742.7, 742.8, 742.189, FS1202.42) in relation to the Significant Natural Areas (SNA) topic. I have reviewed the s42A reports and largely support the author's recommendations in relation to the Transport Agency's submission points.
- 1.3 My evidence focusses on the mapping of the SNAs located on Waka Kotahi's designations and the recommended addition made to Policy 3.2.6 (Providing for vegetation clearance). I support the reporting officer's recommendations on these matters.
- 1.4 I confirm that I am familiar with the Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses as set out in the Environment Court Practice Note 2014. I have read and agree to comply with the Code. Except where I state that I am relying upon the specified evidence or advice of another person, my evidence is within my area of expertise. I have not omitted to consider material facts known to me that might alter or detract from the opinions I express.

2. QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

- 2.1 My full name is Michael Blain Wood. I am a Principal Planning Advisor with the Transport Agency where I have been employed since June 2014.
- 2.2 I hold a Masters' in Resource and Environmental Planning (MRP) from Massey University in 2001. I am a full member of the New Zealand Planning Institute. I have 17 years' planning experience both within the public and private sector.
- 2.3 My key responsibilities at the Transport Agency, include working with local councils on district plan reviews and plan changes, assessing land use development applications and contributing to business cases for capital works.
- 2.4 I am also involved in the delivery of the Transport Agency's capital works programme through the statutory consenting process. This involves stakeholder engagement and reviewing notices of requirement and resource consents prepared on behalf of the Transport Agency.
- 2.5 I have authority to give evidence on behalf of the Transport Agency.

3. SECTION 42A REPORTS: HEARING 21A: NATURAL ENVIRONMENTS – INDIGENOUS VEGETATION AND HABITATS

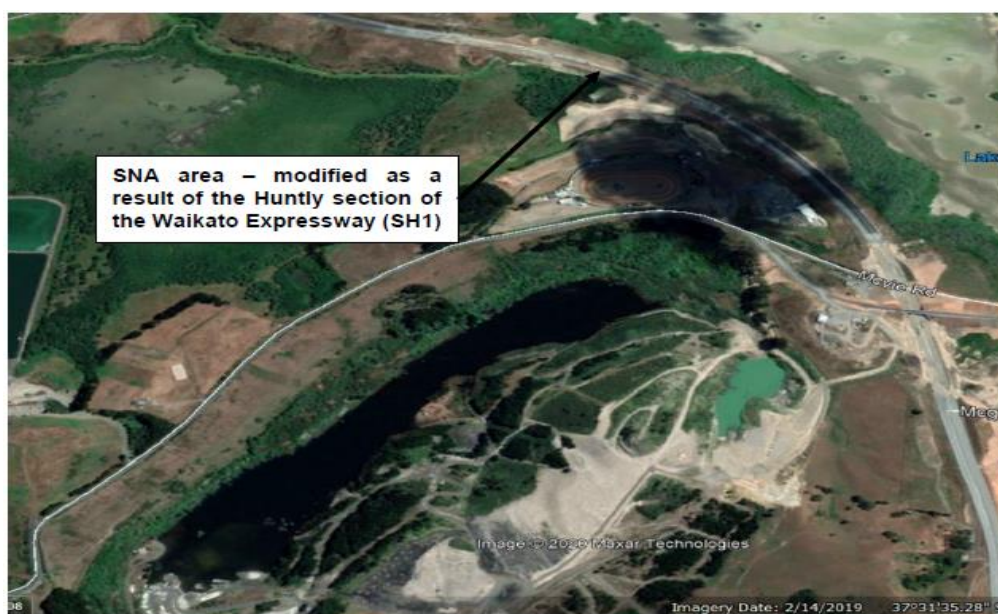
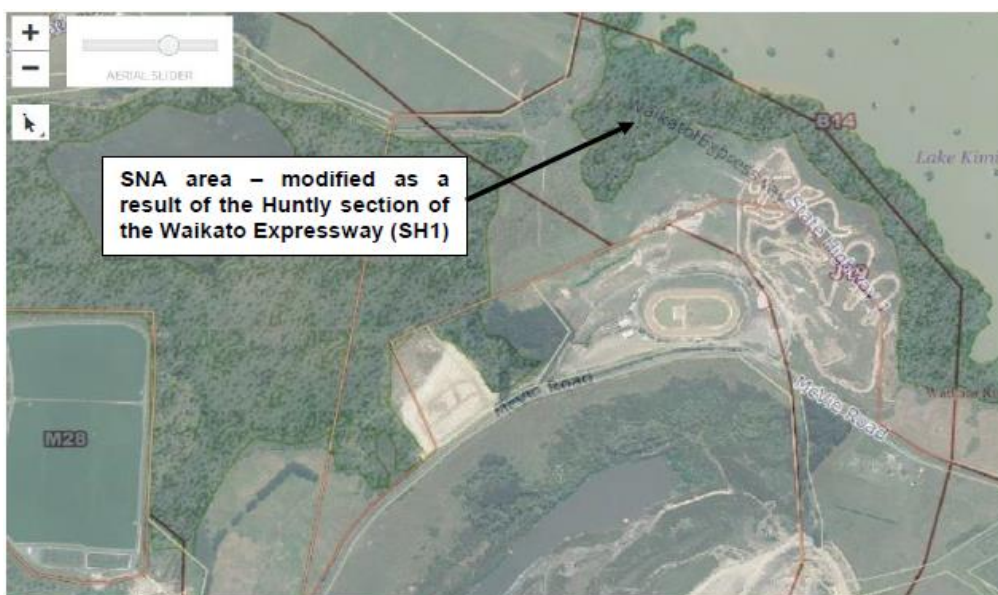
Section 42A report: Part 3 - Mapping

- 3.1 Waka Kotahi lodged submission 742.185 which sought to delete those SNAs mapped on existing NZTA designations. The s42A report writer accepts this point in part, to the extent that the SNAs will only be mapped on NZTA's designations once ground truthed.
- 3.2 I have reconsidered the Waka Kotahi submission and advise that we do not seek the total removal of SNAs from our designations. I am generally supportive of the use of SNAs as a tool to protect ecological areas if these:
- i. do not unduly impact on the day to day maintenance, minor upgrades (in particularly safety improvements) of the state highway network; and
 - ii. have been mapped on the basis that they have been assessed and ground truthed by a suitably qualified ecologist.
- 3.3 In the Waikato District, there are approximately 25 SNAs located in Waka Kotahi designations. From my desk top review of these SNAs, these appear to be located a sufficient distance from the carriageway (including pull over areas) to not materially impact on the matters outlined in 3.2 (i).
- 3.4 However, in relation to 3.2 (ii) it is my understanding that these 25 SNAs have not been ground truthed. On that basis, I support the recommendation of the reporting officer to remove these mapped SNAs until such time that a future plan change(s) is undertaken to assess whether these SNAs (and others) exhibit the criteria needed to support their inclusion and mapping in the District Plan (see Option 5 – paragraph 71, Part 1-Objectives and Policies).
- 3.5 I understand that Option 5 would also involve relying on the criteria set out in Appendix 2 of the PWDP as a protection measure for these areas until such time that a plan change has been undertaken. It would be helpful if Council could identify what specific criteria from Appendix 2 each of the 25 SNAs exhibits because it is not clear from the PWDP or the s42 report. This is an approach that I am familiar with having been involved (on behalf of Waka Kotahi) with the Significant Ecological Area (SEA) topic under the Auckland Unitary Plan (see Schedule 3, Table: Terrestrial Schedule – Operative Auckland Unitary Plan). I would also note for the Panels information, that under the SEA topic extensive site visits were undertaken by Council staff (along with utilising existing data) to identify ecological areas before they were finalised as maps within the Operative Unitary Plan.

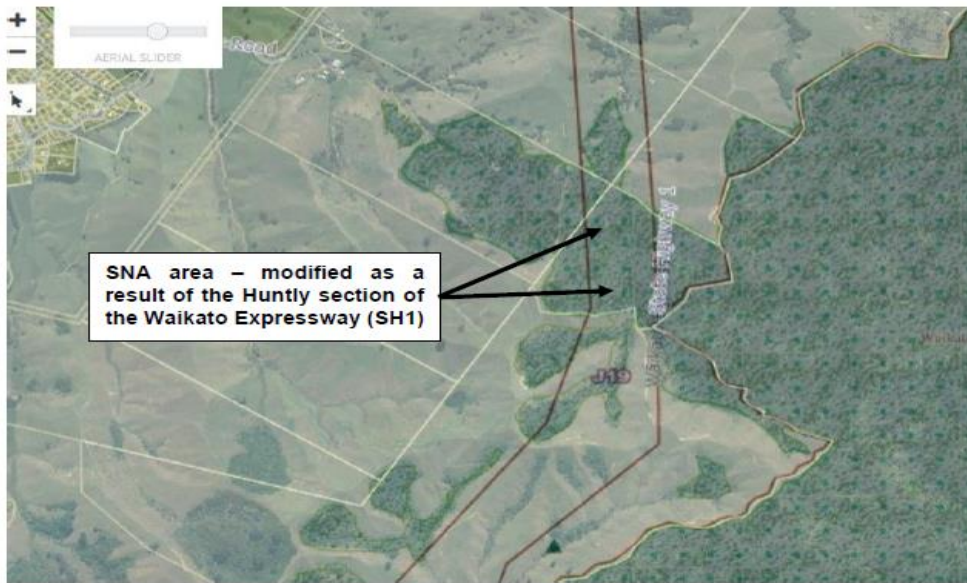
3.6 Through my review of the PWDP SNAs, I have identified several proposed SNAs on the new Huntly section of SH1 that have since been modified as a result of this project (note: the Operative Plan did not use SNAs as a tool). I have taken a snapshot of the locations which I believe need to be reassessed as part of any future SNA plan change(s) to the District Plan.

Proposed Waikato District Plan: Huntly section of Waikato Expressway (SH1) – Significant Natural Areas

Significant Natural Area 1



Significant Natural Area 2

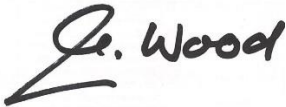


4.0 Policy 3.2.6 – Providing for vegetation clearance

4.1 Waka Kotahi lodged submission 742.8 seeking to amend Policy 3.2.6 by adding two additional clauses as follows –

- (v) operating maintaining or upgrading existing infrastructure; and
- (vi) the construction and operation of new regionally significant infrastructure where there is a need for that infrastructure to be located within the Significant Natural Area.

4.2 The reporting officer accepts this submission in part; clause (v) has been accepted and clause (vi) has been rejected. I support this recommendation; the ability to operate, maintain or upgrade existing infrastructure in SNA areas (clause v) provides the necessary operational flexibility Waka Kotahi requires to operate the state highway network. In relation to clause (v), I accept the reasoning provided under paragraph 251 (Natural Environments I – Indigenous Vegetation and Habitats) noting that the PWDP ultimately does not preclude the ability for network utility providers like Waka Kotahi to make an application for new works in SNA areas.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Wood". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Mike Wood

Principal Planner

Waka Kotahi (The Transport Agency)

28th October 2020