

# **Hutt City Council Proposed Private District Plan Change 33: Winstones Quarry Extension**

## **JOINT STATEMENT OF ECOLOGY EXPERTS 8 May 2014**

### Introduction

At the request of the Chair of the Hearing Panel for the Proposed Private Plan Change 33, ecologists representing Winstone Aggregates, Greater Wellington Regional Council and Hutt City Council held a conferencing session at the Hutt City Council offices on High St Lower Hutt on 8 May 2014.

The purpose of the conferencing session was to discuss the nature and extent of the potential effects of the proposed Winstone Belmont quarry extension on the ecological values of the site and the surrounding area.

Those in attendance were:

- Adam Forbes, Forbes Ecology, representing Winstone Aggregates;
- Paul Blaschke, Blaschke and Rutherford Environment and Ecology Consultants, representing Greater Wellington Regional Council;
- Simon Beale, MWH, representing Winstone Aggregates;
- Roger MacGibbon, Opus International Consultants, representing Hutt City Council;
- Allison Tindale, Policy Analyst, Hutt City Council (Secretary support/minute taker)

### Scope of the Meeting

The following matters were discussed:

1. The ecological values present in the proposed quarry extension area and on the remainder of the Firth Block (including the existing northern Special Amenity Area (SAA), the area of the proposed extension to that SAA, the eastern section of the southern SAA that will remain intact following the extension of the quarry, and the strip of land that will remain between the quarry edge and the extended northern SAA).
2. The significance of the ecological values in both the quarry extension area and the northern SAA extension area, using the GWRC Policy 23 biodiversity significance criteria.
3. The potential effects of the quarry extension on the ecology of the Firth Block and the surrounding environment.
4. The two mitigation components offered as at 8 May – that is, progressive rehabilitation of the quarry site during quarrying and legal enlargement of the northern amenity area. Note that the contents of the quarry rehabilitation plan were not discussed.

We were advised by Simon Beale that the two mitigation components tabled could be part of a larger mitigation package, however, the details of any additional mitigation were not available for our consideration at the conferencing session. Because we were not aware of possible additional mitigation our ability to adjudicate areas of agreement and disagreement were limited.

The principal written information considered was the “Belmont Quarry Extension: Terrestrial Ecology Assessment” as prepared by Adam Forbes of Forbes Ecology.

Discussion point 1: Ecological Values

- **The ecologists agreed that the methodology used by Adam Forbes was appropriate for each of the vegetation, avian and herpetological field surveys, and that the data collected and presented in his report was comprehensive and relevant. All were happy to accept the data presented.**

Arising from comments in paragraph 26 and footnote 12 of the GWRC submission there was some discussion as to whether the bird data (figure 2, pages 13 and 14) presented in the ecology assessment showed differences between the quarry extension block and the remaining Firth Block area that might be significant. The ecologists agreed that it was unlikely that the differences would be significant and left it to Mr Forbes to decide as to whether he undertook a test of significance.

The accuracy of the vegetation zone land areas shown in Table 1 (page 5) of the ecology assessment were questioned. After discussion with Adam Forbes, all agreed that the data presented in the table was sufficiently robust to be used with confidence.

Mr Forbes raised participants’ attention to an error in the ecology assessment report. Table 1 states that there are 6.93 ha of land area within the proposed quarry extension area whereas 6.39 ha is stated on page 33 (in 5.1 and 5.2) and page 34 (5.5). 6.93 ha is the correct figure.

- **The Ecologists agreed with the statement in the Eco Gecko herpetological report that Wellington green gecko were very likely to be present in the quarry extension block even though they were not detected during the surveys.**

Paul Blaschke questioned the absence of reference to any aquatic or riparian areas within the quarry extension area. Adam Forbes showed photos of and verbally described the channels that probably carried runoff following rain events but suggested that at most these were ephemeral flow channels only. Water draining from the quarry extension site appears to drain onto an area of curb and channel at the edge of the Firth Yard from where it is carried by stormwater culvert to the Hutt River. Adam Forbes queried whether this matter was to be dealt with by a separate (resource consent) process, however, both Roger MacGibbon and Paul Blaschke considered this drainage feature to be part of the site’s ecology and therefore is relevant to the current plan change process. Adam Forbes agreed to look into the nature and location of the drainage network that carried water away from the base of the quarry extension block to enable a more complete picture of the aquatic and riparian habitat to be gained. |

- **Paul Blaschke reserved his view about whether there was aquatic and/or riparian habitat that might be affected until more information was made available. In particular he was concerned about any invertebrate populations that might be associated with seeps or ephemeral waterways.**

### Discussion point 2: the significance of the ecological values

The use of the GWRC Policy 23 criteria for biodiversity significance, as used by Adam Forbes, were considered appropriate.

- **Of the 4 measures, all ecologists agreed that the quarry extension block and the remaining Firth block were significant for Representativeness, Rarity and Ecological Context.**

Roger MacGibbon stated that while both areas were significant for Rarity, the quarry extension area rated higher for the rarity of indigenous plant species than the proposed extension to the northern SAA. Paul Blaschke agreed with this statement. Adam Forbes raised concern over the subjectivity of the GWRC Policy 23 Diversity criterion.

- **Agreement was not reached about whether each block rated as significant for the Diversity criterion. Adam Forbes rated both as not significant for diversity, while Paul Blaschke believed they were significant. Roger MacGibbon felt that both flora and fauna were less diverse than previous more natural states.**

While there was not agreement on this issue, the ecologists all agreed that the diversity in the quarry extension area was higher than areas surrounding it. The determination of whether an area has significant diversity or not was considered to be somewhat subjective and dependant on what the original temporal reference point was (eg. pre-European, pre-Maori or some other time).

### Discussion point 3: Potential ecological effects of quarry extension.

- **The potential ecological effects of the quarry extension as stated in the ecology assessment report were agreed to by all of the ecologists.**
- **In addition to those identified in the report, the ecologists all agreed that there were three additional effects:**
  1. **Increased edge effects especially to the remnant area of the southern SAA and the strip between the quarry area and the northern SAA.**
  2. **The combination of edge effect and reduced connectedness of the remaining area of the southern SAA with the bush areas to the north will lessen the ecological value of the small remaining area of the southern SAA.**
  3. **Quarry operations (especially dust and noise) will potentially have an effect on the bush areas adjacent to the north-eastern edge of the new quarry area for the duration of the quarrying activity.**

### Discussion point 4: Mitigation

Because the rehabilitation plan for the quarry site and the proposed extension of the northern SAA are likely to be only part of the full mitigation package it was not possible for the ecologists to draw any conclusions or reach any consensus about the appropriateness of the mitigation proposed. Furthermore, none of the ecologists present

had evaluated the quarry rehabilitation plan in sufficient detail so it was not possible to critique that aspect of the proposed mitigation.

However, the proposed extension of the northern SAA as part of the mitigation package was discussed.

Simon Beale reaffirmed that the mitigation proposed for the Firth Block under PC 33 is regarded as partial mitigation in terms of addressing the effects of the quarry extension.

- **All of the ecologists agreed that increased legal protection for the indigenous vegetation remaining in the Firth Block was of value.**
- **However, Roger MacGibbon felt that increased legal protection alone would not greatly improve the state of the ecology in this area in the short to medium term and would not, on its own, be sufficient mitigation for the quarry extension.**
- **Paul Blaschke agreed with this statement but stated that he regarded legal protection as an important component of any mitigation package.**
- **Both Paul Blaschke and Roger MacGibbon believed that the ecological values in the quarry extension area were higher than those in the proposed northern SAA extension and for that reason would require more mitigation than was currently being proposed.**
- **Despite the lack of a complete mitigation programme to evaluate, the ecologists agreed that the following elements should, ideally, be included in any mitigation package developed for the quarry extension:**
  - **Quarry rehabilitation;**
  - **Legal protection of the proposed extended northern SAA;**
  - **Restorative planting;**
  - **Targeted pest (animal and plant) management;**
  - **Establishment of buffers to lessen edge effects;**
  - **Mitigation/restoration designed to improve connectivity.**

Signed



Roger MacGibbon

On behalf of and as approved by Paul Blaschke, Simon Beale and Adam Forbes