

# Water Conservation Order: Te Waikoropupū Springs and Associated Waterbodies

Submission Reference no: 1446

n/a (Steve Penny)

Submitter Type: Individual

Source: Web Form

## Overall Notes:

### Clause

The specific parts of the application that my/our submission relates to are:

### Notes

All

### Clause

What is/are your view/s on the application?

### Position

Support

### Notes

Te Waikoropupū Springs ("the springs") is a treasure of international significance, and is sacred to Maori. With around 100,000 visitors a year, the springs contribute to NZ's attractiveness as a tourist destination thereby bringing significant benefits to the national and local economy. It is difficult to countenance how the interests of private profiteers (such as gold miners, water bottlers and intensive farmers) should be given any consideration over the clear public interest in restoring and maintaining the highest possible standard of water quality at the springs. Sadly, such interests have already been pandered to by the Tasman District Council (TDC) and in so doing they have undermined the very purpose and principles of the Resource Management Act (RMA). They clearly cannot be trusted to uphold the public interest, and I believe they have not only over-allocated resource consents for water abstraction, but have concealed the full quantity of these allocations and misled the public with regard to the true extent of the springs catchment area. The ignorant and short-sighted actions of the "white gold rush" have led to irreparable damage to NZ's clean and green image (at potentially disastrous cost to the economy) and has destroyed the health of soils, waterways and groundwater systems throughout the nation. The only way it seems to prevent this madness and irresponsibility and begin to reverse the damage done is to tie the hands of private interests and irresponsible government bodies by ensuring this Water Conservation Order (WCO) stipulates the very highest possible level of protection for the springs, thereby setting the strongest example and precedent to the rest of the nation. Te Waikoropupū is surely the outstanding jewel in the nation's crown and the standard by which all waterways should be measured. The spring waters are purified by unique and irreplaceable organisms dwelling in the Arthur Marble Aquifer (AMA). Levels of nitrate-N measured at the springs after cleansing by the organisms already significantly exceed the maximum limit specified by NIWA of 0.4g/m<sup>3</sup> for the assurance of their safety, and Gina Wilson of Golden Bay has reported measurements as high as 0.86 in a deep bore (117m) beneath Hamama. Recent measurements commissioned by the Friends of Golden Bay show levels of nitrate-N issuing at the springs from the deep system of the AMA at 0.45g/m<sup>3</sup>, an increase of 1/8th over the previous year. Water takes around ten years to flow through the deep system, so these figures represent the consequences of nitrate pollution from intensive dairy farming during the period 2006/7, the outset of the dairy boom. We can reasonably anticipate significant year-on-year increases as the results of this dairy boom become visible, with a potential doubling of nitrate-N pollution within six years at current rates of increase. It is therefore paramount that the effects of this WCO act to facilitate the recovery of the aquifer organisms as quickly and strongly as possible, assuming this is even possible and that they will not already have been driven to extinction before its protection can take effect. The draft WCO specifies a target level for nitrate-N pollution of 0.4g/m<sup>3</sup> and a freezing of resource consents for water abstraction at current levels. This level of protection is woefully inadequate. Variance around this target nitrate-N level will mean that the safe limit for the aquifer organisms will be exceeded some of the time, causing them distress at a time when they may be trying to make a vital recovery. Current levels of water abstraction are plainly enabling intensive dairy farming to cause nitrate-N levels to exceed safe levels, and it needs to be borne in mind that TDC may approve massively increased resource consents (over 70%) before the WCO takes effect, as recommended by the draft report of their Takaka FLAG. The level of protection proposed by the draft WCO must therefore be significantly increased if we are to save the aquifer organisms and our priceless springs from potential catastrophe.

### Clause

I/we seek the following recommendation from the Special Tribunal to the Minister for the Environment

### Position

Grant the order with changes

### Notes

The purer the water that issues from the springs the better for spiritual and cultural values, tourism and the wellbeing of our people. The question is what level of water quality should the WCO aim to achieve? In this we should be guided by consideration for the safety of the unique and irreplaceable aquifer organisms that purify the waters. NIWA (the foremost authority) has recommended that nitrate-N levels should not exceed 0.4g/m<sup>3</sup> at the springs lest the aquifer organisms be adversely affected, perhaps even driven to extinction. Due to the physical difficulty of understanding the aquifer ecology fully, we should allow a margin of safety (in accordance with the precautionary principle) aiming for a figure well below 0.4, so that this figure is rarely exceeded. I refer the tribunal to the last slide of the Fenemor report presented to the TDC Takaka Flag on 27/11/15 which is available on TDC's website [ref 1]. This is the most authoritative scientific document of which I am aware which shows the relationship between permitted levels of water abstraction in the AMA recharge zone (RZ) for irrigation and the resultant nitrate-N pollution at the springs. It can be seen from this graph that a total ban on water extraction from the waterways of the AMA RZ (i.e. a return to dryland dairying) would result in expected levels of nitrate-N of 0.35g/m<sup>3</sup>. The FLAG's last known recommendation (in their Summary Report about a year ago) would result in a figure of at least 0.5g/m<sup>3</sup>, and I have not heard of any change in their view since then. It seems to me that this would be a reasonable and easily enforceable target for the tribunal to set, giving the aquifer organisms a reasonable margin of safety from the level at which NIWA state that they will become endangered. It would also have the advantage of removing any uncertainty or dispute over how much water is really being abstracted, and which waters contribute to recharging the aquifer. Direct irrigation pumped from waterways should therefore cease as existing resource consents expire, and be replaced by irrigation from on-farm storage tanks which are only replenished when waterway levels are high, thus ensuring that dissolved oxygen levels for native fish and other organisms are never compromised. Would this increased level of protection be too hard on our farmers? I think not. There is plentiful local rainfall of around 2m per year. Intensive farming by application of unnaturally high levels of water and nitrate-rich fertilisers is a relatively recent development, and farmers were able to make a satisfactory living before then using more natural methods. Since then great advances have been made amongst more enlightened members of the farming community in soil management and farming methods (such as biological farming) that allows comparable productivity to intensive farming and furthermore develops soil health rather than depleting our natural capital. Should we give consideration to the very considerable investments farmers have made in specialist constructions, equipment and machinery associated with intensive farming? Again, I think not. They have taken a calculated business risk in the hope of higher profits, surely knowing that the consequent pollution could give cause for public concern. It should not fall upon the general public to subsidise or cushion the effects of their misadventures, in much the same way that we should not be made to underwrite the reckless lending of private bankers which threatens the collapse of the financial system. Why should we in any way compromise the level of protection of the aquifer organisms and the quality of our sacred springs in consideration for private financial concerns? To reiterate, please set a target level of 0.35g/m<sup>3</sup> for nitrate-N, and ban all water abstraction for the purposes of direct irrigation on farmland within the AMA RZ. [ref1] (<http://www.tasman.govt.nz/environment/water/water-resource-management/water-catchment-management/water-management-partnerships-flags/takaka-fresh-water-and-land-advisory-group/flag-outputs-and-supporting-information/takaka-flag-meeting-agendas-notes-and-presentations/?path=/EDMS/Public/Meetings/FreshwaterLandAdvisoryGroups/TakakaFLAG/2015/2015-11-27>).

**Clause**

Would you like to present your views on this submission to the Special Tribunal at a public hearing?

**Position**

I/we do not want to present my/our views at a public hearing

**Notes**