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Sent: Thursday, 21 November 2019 8:54 a.m.

To: Kirsty Prior <kprior@doc.govt.nz>

Subject: FW: Owairaka information

Hi Kirsty,
Please find below

Comments on Owairaka-Mt. Albert situation

Numerous surveys have been undertaken to assess the impact of exotic tree removal and restoration planting at Owairaka (Mt Albert) on native fauna and flora. These surveys have identified a total of 787 trees (>3m in height) across approximately 10ha, of these 345 are not native and have been identified for removal. Dominant exotic trees include: Eucalypts sp. (n=104), Prunus sp. (n=131) and Banksia sp. (n=26). Native and exotic trees are interspersed throughout the site (Owairaka/Mt Albert Tree Removal Methodology).

We agree that in the long term, removal of exotic species and replacement with native flora will significantly benefit the ecosystems present on Owairaka, however I believe that oversights have been made with regard to the value of vegetation currently present in terms of its provisioning for native species (legally we have no grounds to object against this, but ecologists should be encouraged to look at ecosystems and their landscape values particularly in an urban landscape where vegetation is limited, and when mitigating/minimising the effects of vegetation loss consider the length of time vegetation takes to become mature and provide for ecosystem functioning) and also the short term effects of vegetation removal which is our primary concern.

The original Ecological Assessment conducted by Te Ngahere identified a small number of native bird species (grey warbler, tui, fantail and kingfisher), at that stage no formal survey of herpetofauna was completed. It was discussed that there would be loss of exotic habitat availability until plantings established and disturbance during the bird breeding season. It was recommended that works were limited to outside the bird breeding season which is from August to January.

The consent conditions for the discretionary activity (LUC60328646) – To remove exotic vegetation and undertake restoration planting on Owairaka / Te Ahi-ka-a-Rakataura / Mt Albert (Owairaka) at 27 Summit Drive, Mt Albert; include:

20. All vegetation shall be removed outside the bird breeding season (bird breeding season is September to January inclusive). If vegetation clearance is undertaken within the bird breeding season, woody vegetation must be confirmed clear of nesting native birds by a suitably qualified ecologist, and

confirmation provided to the Council prior to undertaking any works. This should ensure no nesting birds, eggs, or chicks are harmed.

As such a pre-commencement nesting bird survey was conducted by Arborlab across three days for a total of 11 hours. This survey identified three tui nests using Arborlab Owairaka Nesting Bird Survey Methodology (this methodology has not been obtained). They also identified other species present, of these kereru (breeding Sep-Apr), grey warbler (Aug-Feb), fantail (Aug-Mar) and silvereve (Aug-Feb) have the potential to be nesting at Owairaka.

Our main concern is that whilst the resource consent conditions have been followed, they do not suitably minimise potential risks to native bird species that are legally protected under the Wildlife Act 1953 for the following reasons:

- Given the number of trees present on Owairaka (n=787) and the search effort it is highly unlikely that all native bird nests were identified;
- Native and exotic trees are interspersed across Owairaka therefore it is likely that there are exotic trees proposed for removal are in close proximity to the nests that are present (those detected and otherwise), regardless of if they are nesting in native vegetation. Temporary fence around the trees in question is not sufficient to negate disturbance.
- Due to the size of the site, approximately 300m across, there is potential that tree felling methodology which includes: crane assisted dismantling, helicopter assisted dismantling, machine assisted manual felling and manual felling, will disturb native nesting birds.

It is our recommendation that tree removal at Owairaka wait until the cessation of the bird breeding season. Our additional recommendation is to leave Banksia trees intact until the newly planted native trees become well established in the area. Banksia provides an excellent food source for various native birds especially honeyeaters e.g. tui in urban/suburban environment over winter period. This tree species is not invasive and doesn't pose risk in the monitored and controlled situation while providing food and shelter to native bird species as well as connectivity of fragmented elements of the habitat.

An additional concern from the Wildlife Act perspective, separate to the vegetation clearance, is the wording of the herpetofauna condition below:

A survey to confirm the presence of native lizards, **particularly rare 'At Risk' species of skinks**, shall be carried out by a suitably qualified and experienced herpetologist. The lizard survey must:

- a. Target potential lizard habitat identified during the herpetological assessment, including the quarry and rock bomb areas in the craters;

- b. Be carried out at a time of year and during weather conditions that will maximise the chance of locating native lizards, including rare and 'At Risk' species potentially present at the site;

- c. Utilise no-dig, non-pitfall methodologies suitable for deployment in high value archaeological areas with public access

The concern is the emphasis on rare and at risk species as opposed to all native species, whilst

rare species are important for obvious reasons it shouldn't negate from the fact that any native lizards are legally protected. A proper reptile survey utilising standard methodology is recommended for the area in question as well as a long term reptile plan for Owairaka.

Kind regards,

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