

To: Shane Henderson & Linda Cooper, Waitakere Ward Councillors

CC: Saffron Toms & Greg Presland, Chair & Deputy Waitakere Ranges Local Board

From: Waitakere Ranges Combined R&R Group

9 June 2022

Kia ora koutou,

**RE: Request for meeting with respect to Council Consultation Process.**

Following the Auckland Council consultation early this year on the Draft Regional Parks Management Plan, Titirangi Residents and Ratepayers Association surveyed a selection of representatives from voluntary organisations on their experience of making a submission. The submitters who responded included two national environmental bodies, and six submitters from the Residents and Ratepayer Associations in the Waitakere Ranges.

The motivation to conduct this survey arose because individuals and groups are facing serious challenges when attempting to submit effectively on the Council's draft plans and proposals and we decided to take action. We are writing to share with you a brief summary of our findings.

We request that a meeting or forum is organised to include some members of the respondent groups and relevant Council staff, to explore means by which this experience can be improved for future submissions.

In our survey, we asked respondents whether they would be interested in joining such a meeting or forum, and overall, the response was positive.

Overleaf you will find a summary of the survey questions we asked, and the responses received. For our environmental and community organisations, we feel the responses reflect typical experiences. We believe that consideration of the survey findings will help Council staff understand how better to undertake consultations and present information, so that voluntary organisations may in fact '*Have Their Say*' without in many cases having to overcome almost insuperable barriers to do so.

We believe that the insights shared may help to improve this situation, for mutual benefit.

We would like you to contact us about forming a focus group to consider what needs to be done.

Ngā mihi maioha

Dr Mels Barton

Chair Waitakere Ranges Combined R&R Group

Chair Titirangi Residents & Ratepayers Association

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## Survey of Experience of Submitting on Draft Regional Parks Management Plan 2022 (RPMP)

**Period of Survey:** March to May, 2022:

**Surveyed:** National environmental voluntary organisations (two responses); Residents and Ratepayers Groups in Waitakere Ranges Heritage Area (six responses)

### **Survey questions:**

**Which Auckland Council draft plans or proposals have you submitted on in the past year?** A few respondents had only submitted on the RPMP in the past year, but most had submitted on more, and three groups submitted on a large number of plans and proposals.

**In regard to your most recent submission, on the Draft Regional Parks Management Plan, what is your evaluation of the following?** (Five point scale: Strongly Agree; Agree; Neither Agree nor Disagree; Disagree; Strongly Disagree)

- ***The right information was presented – pertinent, not superfluous:*** All respondents except for two either disagreed or strongly disagreed. Only one agreed.
- ***The document size was easy to manage:*** All the respondents strongly disagreed
- ***The PDF format, internal arrangement, links, layout, etc. made the material easy to navigate:*** All respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed except one who gave no opinion.
- ***All the information on a topic could easily be found:*** All respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed.
- ***The use of summaries with support information helped me to quickly understand what was proposed:*** All respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, over 70% strongly disagreeing
- ***New elements or changes to any former versions of the plan/proposal, were clearly highlighted:*** All respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, over 70% strongly disagreed.
- ***The timeframe for submitting was reasonable:*** All respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed except two who expressed no opinion.
- ***The Council website was easy to navigate and use to make my submission:*** The responses were mixed: one agreed, others either disagreed or had no opinion
- ***Any other comments you'd like to make to expand on the above points?*** Many comments were submitted which are briefly summarised below
- ***How could the presentation of the information have been improved to assist you in making a submission?*** Many comments were submitted, briefly summarised below
- ***Would you / your group participate in a forum / meeting with Council staff to discuss these issues and improve the experience of submitting on plans?***  
All respondents said yes, they would be willing to participate.

## Summary of Comments

### **The time frame:**

Many negative comments were made. Timing the consultation during Covid lockdown in the run-up to Christmas made it very hard to submit and voluntary groups not meeting again until February could not easily canvass members. Further, the draft plan was compiled before the The Kauri Science report was available, although this was central to the RPMP.

### **Document size, format, layout, quality of information and ease of use:**

Comments were very negative, with no positive comments. Submitters face multiple, serious issues when trying to analyse drafts, including their enormous size, the lack of effort to be concise or present the information in a logical succinct way, and the lavish use of fancy formatting, scenic photos, large, unhelpful graphics and big sections in Te Reo. The PDF format creates an almost insurmountable barrier to navigating the document on a computer screen.

There was further concern about the lack of access to any meetings or briefings about the plan, and that copies of the plan were not even provided in all libraries. Information relating to the Waitakere Ranges was also seen as poorly researched, resulting in flawed decisions.

### **Material easy to find, summaries provided, changes from previous plans clear:**

Respondents were highly critical of the shortfalls: concerns included the lack of any high quality executive summaries, and that because information on the same topic was very hard to find, and not even linked internally, trying to draw this together was described as a nightmare.

Because the changes proposed to the previous 10-year plan were not set out, this created huge quantities of work for submitters; some respondents felt this signalled a lack of transparency.

### **How could the presentation of the information have been improved to assist you in making a submission?**

Many constructive and insightful suggestions were made, to be shared in full in discussion with Council staff. They included the importance of prior consultation before creating proposals, and many comments on the factors that help and hinder submitters.

The respondents had most to say on the need to improve the formatting and presentation. This has been a severe problem for submitters for a long time, and needs serious attention. Learnings are needed from best practices on how to present information in the most accessible way for readers. There should also be regular feedback invited from submitters on the quality of their experience, for the purpose of continuous improvement.

**We include one overall comment** about the consultation itself, which signals some of the big picture issues causing concern for submitters:

“In general I do think that the council could be MUCH more transparent - REALLY find out what people want - Most people are not opposed to change but when change is dumped on them without well thought out information, good design, quality research, then given very little time to contribute and /or offer alternatives that are looked at and listened to, that’s when you have issues. It’s time to stop running roughshod over the population and be open to discussion and alternatives. In some areas the council

has begun to do this - for the better - how about doing the same for all suburbs and all ethnicities - we are after all, all Aucklanders. We all deserve to be heard.”

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