

IN THE MATTER of the Resource Management Act 1991

AND

IN THE MATTER of **PROPOSED PLAN CHANGE 1** to the Waikato Regional Plan – hearing of **BLOCK 1** topics

AND

IN THE MATTER of the hearing of the Submission & Further Submission by **MATAMATA-PIAKO DISTRICT** in relation to **BLOCK 1** topics

STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF JAMES THOMAS

1. INTRODUCTION

Qualifications and experience

- 1.1 My full name is James Allen Frederick Thomas. I am the Deputy Mayor of the Matamata-Piako District Council. I have been a Councillor and the Deputy Mayor since 2013.
- 1.2 I hold the qualifications of Bachelor of Agriculture (Production and Management) from Massey University 1987, and am a member of the New Zealand Institute of Primary Industry Management (MNZIPIM).
- 1.3 I have been a farm consultant with FarmWise with LIC since 2007. I work mostly one on one with farmers in our district and beyond advising on anything from human resources to farm system analysis and farm supervision. Prior to this, I was working part time in the consultancy field and was an agricultural tutor for Dexcel from 2000 to 2006. I was a Sharemilker on the family farm from 1988 and purchased the property in

1994. This farm is 78 ha in the Kereone district milking 180 cows and being supervised by a contract milker.

My professional, farming and local government experience is of particular relevance to PC1 and being able to comment on what impacts these provisions may have, if they were to be adopted in our district.

1.5 I am authorised to give this evidence on behalf of the District Council.

Council Involvement in Proposed Plan Change 1 (PC1)

1.6 The Matamata-Piako District Council lodged a submission to the Plan Change. This submission No. 73419 expressed support in part to achieving the Vision and Strategy for the Waikato and Waipa Rivers while opposing in other parts given the potential adverse economic and social costs to communities that may result from its implementation.

1.7 The criteria adopted by the council when assessing the merits of the Plan Change are recorded in our submission as being:

- Are the implementation methods capable of achieving the Vision and Strategy?
- Are the implementation methods affordable to the community and particularly, the primary production owners and managers in Matamata-Piako District?
- Are the implementation methods affordable to the community given that the district is rural and its towns support rural activities?
- Are the proposed changes based on proven and robust information and data?

1.8 We subsequently chose to become a member of the Waikato Regional Territorial Authority (WARTA) collective as this Council saw merit in collaborating with other Councils in the region (as well as other like-minded submitters also active in our district) to address these concerns and to seek more practical measures to implement the Vision and Strategy under the Resource Management Act.

1.9 Council also lodged a set of further submissions in 'support' or 'support in part' for submission points of other parties that had a strategically relevant

and important district focus. These included: Ngati Haua; Balle Bros Group; AS Wilcox and Sons; J Swap; and Open Country Dairy.

- 1.10 While only a small portion (less than 1%) of the District is in the Plan Change area as is noted in our submission, the implications of PC1 once operative, will likely have significant adverse effects on us. This is because the district like our neighbours of Waikato and South Waikato is reliant on the primary sector and dairying and dairy processing in particular, and more recently, vegetable production for sustaining the overall wellbeing of our communities and businesses.

Purpose and scope of evidence

- 1.11 The purpose of this evidence is to present a district perspective on PC1. I seek the Panel's acknowledgment that in your deliberations on the methods of implementation, the focus be on the need for practical (farmer-led) and collaborative actions to achieve the Vision for the Waikato and Waipa River catchments. From my experience, adopting a 'one-size-fits-all' approach will fail to recognise farm management that would include different stocking rates, management skills, and the difference that this can make to farm systems. This would also include the differences in soil types and contour. Rules should not be regarded as being the 'solution' by default. Regulation must not be for administrative convenience, and regulation should only be adopted where this can clearly be justified. Therefore, the approach adopted must be seen to be 'fit for purpose'.

- 1.12 My evidence is structured as follows:

- (a) District economy and employment (Section 2);
- (b) Observations on the effects of the Plan Change (Section 3);
- (c) Comments on the Officers' Section 42A report (Section 4) and
- (d) Conclusion (Section 5).

2 DISTRICT ECONOMY & EMPLOYMENT

- 2.1 With some of the best quality soils in the country, with 75% of our soils being Class1-3 and making up over 110,000 hectares, the district supports a strong dairy and dairy processing sector, as well as meat processing

and horticulture. Agriculture and mainly dairying remain the single biggest contributor to economic growth.

- 2.2 Manufacturing is a strongly connected part of our district economy and has experienced the strongest rate of job growth over the past decade contributing close to 30% of the 1,710 jobs created.
- 2.3 The economy has therefore performed well, growing by 2.8% and just above the 2.6% national economic growth rate over recent years. This data is sourced from the Infometrics economic profile prepared for our District on an annual basis.
- 2.4 Horticulture is also recognised as an increasingly important contributor to the district economy, employment and community wellbeing. Some 3,000-4,000 hectares of flat arable lands are now used or proposed for the horticulture – potatoes, onions, carrots, brassicas and arable rotational crops for example.

3. OBSERVATIONS ON THE EFFECTS OF PC1 ON THE DISTRICT

- 3.1 This Plan Change not only proposes rules to regulate farming and dairy farming in our case but also proposes strict controls on horticulture/vegetable growing. In both cases, un-necessary or not fully informed rules and restrictions will lead to uncertain futures for these two sectors and could also result in impacts on the service industries that support these enterprises.
- 3.2 The Council would like to think that this District can play a greater role in contributing to the nation's food production so is naturally very concerned with the approaches that might be taken in the neighbouring Waikato River catchments for dairying and horticulture.
- 3.3 Methods that may include rules need to afford flexibility in the approaches of land managers to carry out their farming or horticulture activities simply because our communities are built on and sustained by the primary sector.
- 3.4 My observation is that the horticulture sector also has unique operational requirements so I seek the Panel to reflect this in your decision making and enable a tailored (relevant and localised) approach to evolve as part of an amended Plan Change for this sector.

- 3.5 I also view a reliance of establishing an NRP derived from use of the Overseer model to promote a rule for farming for properties that support horticulture or dairying is not appropriate.
- 3.6 The Council now observes that the horticulture sector increasingly eyes Matamata-Piako as a new focus for its commercial enterprises probably as a consequence of pressure for urbanisation in Auckland and the 'pressures' coming from this Plan Change on their operations in northern Waikato. There must be scope to allow growth in the area under horticulture production including land in rotation.
- 3.7 I close by saying that I do see merit in moving to a sub-catchment based approach for the reasons I outlined in paragraph 1.11. This approach would recognise and better understand the local 'environment' as the first step to providing locally relevant and practical solutions to promoting sustainable management, being the over-riding purpose of the Act.

4. COMMENT ON THE OFFICER'S REPORT

- 4.1 My submission is high-level and I have not made comment on the specific provisions of PC1. My Council relies on the evidence presented by Mr Kivell in his joint statement of behalf of this Council and the South Waikato District, and the WARTA legal submissions and their expert evidence to address these matters fully.

5 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 I conclude by returning to the question recorded in our submission: Is the Plan Change going too far, too fast, and with too greater cost to communities?

PP 

James Thomas
15 February 2019

