Ka ora te whenua; Ka ora te tangata.

Healthy Environments, Thriving Communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

Go Eco is a voice for the environment, a centre for learning and a catalyst for change. We coordinate and network with community based biodiversity, environmental and sustainability groups and organisations in order to inform our work with local and central governments.

Go Eco strongly supports the work towards implementing plan change 1, to urgently address the poor quality of Waikato's freshwater bodies. We support the vision for the Waikato River to be swimmable and suitable for food gathering along its full length, and we would support targets for all freshwater to be swimmable.

We support the commitment to ongoing reductions in discharge levels over the next 80 years, however we advocate a continuous revision of the levels that matches the urgency we face with regard to predicted ecological crises and destruction of ecosystems as outlined in recent United Nations reports. We support and encourage the commitment to educating and supporting diffuse and point source dischargers to improve their practices, diversify land use, and reduce their negative impacts on water quality.

Go Eco does not represent experts in the areas of work that have formed the large majority of these hearings. We understand that the deliberations around targets and what attributes will be measured are difficult.

Our concern with this process is that it is largely out of reach for a large majority of our community. The majority of people would have no idea that this process even exists or how they might have a voice in it. So today we are here to say on their behalf, please do all that you can to ensure the wellbeing of the river for future generations.

The idea of subcatchment plans is something that we support. We are interested in how one farm environmental plan might relate to another and how farmers will be brought together to share common goals for the health of the river. This work will not be only a matter of science but also social science. It will rely on human relationship. Go Eco works in this space. We are continually working to build community and relationships. It is challenging and dynamic work that draws on the traditions of community psychology and the principles of broad based community organising.

We encourage you not to overlook the importance of work in this space. Last week, at a Waikato Biodiversity Forum focused on urban restoration, Professor Bruce Clarkson noted that the new wave of research coming out of the university is increasingly multidisciplinary, involving scientists and social scientists working in collaboration. In the work of collaboration and collective enterprise, we note the wisdom of our indigenous people, of practices in Māori culture that are designed to bring people together and to create strong relationships.

Farmers are likely to face some expense going forward with the diversification of their land use. We would not like restrictions put in place for land use change that is proactive and positive. Regenerative farming, from our perspective, is the way of the future.

There are a number of models that may enable farmers to diversify their product and their land use without bearing all the cost and risk of doing so. A local example is Community Supported Agriculture. Community supported agriculture (CSA) is an alternative food marketing and distribution model in which consumers pay a membership fee before the season in return for a weekly share of a farm's harvest.
We provide here a photo of the Wairarapa Eco Farm that is Community Supported Agriculture. You will notice the stark contrast between the eco farm's regenerative and biodiverse land use and the neighbouring farms.

There is no doubt that we need new models of operating. We need to move away from an economy focused on growth to new models of sharing and using the resources that we have. Community Supported Agriculture is just one example of moving outside of the status quo.

Many farmers are in debt. Debt often locks farmers into a particular way of operating, leaving them with little possibility of change. We are interested in how the finance sector and the government is being engaged in this change. How funds will be required to enable the transition and how this will be achieved. We encourage a regional assessment of transition costs across industries to assist with the implementation of discharge goals that are meaningful and achievable in a timeframe of ideally less than 80 years. This space and the science is moving so quickly that communities are seeking significant measurable impacts, opportunity for collaboration and accountability for our shared environments.

There are moves towards social impact investing that are important for our farmers to understand. They have the opportunity to embrace new models of operating to achieve the results required. We cannot afford more of the same. We need to know what kind of subsidies may be required to support farmers to transition away from farming that relies on fossil fuels and generates greenhouse gas emissions. Our understanding is that smaller holdings, a focus on crops (hemp included) and a focus on local markets are part of the change required. Being able to feed New Zealanders and our immediate neighbours needs to become a priority.

Go Eco supports the commissioners in developing ways for positive work to be recognised over and above what Overseer can assess.

One of the farms that Go Eco supports through the Sustainable Business Network and Te Puna Kai o Waikato is Our Land of Milk and Honey (OLMH). This is a farm located near Maungatautari Maunga. In February this year, we organised for a group of city volunteers to release trees in their wetlands area - it felt good to be part of the positive change.

Go Eco does not have the expertise or understandings of OLMH, but we think it is important to consider and listen to the experiences and concerns of farmers who have been taking actions that Plan Change 1 seeks to encourage. Today we are sharing their perspective as part of our commitment to collaborative relationship and being a voice for the environment.
OLMH suggests that it is difficult to determine how Overseer works for organic and regenerative practices. They looked at the Overseer data to write their recent entry to the Sustainable Business Award and realised that it doesn't allow much for any improvements. To demonstrate improvements they created a sustainability dashboard with EnviroStrat. The following data is from the 2014/15 season to the 2017/18 season. During this period they achieved the following:

58.6% reduction in N (kg)
65.9% reduction in P (kg)
60.4% reduction in sediment (t)
75.1% reduction in E.coli (tera)
15.9% reduction in GHG (tC02e)

Amongst other things, during this period, OLMH retired beef animals from marginal land and excluded stock from waterways. They planted over 10 hectares of native wetland (over 30,000 new plants and 20 species). They diversified their pasture with plantain to reduce leaching. They stopped cropping maize silage, meaning no cultivation of soil and minimal pasture damage and reduce sediment into waterways. They maintained a low stocking rate below 3.0 (currently 2.78).

From their assessment, the changes that made the most impact were the organic system (diverse pasture, and a reduced stocking rate), the wetland work (biodiversity and retiring the beef animals) and no maize cultivation. Overseer assessments do not account for all of this positive work but it does need to be recognised. We think that finding ways for it to be counted, alongside the use of Overseer in Farm Environmental Plans, is urgent work.

OLMH are concerned that high polluters are treated the same as low polluters. They suggest that this is mainly down to the requirement for farmers to decrease nutrients by a percentage, versus reaching a benchmark. Their assessment of the proposed plan change is that high polluters can remain relatively high polluters, and low polluters will have to do even more. They are concerned that no increases in nutrient loading are allowed. If an organic farmer were to sell to a conventional farmer, they essentially couldn't. This reality could see organic farms devalued. We think these are all valid issues to consider and we appreciate the good work that you are doing to ensure these asepcts are considered.

Thank you again for this opportunity.