

Notes for presentation at Hearing

Good afternoon, and thank you for giving me the opportunity to present to this Hearing. My name is Tony Chad. I have lived in parts of Whitemans Valley Upper Hutt since 1984 when I arrived from the UK, and have lived for almost thirty years in Katherine Mansfield Upper Hutt.

We have the dubious distinction of formerly being known as Swamp Road, as this is where the Mangaroa Peatland once sat in all its glory. Also we have what has been described as one of **“the best remnant of valley floor forest” ranking alongside “the well known Tunnel Gully remnant (podocarp rata tawa).” In Katherine Mansfield Drive we have “ a completely unpublicised remnant of black beech grading into dense podocarp forest”**. Please hold that thought! The detail is in an Appendix.

I have read a lot of submissions and recently listened to some very informed additional submissions. To the point of wondering if there is anything useful I can add - but I believe it is always useful to support our democracy.

I am not an expert witness - but I do spend very many volunteer hours trapping invasive pest animals that threaten our indigenous species and their habitat. I have been a member of Forest & Bird since 2018 and I am a Coordinator for Katherine Mansfield Valley and Whitemans Valley within Pest Free Upper Hutt, which is a sub-group of Forest & Bird.

I have watched and been part of the great progress we have made towards Predator Free 2050 over recent years. I like to look at the bigger picture and see how all our trapping projects connect. Within the scope of the legislation affecting the Silverstream Spur, the NPS IB seeks no further degradation or loss of indigenous biodiversity. It requires councils to promote the restoration or reconstruction of certain priority areas such as SNAs, threatened and rare ecosystems and important buffering or connectivity areas.

The importance of buffering and connectivity areas is apparent in how conservation groups throughout the country do their work. We cannot all have predator-proof fences. So from Otago to Mount Bruce to Taranaki and beyond, we rely on buffering areas, halo areas and neighbourhood trapping projects so that when endangered birds leave sanctuaries such as Zealandia, their risk is minimised. For us, that means that when kaka and karariki take adventures out of Zealandia they will come to somewhere like Keith George Memorial Park and then the Silverstream Spur on their way to explore the south end of Whitemans Valley and will find areas of regenerating bush that is being regularly trapped. In their travels they might even meet up with robins and kiwi from Wainuiomata! Such is the dream, and that is why we spend so much time trapping invasive predators.

The Silverstream Spur is an area of regenerating indigenous biodiversity and an important buffering area connecting a number of natural areas. The importance of maintaining connectivity and avoiding fragmentation of SNAs is recognised in the NPS-IB.

We are in a Global Climate Change Emergency;

Globally, but particularly in New Zealand we are in Biodiversity Crisis, that involves not only our precious indigenous creatures but their habitat:

I don't think any informed parties would dispute these statements.

National legislation is becoming stronger, more comprehensive, and more urgent in an effort to lessen the effects of Climate Change and to try to save our indigenous species from extinction and their habitat from destruction.

So, I am particularly frustrated that it sometimes appears that our Council & developers, rather than paying heed to the intent of legislation seem to want to squeeze their own destructive plans through before the legislation comes in to effect. I have become very frustrated over the years with the action of our local Council in conjunction with developers. Especially when they hold secret meetings behind closed doors, or delegate responsibility to developers, such as in the creation of roads.

Our native plants and animals are continuing to decline across the country, with over 80% of our land-based birds, bats, reptiles and frogs in trouble.

To quote from Upper Hutt City Council/Community/A Brief History of Upper Hutt /Pre-1840:

“These forests were also full of bird life, with thousands present for every hectare. This would have included large flocks of kereru, kokako, bellbirds, saddlebacks, and tuis, as well as the now extinct huia. The sound made by this dense accumulation of birds must have been almost deafening at times. Many small creatures, such as geckos and wetas, would have scuttled along the forest floor, while eels and other aquatic life made their home in the river that flowed through the valley.

While the eventual arrival of Māori would have little overall impact on this environment, European settlement was entirely another matter. Within half a century, driven by their wish to create pastureland and provide timber for construction, Pākehā had almost entirely cleared this area of its original forest and drastically altered the nature of a landscape previously unchanged for thousands of years.”

I have heard the use of phrases such as “We have engineering solutions” or this is “The best option from an infrastructure design perspective.” We need to stop doing things just because we can, without considering what is best for Nature. It is time for our Council and community to work together to put Nature first, to restore Nature, in the tradition of the lowland forest of Totara, Rimu, Kahikitea, Beech and Rata that used to dominate the landscape here.

Whether we are talking about remnant lowland beech forest in Katherine Mansfield or the regenerating bush on the Silverstream Spur, it is not appropriate to want to drive roads through what is left.

This consultation is all about protecting the Silverstream Spur in its entirety as Natural Open Space. It's about refusing to enable any provision for an 18 meter wide transport and infrastructure corridor through any part of the Silverstream Spur land.

Decision I seek is to

- Zone the Silverstream Spur in its entirety as Natural Open Space.
- Include Sylvan Heights Reserve in PC49 as a natural entrance by track to the Spur.
- Stop Kiln Street paper road and add this land to the Spur.
- Provide site-specific provisions to provide track access to the Silverstream Spur for a range of recreation, conservation and customary purposes.
- Protect all indigenous biodiversity on the Spur from development.
- Remove from PC49: the inclusion of a road/infrastructure corridor through the Spur is not compatible with Natural Open Space. Remove all site-specific provisions for infrastructure (including a transport corridor through the Silverstream Spur) from PC49.
- Remove rule NOSZ-R15 (enables the development of a road, network utility infrastructure and storage tanks)
- Remove rule NOSZ-S4
- Remove rule NOSR22 the removal of indigenous vegetation on the Silverstream Natural Area.

(These last three rules would enable activities that are not compatible or appropriate within a Natural Open Space.)

Appendix

Appendix describing the unique remnant forest elsewhere in Upper Hutt: and how Upper Hutt City Council acknowledged residents' wishes to keep the trees, but said the decision lay with the councils' roading team, and no notification was needed.

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RE: Katherine Mansfield Drive between 418 and 427 – vegetation clearance for road upgrade through native bush

Dear Mr Kelly, Honourable Mayor, and Upper Hutt City Councillors,

As a brief introduction, I am Jean-Claude Stahl, imaging specialist at Te Papa, and biologist by training (masters in botany, doctorate in animal ecology). Besides photographing specimens in Te Papa's natural history collections, my pet after hours project involves photographing New Zealand's native forests up and down the country.

I first walked into the New Zealand bush in 1986 (at Bullock Creek behind Punakaiki), and was thunderstruck by the overwhelming grandeur and lushness of the forest, a love at first sight that never faded. And I can't fail to notice, every time I return to Europe to visit my family, how forest trees there look like matchsticks compared to the many surviving New Zealand veterans (native trees in Europe are logged as soon as marginally reaching millable size).

As part of my forest project, I have surveyed most if not all remnants left in the Hutt Valley. I am particularly interested in remnants of valley floor forest, which grow on soils most coveted by agriculture, and so have suffered the brunt of deforestation. To get an idea of the original extent and composition of such forests, I have also read many accounts left by the first European explorers or settlers.

In July-August 1840, German naturalist Ernest Dieffenbach (employed by the New Zealand Company) explored the Hutt valley and foothills of the Tararuas. The Hutt ("Eritonga") valley floor that Dieffenbach used to progress up the valley was then completely forested, with jumbles of gigantic totaras piled up across the river. To his relief, he described how open tawai (Māori for beech) forests that he often encountered facilitated his progress (extract of his account supplied). Today's remnants of valley floor forests make up less (probably much less) than 1% of the original extent. Of this less than 1%, **the best remnant of valley floor forest I have come across are the well known Tunnel Gully remnant (podocarp rata tawa), and a completely unpublicised remnant of black beech grading into dense podocarp forest in Katherine Mansfield Drive, Upper Hutt.** I have returned several times to photograph this remnant since 2012, as being the largest and best preserved remnant of Dieffenbach's tawai forests.

I now regret that I didn't publicize earlier the value of this Katherine Mansfield Drive remnant. I naively assumed that remnants like this are now safe, given the iconic conservation ethos of New Zealand. So I must admit that I was asleep at the wheel when I read news reports that this remnant was being potentially eaten into by a planned road extension.

My point is that the remnant of black beech in Mansfield Drive is not your average kind of bush patch, but the last vestige of a former widespread type

of valley floor forest in the Hutt Valley. It is even more valuable as it encompasses a seamless but dramatic change to dense kahikatea and rimu forest below the terrace where the black beech patch is located. As such it has a heritage value akin of say an 18 th century church or monastery in Europe (I chose 18 th century as two of the twelve trees earmarked for felling are well over two hundred years old, see attached photograph). It would be a brave city council to remove a side of such a monument to accommodate a modest private development at the far end of a no exit road. In my view, forest remnants like the one described are truly New Zealand's cathedrals.

The good news is that the proposed felling of twelve centenarian trees is actually not necessary given the modest traffic expected even after completion of the development. This is because the road segment through the "tree bottleneck" in the black beech remnant is less than 100m long, and is close to straight, meaning that oncoming cars can be spotted from well beyond the length of this bottleneck (see attached photograph; I have re-visited the location last week end). The obvious heritage friendly solution is to establish a one-lane passage similar to the many one-lane bridges in the country, and managed as those with priority one-way traffic signs, or possibly smart (traffic aware) traffic lights. As I understand it, the council's original option was to remove the twelve centenarian black beech that are located within the literal "Red Zone" (the road extension boundary marked by a red cable).

I urge you as passionately as I can to keep the chainsaws locked in the council's workshops, and choose the one-lane option that you could proudly use as credential for natural heritage protection. You can count on my full support to publicize such a change of policy, should you chose to do so.

Kind regards
Jean-Claude Stahl

Sent to:
Peter Kelly, Chief Executive, Upper Hutt City Council
Cc: Upper Hutt City Council
15 June 2022

Also Reference to UHCC website
[Home - Upper Hutt City Council](#) / [Community/ A Brief History of Upper Hutt](#) / **Upper Hutt: Pre-1840**