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Submission to the select committee on the Resource Legislation Amendment Bill

I am writing on behalf of the Waitakere Ranges Protection Society (WRPS) to submit on the Resource Legislation Amendment Bill.

Background on the WRPS

The WRPS was incorporated in 1973. Its purpose is the conservation and protection of the Waitakere Ranges and to oppose any activity that may threaten or adversely affect the natural environment in the area.

WRPS and its members are strong advocates for the conservation and protection of the natural environment of the Waitakere Ranges and was one of the key groups promoting the concept of the Waitakere Ranges Heritage Area (WRHA) for 35 years before it was achieved through an Act of Parliament in 2008.

Comment

The WRPS supports the Environmental Defence Society submission and clause by clause analysis of the Resource Legislation Amendment Bill. We ask that the select committee gives full consideration to these issues.

We would also like to emphasise our concern with two issues in particular: the erosion of environmental bottom lines and the reduction in public participation and democracy.

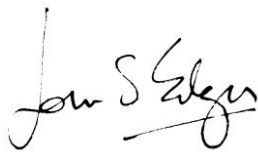
The primary purpose of our resource legislation in New Zealand must be the sustainable use of our resources and protection of the environment. There are a number of provisions in the Bill that result in a reduction in environmental protection and the relaxing of environmental limits. These changes need to be reconsidered to ensure that environmental protection and environmental bottom lines remain the fundamentals of our resource legislation.

There are also a number of proposals that reduce the ability of the public to participate in resource management decisions, restrict democracy and increase the powers of Ministers outside of their current roles. These changes do not appear to be justified, and as the Environmental Defence Society notes, are proposed to address a problem that does not exist, with appeals on only 0.7% of resource consents and only 3% of consents notified hardly justifying a restriction in public engagement.

Public notification of major proposals and public engagement in these processes is critical, along with the ability to identify impacts, both positive and negative, beyond what is included in a consent application or Council report. Local knowledge is often critical for understanding the impacts of a proposal in sensitive areas, such as the Waitakere Ranges, and can include issues that are not initially considered by the proponents or the consent authority. Therefore, the Bill needs to be revisited to ensure the balance of efficiency for processing consents and opportunities for public engagement and submission on all issues is appropriate and not restricted to enable quick decision making at the expense of good quality decision making.

Finally, the proposals around Ministers powers also need to be reconsidered to ensure that the democratic separation of powers and checks and balances on government are maintained.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Edgar', with a stylized flourish at the end.

John Edgar ONZM
President