

Submission of the Waitākere Ranges Protection Society on the Waitākere Ranges Heritage Area Deed of Acknowledgement

1. The Waitākere Ranges Protection Society welcomes the opportunity to submit on the Waitākere Ranges Heritage Area Deed of Acknowledgement. The Waitākere Ranges Protection Society was established in 1973 to maintain the environmental values of the Waitākere Ranges. Our long-term vision is to achieve an ecologically flourishing Waitākere Ranges and we were at the forefront of the campaign to acknowledge the significance of the Waitākere Ranges through the Waitākere Ranges Heritage Area Act 2008 (the Act).
2. We support the proposed Waitākere Ranges Heritage Area Deed of Acknowledgement, noting that this is a statutory requirement under the Act and is long overdue. We are dismayed at the length of time this has taken and the apparent lack of regard the Council and the Crown have shown towards this legislation.
3. We strongly support the development of a strategic plan for the Heritage Area, with ongoing monitoring and reporting for that plan via dedicated resourcing. There is currently no integrated approach to managing and monitoring the Heritage Area and this is a significant gap for preserving and enhancing it for future generations.
4. We see a critical need for an overall strategic plan to achieve this. Such a plan would enable the alignment of what are currently uncoordinated approaches by different agencies and groups to achieve better impact, and in some cases avoid damage from uninformed work by contractors. It would also, importantly, set out a plan to address the impact of over 1.2 million visitors per year, by ensuring appropriate infrastructure and resources.
5. The Council has been failing to meet its obligations under the Act by not providing resourcing or continuous monitoring of the Heritage Area; this is necessary to assess the changes in heritage features such as ecosystem health and habitat loss. This is despite clear indications of degradation, including in freshwater (lagoons, dune lakes, wetlands), through incursion of pest plants and pest animals, and the impact of visitor numbers.
6. We are concerned about lack of funding for the preservation and restoration of the heritage area and would urge the Council to allocate significant budget to enable this, particularly in the context of serious threats such as Kauri Dieback and the impacts of climate change.
7. We note that the amount of budget required through rates to resource this would be very small in terms of the Council's overall budget and (particularly noting that this is one of the Council statutory obligations and should therefore be funded by default) urge consideration of this through its annual financial planning.
8. We support the proposed establishment of a joint committee to monitor the strategic plan and relevant work programmes and support in principle the proposed composition of the Joint Committee but would urge consideration of the formal establishment of various technical advisory groups (e.g. ecological, fresh water, dark skies, transport and infrastructure, resilience) to provide expert advice to the committee.
9. We would advocate for the establishment of a dedicated operational unit within the Council, in addition to the proposed joint committee and technical advisory groups, to develop, manage and monitor work programmes relating to the Heritage Area, and support

the upskilling of staff across the council group on their obligations under the Heritage Area Act. A single FTE, as outlined in the proposal, is insufficient to enable this.

10. We also support the provision of funding to Te Kawerau ā Maki to enable liaison with the Council and the Crown on matters pertaining to the Heritage Area.
11. It is of critical importance that the community and stakeholder have both formal and informal mechanisms available to participate in the decision-making processes of the committee and that the committee's functions are as transparent as possible (e.g. by using mechanisms similar to those required under the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987).
12. We note that this proposal is entirely separate from other matters such as Te Kawerau ā Maki's "Heart of the Ngahere" proposal and that opponents to this proposal will likely spread misinformation to conflate these and other matters. We note the campaign by some in the recreational access lobby to undermine this process through mis- and disinformation and urge Council to be clear on the critical matters that the proposal seeks to address, rather than to provide for the interests of any individual group.
13. We do not see any group being adversely affected by this proposal, but rather that all groups will benefit from its implementation. The proposal will, rather, enable Council to "protect in perpetuity the natural and historic resources of the Waitakere Ranges Regional Park for their intrinsic worth and for the benefit, use, and enjoyment of the people and communities of the Auckland region and New Zealand". (Waitakere Ranges Heritage Area Act, 2008, S8 (l).)
14. We reiterate that the Deed of Acknowledgement is a statutory requirement and note that public consultation is not required, though we acknowledge Te Kawerau ā Maki and the Council for adopting a transparent and collaborative approach as this will be important in the longer term.
15. We further note that there may be legal risk to the Council if it decided against fulfilling its statutory obligations under the Act in respect of the Deed of Acknowledgement and would urge decision-makers to consider this carefully.