

SUBMISSION BY HAURAKI ISLANDS' BRANCH FOREST & BIRD - TO THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON AUCKLAND'S GOVERNANCE (DRAFT)

PREAMBLE.

The DOC introduction to the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act (HGMPA) 2000 says:

“The Hauraki Gulf has a natural richness, environmental quality, biological diversity and landscape that make it ***outstanding and distinctive within NZ.***”

AND

In Section 7 (1) of the HGMPA it says:

“The interrelationships between the Hauraki Gulf, its islands, and catchments, and the ability of that relationship to sustain the life-supporting capacity of the environment of ***the Hauraki Gulf and its islands are matters of national importance.***”

AND

On page 93 of the Hauraki Gulf Forum (HGF) ‘State of the Environment Report 2005’ (STE) it says:

“The Gulf has ***a rich diversity of habitats and species***, including algae, zooplankton, invertebrates, fish, aquatic plants, and terrestrial plants and animal species on islands.”

AND

Further to this on page 127 of the HGF STE Report 2005 it says that:

“Several surveys have found that the values associated with our coasts and beaches are key reasons for living in the Auckland Region and/or protection of these values (is) a key environmental issue.”

Nevertheless the Gulf has been affected by a lack of consistency in the assessment and protection of its natural character and resources. There also continues to be a lack of a proper baseline for establishing the full extent of habitat degradation and loss of biodiversity.

Although these problems exist, and there has been without doubt extensive modification of the natural environment, there are still many areas in the Gulf which retain significant natural values. eg there are 110 Coastal Protection Areas including areas which are regionally or nationally rare habitat types. This encouraging state of affairs is in no small part due to the (though sometimes imperfect) efforts of the ARC.

OUR SUBMISSION.

For all the reasons above The Hauraki Islands Branch of F&B believes that it is vital an appropriate structure for the governance of Auckland be established which will provide an effective Kaitiakitanga (Stewardship) for the Hauraki Gulf and its islands.

The Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act 2000 (HGMPA) and the Hauraki Gulf Forum (HGF) must have pivotal roles to play. **ARC or an enhanced version of it must continue to retain oversight** over such as water and air quality, land and coastal area management, natural heritage conservation and biosecurity. And there must be the continuation and expansion of collaborative initiatives with communities and groups (eg Weedbusters) something greatly appreciated on Waiheke Island.

By 'enhanced' is meant that ARC would have an enlarged biosecurity and conservational role to take in all reserves other than those under DOC control. Although beyond the scope of this submission it would also be expected that ARC would have the oversight of roading and would be responsible for providing major events, sporting and cultural facilities and setting and collecting all rates. ARC in effect would become a single unitary authority.

A Kaitiakitanga for the Gulf should involve full integration of all the natural elements resources and activities. It should also involve the effective collaboration of all groups including Maori, ARC, DOC, F&B, Fishery and Farming interests. This integration and collaboration should be provided for in the new governance structure in order that the Kaitiakitanga be achieved.

An essential part of the Kaitiakitanga is the involvement of communities in local decision making - a return to a bottom up rather than a top down approach to decision making. In other words each community would be responsible for the management of natural resources in its local area. We propose that a community conservation forum could be set up, building (as far as Waiheke is concerned) on what already exists. Each community conservation forum would appoint a representative to the HGF. Some additional resources would need to be allocated for the purpose.

The control and management of the natural resources of each local area would be subject to standards set at two levels. One such set of standards would relate to the onset of climate change. We would expect that National standards would have precedence and they would be set by Government through MfE and MoC. Regional standards would be set by ARC or its equivalent. Communities should however have as much control as possible over the implementation and management in relation to those standards.

This control and management should be a collaborative process, working with appropriate ARC staff assigned to the task such as parks and biosecurity officers and planners. This collaborative grass roots way of doing things should mean that people feel they own the process. It should also mean that they value much more the activities that they are engaged in.

Although also perhaps beyond the scope of this F&B submission it would appear logical to keep control and management as close to people as possible. A community board or a community council would be preferable to having decision – making in the hands of city council bureaucrats as at present. In addition each community board (or community council) should be entitled to appoint one of its members to the ARC (and/or to one of its ad hoc committees with decision - making rights.)

Although this submission focuses on the Hauraki Gulf most of it should apply to the Auckland Region as a whole. There are any number of large and small clearly demarcated areas with significant natural characteristics and important natural habitats. Some examples are the Waitakeres, the West Coast, the Hunuas, the Kaipara harbour, and numerous estuarine areas, volcanic features and reserves.

All the processes referred to above require a high level of transparency. But problems will be encountered. In the event of such problems arising (between individual communities and between communities and the ARC) we suggest that consideration be given to the establishment of local and/or district ombudsman systems or some other similar monitoring or accountability facility.

SUBMISSION SUMMARY.

- Environmental protection - including but not necessarily restricted to waters management (aquifers and other water supply, wastewater, stormwater, coastal waters, stream systems and wetlands,) control over earthworks and sedimentation, control over the coastal marine area, revegetation programmes, protection of trees, and animal and plant pest control – should be controlled at community level.
- Decisions about strategic and long term planning should be made at community level.
- Achieving a sustainable future is paramount. In particular checks and balances need to be in place in order that environmental and community needs are balanced appropriately.
- There must be provision for an holistic and integrated management of the Hauraki Gulf.
- ARC or an enhanced version of it must continue to retain oversight over a wide range of services and infrastructure – especially where environmental protection is concerned .
- Consideration should be given to the establishment of a local and/or district ombudsman system.
- Community boards or community councils should be allowed to appoint members to the ARC (and/or to one of its ad hoc committees with decision - making rights.)
- Account must be taken of the major changes ahead especially those associated with climate change and the use of energy and water resources.