

RUSSELL PROTECTION SOCIETY (INC)

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RESPONSE TO REGIONAL POLICY STATEMENT – DISCUSSION DOCUMENT

The Russell Protection Society (RPS) wishes to focus its submission on a single regional issue that is most often raised by our membership and is regularly highlighted at our meetings. This concerns the rapid process of sedimentation that is occurring in our Northland intertidal and estuarine waters and the effect this is having on our feral shellfish beds, many of which are important customary resources.

Erosion and sedimentation are usually accelerated when land use changes occur. In the Bay of Islands this is particularly so during the process of creating coastal residential subdivisions. Examples of these environmental effects are numerous and include subdivisions at Uruti Bay, Orongo Bay, Te Wahapu, Oneroa Bay, and many other areas in the inner and outer Bays. Photos are available showing streams carrying massive sediment loads during storm events in these areas. As a result the important shellfish beds at Uruti Bay, Te Haumi, Pipiroa Bay and elsewhere have virtually disappeared. The NRC is also on record as expressing concern about the rapid spread of mangroves, which is a direct result of increased sedimentation in our estuaries.

The author of this submission was previously responsible for the management of recreational and customary shellfish beds in Northland for over a decade as an officer with the Ministry of Fisheries. During that period the Ministry conducted a number of intertidal shellfish surveys in the Region which documented the steady decline of these resources. As an advisor to the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Forum he helped to initiate a multi-disciplinary study of intertidal shellfish decline in the area. The most likely culprit identified through this study was sedimentation and the associated binding of pollutants to this fine particulate matter.

The NRC has developed a standard set of guidelines for controlling land clearing and earthworks activities. These were originally modelled on US Army Corps of Engineers standards and more recently on work done by other Regional Councils, notably Auckland. Northland has a combination of relatively high rainfall, steep topography and fine clay soils which means that it is particularly prone to erosion when land is disturbed. It is therefore considered appropriate during this RPS review that the NRC guidelines are critically examined to determine whether they have been effective or not.

If it can be assumed that NRC's standard guidelines have generally been followed in the Region, then by most accounts it would appear that these have largely been inadequate in controlling erosion and consequent sedimentation, particularly when high-intensity sub-tropical storm events occur during the summer and autumn months while earthworks and land clearing operations are being undertaken. It is recognised that this is not a trivial matter because land development and use are at the heart of the Northland economy. However, use of our marine areas is also very important to the cultural, social and

economic well-being of the regional community and to tangata whenua in particular. In our view what is needed is an open and transparent debate about where the balance lies between protecting our intertidal waters from rapid sedimentation and fostering land use development. It is suggested that the NRC is in an ideal position to articulate and debate the various trade-offs that may have to be made in this regard so that a regional consensus on the matter can be developed.

Bob Drey
Chairperson
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