

Submission of Carol and Jeff Wagener

1. Members of the Panel, I am Carol Wagener and I am unable to be present in person because State Highway 1 has been washed out south of where I live.
2. Our families have lived in the Pukenui area for four generations. The small Pukenui community relies heavily on the Aupouri aquifer, and the present applications have caused a lot of disquiet, not just among current bore users, but also among many others who do not have bores.
3. I appreciate that Section 95 of the Resource Management Act can be read so as to exclude these others from making submissions, but many of them do not think that the applications are a matter of less than minor concern to them. I also appreciate that Section 95 matters are outside the ambit of the panel.
4. I feel that by making this submission to you, I to some extent represent all the residents of Pukenui-Houhora.
5. There has been among the community a sense of lack of trust. A sense that the Council has been concerned less with the community and more with “big business” and a few exceedingly rich individuals; a sense that the aquifer might be ruined by reckless exploitation and, once ruined by salt water intrusion, it would be ruined for ever; and a sense that commercial bore users could not be trusted to follow the conditions of their consents. I will return to this last one later.
6. After having read the Council’s Staff Report, I have been largely reassured on many of the matters that have been raised with me by individuals in the community, and I congratulate the Staff on the care that they have taken to consider matters raised

by written submissions to the Council. There are nevertheless several uncertainties that I would like to air before the Panel.

7. Whether or not the amount of water take proposed can be sustained is critically dependent on the recharge rate of the aquifer, with take not to exceed ten percent of the average recharge rate. This rate has apparently been estimated using historical data and computer modelling. Some of the inputs to the computer model are rather “soft”, the geology over the area is variable, the shell beds are relatively unconfined and data points to the west of the region, where most of the re-charge is thought to occur, are relatively sparse.
8. This area to the west is largely occupied by plantation forests, which have been recently felled and are now being replanted. There are good data that the forest cover significantly reduces recharge and one can assert with some confidence that recharge will be reduced as the trees reach maturity.
9. Proposed take in the Motutangi area approaches ninety percent of the allocation limit of ten percent of recharge and it is this area that is most at risk of saline intrusion. I am reassured by the expert opinion that salination occurs slowly and is reversible, equally slowly.
10. Climate change is another matter which may well affect the aquifer, both through change in sea levels and in patterns of re-charge. While the opinion of the experts is largely re-assuring, uncertainties remain.
11. I return now to the matter of trust. Can some local commercial bore users be trusted to abide by the conditions of their consents? The answer seems to be “No”. Last year, five bore users were detected exceeding their permitted takes by large

margins. They were detected, not by actions of the Council, but by information given to the Council by the public. Another applicant managed the previously unheard-of feat of planting an orchard in the summer, by collecting and storing water from bore tests, water that had allegedly been seen running to waste.

12. There are credible rumours that some water meters may be by-passed at the turn of a valve.
13. In Section 9 of the Council Staff Report the Council recommends detailed monitoring of water take and of water use efficiency. In Schedule 1, it deals with monitoring of and response to matters of water quality, and in particular of salt water intrusion. I applaud these recommendations and *urge the panel to accept them without modification*. They address the uncertainties and the matter of trust.
14. No doubt, the Applicants will argue that the conditions are too onerous, that they are technically unfeasible and, as Ms Letica has indeed done, that the costs of monitoring should be shared with the rate payers, as monitoring will benefit all. She offers as an alternative that the Applicants should own the information.
15. As to the matter of the costs of monitoring, I submit to the Panel that it is the Applicants that are causing the risks that have to be monitored and that they should fairly bear the consequences of their ventures. They are also receiving the benefit of the resource. Ms Letica's suggestion (Section 8.5 of her brief of evidence) that the information proposed to be collected may be "of a highly commercial nature" is rather difficult to understand, given the nature of the information to be collected.
16. Though the Council have not considered this, I would suggest that information gathered be made publicly available on-

line, so that interested ratepayers and council staff do not have to deal with Official Information Requests.

17. Finally, in the monitoring recommendations, mention is made of agrichemicals, specifically of inorganic fertilisers, but not of herbicides and pesticides. Herbicides generally degenerate in contact with the soil, but pesticides may not. While they may be intercepted and degraded by the iron and manganese-rich pans on their way to the aquifer, I suggest that it would be prudent to monitor for them.
18. I thank the Northland Regional Council for their hard work on behalf of their ratepayers and the environment, and the panel for their attention.