

Kia ora, good morning everyone, my name is John Johnston i am part owner and current caretaker of the historic Gumdiggers park in the Kaikino valley Waiharara. I have lived here for around 35 years and my business partner has family ties to this land via her ancestors ngai takoto. I would like to tell you of our experience with the effect of avocado orchards in our valley. When the 1st orchard was developed directly opposite our park entrance around 2009 our bore water supply dried up soon after the sandstone pan was broken, in roughly 5 meter spaced trenches to accommodate their trees, they put in a 70 meter deep well bore roughly 80 meters distance from our bore. Ours was a shallow bore, around 30 meters deep drilled by the late Joe Babich who was responsible for many bores on the Aupouri peninsula, this had served us well for around 14 years.

We were later told that this was a potential adverse effect from the orchard development. The owners manager offered us a water supply as he did not like the idea of us taking water from our roof due to spray drift. We gratefully accepted, as we did not have funds to put in another bore. This also put us in a difficult position, i felt if we were to complain about any other aspects of the ongoing development of neighbouring orchards, they may have turned our supply off as it was only a gentleman's agreement and therefore would have affected our tourism business, so I had to refrain from the 1st round of submissions.

Just before the orchard was sold this year, we had help from NRC in securing a 400 cubic meter supply of water per year, on the orchards land title from there bore.

They dug trenches and broke through the pan along their boundaries within 20 meters of our property and planted pine trees, even after i offered to buy Pohutukawa to plant instead.

this will eventually add to the weed infestation of the park via wilding pines, we already have a problem with this from neighbouring trees. Prior the development of this orchard, i was told by the manager they were going to be organic.

When the 2nd orchard was developed alongside this orchard the same practice was adopted and the sandstone pan was again broken and trenched, a wetland was cleared and drained, pines were planted and native vegetation cleared along with a heritage orchard and a mature Pouhutukwa. As soon as the Avocado trees were planted, this orchard was sold and the developer moved to Australia. This again has affected our ecosystem as the water that had flowed from Wharemaru pa, and had done for thousands of years stopped. This has seen a gradual decline in the health of the parks ecosystem. Then prior to a 3rd orchard being developed across the road it was totally cleared of all its native vegetation. The whole Wharemaru ridge was now cleared of 90% of its native vegetation, that had been home to countless wildlife species right down to the Kaikino stream. This land was then sold and developed into another avocado orchard, again the sandstone pan was broken and trenched. The natural ponds that had been there for years where gone and the fresh water aquifers along the banks of the river stopped seeping. The decline of the Kaikino stream has been slow but sure, a test i had done 2 years ago showed a very unhealthy system.

Then a 4th much larger orchard was developed on our southern boundary ( Tiri ) with this one, they planted trees 10 meters from our wetland as well as again braking the pan. Initially they dug drains through our boundary fence without our consent, with complaint from me they filled most of them in. This orchard is the closest to us and has also badly affected our wetland by again stopping water flow into it, they also planted pines 1 meter from our wetland.

Out of the once 1600 hectare wetland that is the Kaikino, maybe 40 hectares remain today. Cleared by early settlers 1st for gum then dairy farms. For thousands of years this valley helped in the development of the aquifer, with human settlement, land clearance and drainage systems installed, the recharge has now been severely limited, with most of the water now being drained out into the harbour rather than gradually seeping down into the aquifer. However with the sandstone pan now broken on such a large scale, the water that seeps down into the aquifer will now carry nitrates and contaminants eventually polluting this pristine body of water. With industrial pumps sucking the aquifer as never before in its natural history, saline intrusion as well will no doubt follow.

The aquifer has already been contaminated on our northern boundary, 10 years ago i was told by my neighbour they had to put a new bore down further away as the water had been contaminated by the cowshed effluent over the years being flushed down a hole into the groundwater . I have already witnessed a serious decline in the health of the gumdiggers park ecosystem, loss of water, loss of insects, loss of birdlife, loss of reptiles, Acacia wattle is far more of an issue now due to the water table lowering. I fear the damage done will see a further decline in the ecosystem with dryer summers and insecticide use.

We have had numerous incidents over the last 9 years with spray drift, even one time covering two German tourists with fertilizer via helicopter as they came from the carpark to the park entrance and dusting visitors walking the trails inside the park. The latest incident occurred three weeks ago with insecticide being applied in an easterly by helicopter. At the time of sampling our vegetation for pesticide residue the day after spraying, the neighbouring orchard was applying a lime

mix in an easterly that was pouring into our ecosystem, horrified, the NRC rep Adam took photos and asked them to move from my property to the property they were treating and to stop until the wind direction changed. They were accommodating but baffled as to why lime mix was an issue. Adam explained that the ecosystem here was fragile and would not fare well to having its soil acidity changed. The test came back negative, this was the 1st time in 9 years a test had been carried out.

Most of the fauna and flora living here are highly endangered. For example, two very rare orchids, noted by Kevin Mathews, that once thrived in the park have not been seen in abundance for around five years now, this year only a handful have been seen. I know some of these issues are not directly connected to water take, but i am trying to tell the whole story.

So far, in my eyes, most of what i have witnessed is detrimental, the only good thing is some employment in the region, mostly backpackers with some local employment. It is so sad to see this destruction of our natural habitat being outweighed by the greed of the few. History shows us this, and we still march on doing the same thing, albeit with more regulation, but still with not enough thought or understanding for the long term effects on our natural world and the local human population. Overseas tourists would tell me on a daily basis how in their country they would never be allowed to plant intensive mono culture as they have found them devastating to people and nature. Permaculture or regenerative farming is being adopted worldwide and in NZ as being better for the planet and its occupants. It seems the reason these new orchards are not using this practice, is it takes a longer time to develop and is initially more labour intensive . They develop these new orchards very quickly for short term monetary gain,

selling these orchards on once developed, as has happened to two of the orchards opposite our park so far.

I have made mistakes when working the land in the past, but have learnt to work with natural resources, hence Gumdiggers park, so you would think the law makers would have acquired the wisdom and knowledge by now to stop any more plunder and pollution of this ancient water source and the way in which they allow these massive monoculture orchards to be developed and operated.

An example is the waikoropupu springs in Takaka, this pristine aquifer can be seen on the surface bubbling up, unlike our aquifer that can't be seen, it is a treasure that would never be used for irrigation or mixed with fertilizer or pesticide, so why should the pristine aupouri aquifer be any different, this is also a treasure and should only be used for domestic purposes not industrial use.

In my case, 25 odd years of trying to save this last pocket of natural history and increasingly rare ecosystem, and make an honest living out of it, seems to be a waste of time when all around me is big money business killing our park ecosystem with a thousand cuts, and council seemingly turning a blind eye towards it all.

On a final note, the last time I stood up to what I felt was an injustice to our country was in 1979 when I paddled my canoe out into the Waitemata harbour in front of a nuclear submarine in Auckland with other likeminded people. This water take and ecological destruction is an injustice I also feel strongly about, and I hope the law makers see sense and stop this before it's too late, and future generations ask, why was this allowed to happen.