

APP.002667.01.04

Submission from the Northland Branch of the Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand

Section 6.

Branch co-convenors: Janine McVeagh and Dave Hookway-Kopa

The Green party is an international organisation spanning many countries. It is composed of activists in many fields, of which I am one, with the parliamentary arm being only one tool to bring about environmental and social change. New Zealand's Values Party was the first Green Party in the world.

The Green Party operates under the principles of its charter:

The Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand accepts Te Tiriti o Waitangi as the founding document of Aotearoa New Zealand; recognises Māori as Tangata Whenua in Aotearoa New Zealand; and commits to the following four Principles:

Ecological Wisdom

The basis of ecological wisdom is that human beings are part of the natural world. This world is finite, therefore unlimited material growth is impossible. Ecological sustainability is paramount.

Social Responsibility

Unlimited material growth is impossible. Therefore the key to social responsibility is the just distribution of social and natural resources, both locally and globally.

Appropriate Decision-making

For the implementation of ecological wisdom and social responsibility, decisions will be made directly at the appropriate level by those affected.

Non-Violence

Non-violent conflict resolution is the process by which ecological wisdom, social responsibility and appropriate decision making will be implemented. This principle applies at all levels.

Environmental policy states:

1. All human activity takes place within the limits of a finite planet.
2. Iwi and hapū rights under Article II of Te Tiriti o Waitangi to manage and develop their resources must be recognised and supported.
3. We all have a responsibility to conserve, protect and restore ecosystem health and integrity, with action on climate change mitigation and adaptation being particularly urgent.

These are the bases on which our objection to the proposed application rests.

The plant has been operating since 1984, over objections of tangata whenua on cultural grounds and of local groups, including the former Values Party, on environmental grounds.

Three iwi (Te Rarawa, Te Roroa and Te Takiwa o Ngāpuhi) have statutory responsibility for the Hokianga Harbour. It is our responsibility as the local branch of the Green Party to reiterate that we support iwi and hapū rights to manage their own resources, in this case the iconic Hokianga Harbour. Human waste, however dilute, should not be entering the Harbour.

Environmentally, there are numerous issues with the plant. Human waste contains pathogens, viruses, heavy metals and elements such as nitrogen – but it also contains nutrients which, while harmful in a marine environment, are necessary for the health of the soil. *Mina*

Leaching from the plant pollutes the Waiarohia Stream, which has its own significance to local hapū. Heavy rain means that untreated sewage can find its way into the harbour. The shortened outlet pipe, which has never been fixed, means that the plant does not even do what it was intended to do 40 years ago. Compliance has been a moveable feast, being changed to suit the actuality of events.

The Opononi-Omapere WWTP is one of four systems (the others are Rawene, Kohukohu and Kaikohe) that discharge into the Hokianga Harbour. While at any given time, there may be relatively minor physical pollution from this system, its discharge adds to accumulated effects of all four. Cumulatively, the effect on marine biodiversity over the decades has been extremely adverse.

In short, the current system damages the ecosystem of the harbour and surrounding land by not treating waste in an environmentally sustainable way, by sending pollutants and nutrients into the water which adversely affects kai moana in particular and the marine environment in general. In addition, this system deprives the soil of potential nutrients.

There is no longer any excuse not to heed the cultural and environmental wisdom of tangata whenua, indeed to continue to insult that perspective.

In the 21st century, enough is known about how to manage sewage in a way that keeps it out of the water and returns it safely to land that there is no longer any reason to continue a 19th century system of disposal. Dilution is NOT the solution.

While it is not up to us to decide on the precise method of treatment and disposal, we acknowledge that much work has been done on the Rawene WWTP. The site may be different but the same principles can be applied to arrive at a suitable land-based operation that does not view human waste as only a problem, but also a resource.

We strongly recommend that the consent be given for a maximum of three years with an enforceable mandate requiring a land-based solution through working collaboratively with local hapū and community, who have set their own terms of reference.

Additional evidence from Janine McVeagh, BA, DipTT, MEd

“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” (George Santayana)

As a researcher and local historian, these words often come to my mind. On Tuesday we heard tamariki from Te Kura-a-lwi o Omanāia speak of their history and their connection to Te Moana o Hokianga and the place to which this history has brought us: a request for the extension of pollution to this most significant of places.

By ignoring the cultural significance of Hokianga Nui o Kupe, Hokianga Whakapau Karakia, the FNDC are repeating the mistakes of history. Those tamariki, one of which is my own grandson, will have to live with those mistakes, that we, their elders, have made.

I don't need to reiterate how strong the feelings are about this – you have been hearing them all week in many different forms and voices.

So, why have the decision-makers defied those associations, those feelings and insisted that there is no alternative but to continue to inflict this insult on this place and these people? This despite the laws governing local bodies that say that Te Tiriti o Waitangi must be upheld?

This goes right back to beginning – to the initial concepts of the system: Page 13.

If you begin with a bad foundation, the structure will only get worse over time. And it has.

The words that have recurred throughout the hearings are “cost”, which in this context seems to mean financial cost, and “science”, which is to say the reductionist approach of Western science only and “practicable” which seems to mean whatever you want it to mean.

As my submission tells you, I have been part of this ongoing project to keep human waste out of the Harbour since 1982. At that time, the capital cost of the new waste water system was underwritten by the government. Cost was not particularly a factor. There was no RMA and no requirement to acknowledge Te Tiriti o Waitangi, so, despite several objectors, notably Matua John Klaricich and various hapū citing cultural objections, these could be, and were, ignored.

We were told by the hearing that there would be investigation into land-based alternatives over the next 30 years of consent. Well, they never bothered. On the renewal earlier this century, the hollow Council-dominated CLG was not allowed to focus on alternatives, so ten years were effectively wasted maintaining the polluting status quo, despite changes in the law requiring recognition of Te tiriti o Waitangi.

I am also a founding member of Te Mauri o te Wai. I researched and wrote the *History of Sewage Systems in Hokianga* which traces the development, or lack of it, in subsequent Councils' dealings with these systems. I hope you have been able to read the relevant sections of that work.

Te Mauri o te Wai began as a CLG – but one which took some control of the process, deciding how to define membership and where to meet, managed the meetings and, most importantly, set the timetable and objectives alongside the Council. The purpose was always to get human waste out of the Harbour. It wasn't perfect and time was wasted on side issues – but we eventually got there.

There most definitely needs to be a community liaison group for both systems with their basic purpose to replace the existing systems with ones that fulfil cultural criteria. Instead of being

constantly at war with hapū, Council needs to work together with them to arrive at a solution. There is no other way to do it.

By insisting on looking for solutions ahead of affordability Te Mauri o te Wai found a treatment system that is culturally acceptable – electrocoagulation. The treatment itself is relatively cheap; it will be the dispersal of the clean water that it generates that requires land.

This raises the question of why it is fine to send semi-treated waster directly to water, but it is a problem as a runoff from land.

However after EC treatment, this water is now totally clean. Therefore, this water can be allowed to flow eventually into a wetland, existing or constructed. Clean water is an easier thing to manage, so the treatment is important. The first tranche of Three Waters is financing our pilot system for Rawene as well as a person to work with landowners to shift it from its current site.

This story refutes two assertions: that you don't need a CLG and you always have to raise rates to pay for it. Whaea Hilda Halkyard-Harawira commented on that on Tuesday and she is right. Do the right thing first.

Another story about putting the solution ahead of the cost is Te Anau. That community wanted to keep all effluent out of Lake Te Anau – they persisted and got two grants from the government's Tourism Fund.

So – has the Council investigated the Tourism Fund? Did they try for any other funding – several million of the PGF went into the beautiful Manea Centre, which daily tells the story of the connection of Ngāti Korokoro and the Harbour – and of course Three Waters in whatever form it will take? Why not? This Harbour is after all a national taonga.

The cost of NOT taking human effluent out of the Harbour is much greater over the long term on every level.

Science: as you commissioners have noted, the parameters of “western science” are pretty much met a lot of the time by the proposed upgrades. “Science” means knowledge – which is a much wider thing than reducing such a fundamental element as water to its component parts. Dissect a butterfly and you no longer have the living creature you are trying to understand. Tangata whenua concepts of wai are far more encompassing than hydrogen, oxygen and fecal coliforms. Western science should not be ranked more highly than Maori concepts of wai. We are supposed to be moving towards genuine partnership – broadening our concepts of science is one major area where everyone will benefit. *See attached notice.*

Finally, that word “practicable” acts as a brake on carrying out the intention of the Act – it is a very convenient loophole for doing nothing.

It just means “possible to do”. Is it practicable to keep human sewage out of the Harbour? Council says it is for Rawene and Taipa, but not for Opononi and Kohukohu. No evidence is given for that assertion, except a couple of desk-top studies.

That is what they said about Rawene too.

We proved them wrong. Once those engineers put their boots on and actually walked around the place, they identified seven possible dispersal sites. On this hilly, slipping clay peninsula. Suddenly, it was practicable.

This opportunity to remove human effluent out of this iconic Harbour comes around only once every few decades – this week is history in the making. We have spent over 40 years arguing about it, despite the evidence that it can be done.

I urge you commissioners to be on the right side of history. It can and must be done to remove human effluent from the Hokianga Harbour.

I recommend a maximum of three years with an enforceable mandate to find a land-based solution through partnership with the appropriate hapū and the local community, who have selected their own people and developed their own terms of reference.

