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**FIRST CONSULTATION PHASE OF THE  
CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT STRATEGY REVIEW**

**SUBMISSION ON GREAT BARRIER ISLAND FROM  
GREAT BARRIER ISLAND CHARITABLE TRUST**

## Executive summary

- \* We submit that the importance of Great Barrier Island as a Place, is currently under-recognised in all ways except rhetoric. Relative expenditure on the Great Barrier Island DOC estate should be brought more into line with the recognised value of the island to the national and regional conservation estate.
- \* There is a real (and locally perceived) need to balance relative expenditure on visitor orientated infrastructure and species protection on Great Barrier Island. Pest control is the key parameter to reduce biodiversity decline.
- \* The relationship between DOC staff and the local community will be central in making conservation gains in future. This relationship should be nurtured and explicitly expanded in long-term planning.
- \* The long-term vision of the CMS should be aligned, as much as possible, with the long-term vision (3+ year plan) of the Local Board.
- \* Within Great Barrier Island we identify the following **six places** of special value:
  - Rakitu (Arid) Island
  - Whangapoua
  - Hirakimata

These three could be linked as 'mountain to sea' and co-managed as Iwi taonga ecosystems (possibly called 'Te Whenua O Rehua' or some name decided by the Ngati Wai/Ngati Rehua Trust Boards).

- Kaitoke Swamp
- Te Ahumata

These two could be similarly linked, but perhaps emphasising early European exploitation of the landscape (mining, kauri logging).

- Te Paparahi

This large area was the last location of kokako. Its future management needs detailed consultation with Ngati Rehua.

- \* Additional data on the importance of these areas can be found in the references given to the Great Barrier Island State of Environment Report ([www.gbict.co.nz](http://www.gbict.co.nz)) and in the Appendix herewith.

## **SUBMISSION ON GREAT BARRIER ISLAND FROM GREAT BARRIER ISLAND CHARITABLE TRUST**

### **Place: Recognising the importance of Great Barrier Island in the context of the Auckland Conservancy.**

The relative importance of Great Barrier Island as a location with many endangered species (birds, reptiles, amphibia, freshwater fishes, and plants) and few pest species is well recognised by the Department. The island is frequently portrayed as “the jewel in the crown” of Auckland as a tourist destination where scenery and the natural biota of New Zealand, contribute to the experience. The Department’s publication “Living Among Treasures” takes this view claiming that “Great Barrier Island is a paradise for people and nature alike”.

Unfortunately, this hyperbole is not matched by relative expenditure on the conservation values of the island; staffing levels have recently been reduced. Great Barrier Island comprises c. 42% of the land area administered by Auckland Conservancy, but only c. 14% of the Conservancy’s 12M \$ budget is allocated to it. Given the significance of the endangered biota, the extensive surrounding marine environment and the growth of tourism, the jewel is seriously under-resourced in terms of its importance to biodiversity in both regional the national contexts. On any ecological basis the Hauraki Gulf Islands (including Great Barrier) must be regarded as very different from the Auckland Region, much more so, for instance, than Northland or the Waikato, both of which have separate Regional Conservancies.

The GBICT submits that the status of DOC reserves on the island should be rationalised and upgraded to reflect their regional and national significance. Such a change in status would strengthen the case for more resources, and reflect the spatial area and importance of the DOC estate on Great Barrier.

The GBICT also submits that mammalian pests (especially rats) are the biggest threat to biodiversity on Great Barrier and are currently hampering all attempts to improve the conservation status. This applies as much to vegetation recovery (from kanuka to mixed forest) as it does to specific birds, lizards etc. which rely on the vegetation habitat.

### **Biodiversity Conservation v. Visitor convenience: The relative balance of expenditure on tourism infrastructure and the conservation of endangered species**

Recent establishment of better tracks, longer walks, and a new hut, is seen as positive, but needs complimenting with adequate information about the biodiversity values at risk on the island. The very provision of these facilities may actually put some endangered species (e.g. black petrel) at greater risk. Increased access for people is also increased access for mammalian pests and weed species. The Department should be addressing this matter specifically in relation to Hiraikimata and other places on Great Barrier. The Great Barrier Island Charitable Trust submits that expenditure on pest

management on Great Barrier Island needs greatly increasing. Without more active management of mammalian pests current conservation gains (eg. in brown teal) are likely to be lost, and continued declines in other species (e.g. black petrel) seem inevitable (see. Great Barrier Island: State of Environment (SOE). Chapters 13 and 14: [www.gbict.co.nz](http://www.gbict.co.nz)).

### **A way forwards: Relationships between DOC staff and the island community**

The Trust believes that attitudes towards conservation in the GBI community have changed markedly in the last decade. Publications and meetings held by GBICT have contributed to this, as have DOC initiatives and joint operations such as the Argentine Ant Eradication programme. The Department is now seen as a significant contributor to the economy and receives widespread majority support. Regular meetings between DOC staff, island conservation trusts, Ngati Rehua, and local board members have been most beneficial. Regular items in the Barrier Bulletin have also contributed to the sense that DOC is an active participant in community affairs.

If future conservation gains are to be made with relatively small DOC budget allocations, then cooperation with other formal bodies (Local Board, Hauraki Gulf Forum), Ngati Rehua and conservation organisations will be necessary. The GBICT submits that the CMS should address the role of the Department in the island's governance structure. We suggest the statutory formation of a cooperative working group able to address conservation issues on both public (DOC estate) and private land.

### **The long-term vision for Great Barrier Island.**

The question "what do you want this place to be like in 10 years time?" implies that a plan, with objectives and milestones is envisaged by the Department. As much as possible this should be in line with the Local Board ("3 years and beyond") plan currently available for submissions. The Great Barrier Island Charitable Trust is also currently formulating a 10-year plan, with the objective of returning the kokako to Great Barrier.

The Great Barrier Island Charitable Trust has a vision for the total eradication of mammalian pests on Great Barrier Island. This would cause existing native species to increase, and allow the introduction of biota formerly present but now extinct on the island, such as kokako. It requires full cooperation between the public and private sectors on the island, but has the potential for great economic benefits. These benefits would accrue sequentially, in part from the Conservation Estate in the form of concessions and increased visitor numbers. Economic benefits would also come from biosecurity work, species monitoring, guiding, education, accommodation and flow-on effects in island demography. This long-term vision envisages an island economy linked to an island ecology, with ecology based tourism and education being the main drivers. It envisages a younger resident population able to maintain the island infrastructure and gain useful employment.

## **Special Places within Great Barrier Island**

Here we summarise what we believe to be the most significant places on Great Barrier and why, and indicate what we believe the Department should do to conserve them.

### **Rakitu**

Rakitu has been in the DOC estate since 1993, and has been widely acknowledged as a location for pest eradication and the reintroduction of lost bird species. The Trust submits that rats and cats should be eradicated from Rakitu within the next three years.

The Trust is aware that the island features in the Treaty of Waitangi claim over Great Barrier, but submits that this should not be a cause for delay; Ngati Rehua have indicated support for a restoration/eradication programme. The island is sufficiently distant from GBI that reinvasion by swimming rats is unlikely. Biosecurity could be addressed with a resident employee or in other ways.

### **Hirakimata**

The summit area of Hirakimata has special significance for Ngati Rehua. It is also a site with a unique coniferous forest tree assemblage, and several endangered plants and birds (SOE, Fig 9.7 and pages 13-9, 13-10. [www.gbict.co.nz](http://www.gbict.co.nz)). It is by far the most important breeding site for the endangered black petrel, and carries small residual populations of cooks petrel, tomtits and kakariki. Robins may have recently established there from stock originally introduced at Windy Hill.

Hirakimata is also one of the most-visited locations by tourists. The Department has acknowledged this, by recent track upgrading and the construction of a hut at Mt. Heale.

However, despite the importance of the black petrel colony, and indications of abundant rats and predation by cats on Cook's and black petrels, no systematic or regular pest control has been carried out. The Trust submits that the summit area above c. 400m should be treated as a fenceless mainland island, with a 'grid' of permanently maintained bait stations, cat traps and monitoring tunnels. Such a management policy would improve the prospects for the biota, increase visitor awareness of the conservation issues, and provide employment. Ngati Rehua would presumably be involved as a co-management initiative. As with Rakitu it is imperative that this plan is formulated immediately, as the situation continues to deteriorate.

### **Whangapoua estuary and biodiversity protection from mountain to sea.**

This estuary featured in the recent decision by the Ministry of Fisheries to veto the proposed Aotea Marine Reserve centred on Rakitu. It is also a very significant location for Ngati Rehua. Shellfish are regularly harvested from the estuary. The area has the best sequence of vegetation zonation across the marine/freshwater interface in the region. The vegetation composition from mangroves to kanuka, and its history, has been

published in detail (See summary and references given in SOE p.9-16 to 9.19. [www.gbict.co.nz](http://www.gbict.co.nz)). The adjacent spit and dunes are also significant, and included here.

The estuary comprises the main winter flocking grounds for the island's population of the endangered New Zealand dotterel (SOE p.13-7. [www.gbict.co.nz](http://www.gbict.co.nz)). It is also a significant site for variable oystercatchers and brown teal. The estuary flats, and the Okiwi spit, are important sites for migrant waders (godwits, Pacific golden plovers, wrybills, banded dotterels, and occasional rarities such as curlews and sand plovers). The significance of this area for marine and bird life on the island cannot be over-emphasised (SOE p. 13-20. [www.gbict.co.nz](http://www.gbict.co.nz)).

The Trust submits that the Department should negotiate with Ngati Rehua with a vision of **biodiversity protection from mountain top to sea**, linking Hiramakimata, Okiwi Station, Whangapoua Estuary and Rakitu as "Te Whenua O Rehua" or some such title decided by Ngati Wai/Ngati Rehua Trust Boards. The concept would be linking the areas to each other as inter-related ecosystems, and also linking them all to their Maori history.

#### Kaitoke Swamp

Lowland wetlands are seriously threatened throughout New Zealand. Kaitoke wetland is the largest in the Auckland region (c. 320 ha), being considerably larger than Te Henga. It is a site of significance for fernbirds, spotless crane and (occasionally) bittern. The vegetation of the swamp has been described in detail, and its development is well understood (see refs in SOE Chapters 9 and 12, esp. those under endnote ii p. 12-7). A well used track (Hot Springs) follows one border and a road (Whangaparapara) another, giving good opportunities for viewing and educational signage.

The Trust submits that more recognition should be given to the importance of this area in the Auckland context. The first stage of such recognition would be to draw together the existing information relevant to biodiversity in the area and write a management plan. Pest control along the accessible swamp margins may be necessary to preserve both the birds, and some rare orchids.

#### Te Ahumata and links to Kaitoke wetland

This area came into focus during the mining on Schedule 4 land debate in 2010. It is a central scenic feature of the island, and the prospect of mining it galvanised the community into action like no other! The mountain became an icon for the island, with the community strongly resistant to mining it. Various surveys at the time also indicated that, aside from the European historical aspects, the mountain has important biodiversity values. There is a remnant population of black petrels (and possibly Cook's), possibly Duvaucel's gecko, and certainly fern birds and numerous orchid species, some of which are very rare in the region.

The Trust recommends that Te Ahumata be developed by the Department as a destination worthy of visiting. The historic mining legacy would be the focus. The

mountain also provides spectacular views and is close to the townships. It could be linked with the Kaitoke swamp and Hot Springs track (which has a historic kauri logging legacy) as a combined entity much as suggested for the mountains – sea sequence for Hirakimata/Whangapoua/Rakitu. As detailed information on these two areas are rather scattered, we append a summary.

## Te Paparahi

This was the area on which kokako survived longest, and from which the last birds were removed to Hauturu in 1994. As there is only one track, it is often treated as a wilderness area. The vegetation has suffered past modification by goats and feral cattle, but is now recovering, and extensive areas of mixed broadleaf and kauri forest remain. The area has, in the past, been the subject of investigation for possible rat eradication. Ngati Rehua have a special interest in the area and the Katherine Bay Trust was set up with a view to returning the kokako to Te Paparahi.

The Great Barrier Island Charitable Trust submits that the future conservation management strategy in this area should be made in consultation with Ngati Rehua. The options range from ‘wilderness’ to improved access with accommodation.

## APPENDIX

### **The biota of Te Ahumata**

*Plants:* The Te Ahumata plateau is covered with low ‘scrubby’ vegetation, mostly composed of manuka (*Leptospermum scoparium*) but with a mixture of other native species. Amongst these plants is the Great Barrier endemic *Olearia allomii*. *Brachyglottis kirkii* var. *kirkii*, *Hebe macrocarpa* var. *latisepala* and *Dracophyllum patens* (both considered rare and probably declining (de Lange et al. 2009) are also recorded, and *Kunzea sinclairii* is possibly present. Eight species of native orchids are recorded, including the only Great Barrier locations of *Thelymitra cyanea* and *Petalochilus bartlettii* (‘At Risk’ species), making Te Ahumata plateau an exceptionally rich place for orchids (Records from Auckland Museum Herbarium). Below the eastern cliffs are a few small areas of kauri / pohutukawa / broadleaf forest, which have not yet been explored botanically.

*Birds:* The Te Ahumata plateau is a nesting site for black petrel (*Procellaria parkinsoni*) and probably Cook’s petrel (*Pterodroma cookii*). The former is classified as ‘Nationally vulnerable’ by Miskelly et al. (2008) and is thought to be declining on Great Barrier (Great Barrier Island State of Environment Report 2010: SOER 2010). In the North Island, these New Zealand endemic species nest only on Great and Little Barrier Islands. The Plateau also contains a small population of North Island fern birds (*Bowdleria punctata*) and New Zealand pipit (*Anthus novaeseelandiae*) (‘Declining’).

*Reptiles:* Duvaucel’s gecko (*Hoplodactylus duvaucelii*) was last recorded on Great Barrier on Te Ahumata (1988). Green geckos (*Naultinus elegans*) are recorded, and Pacific geckos (*H. pacificus*) and moko skinks (*Oligosoma moco*) are probably present. The nationally endangered Chevron skink (*O. homalonotum*) almost certainly occurs in the vicinity of creeks

draining from the mountain (Halema Jamieson. Dept. of Conservation, Port FitzRoy, Great Barrier Island. *Personal communication* 2010).

### **The biota of the Kaitoke Swamp**

The Kaitoke swamp (c. 320 ha) is the largest semi-natural swamp near Auckland, and one of the largest in the North Island. It is situated only about a kilometer to the north-east of Te Ahumata and receives substantial run-off in several creeks draining from the mountain. Its vegetation, past history and bird life are well documented (Rutherford 1998; Pegman & Ogden 2005, 2006; Horrocks et al. 2000; Anderson & Ogden 2007).

The ecological value of the Kaitoke swamp cannot be over-stated. Its value as a fresh-water reservoir has not been quantified, but given sediment depths in excess of 6m in some parts, it must be considerable. The lower sediments are below sea-level. Its hydrology could not be substantially changed without changing the plant communities and the whole biota.

The Auckland Conservation Board recently voted to support the inclusion of the Kaitoke Swamp as a 'Special Place' in the GBI Conservation Management Strategy, as recommended in the Great Barrier Island SOER (2010).

*Plants:* Kaitoke swamp contains at least one orchid species regarded as 'Nationally Critical' (*Prasophyllum hectorii*), and another (*P. colensoi*) which is threatened. The vegetation patterns on the swamp range from oligotrophic peat forming communities dominated by species of *Baumea* and *Gleichenia*, to more eutrophic communities with raupo (*Typha orientalis*) and cabbage trees (*Cordyline australis*) and small areas of swamp forest dominated by kahikatea (*Dacrycarpus dacrydioides*) (Rutherford 1989).

*Birds:* The Kaitoke Swamp contains a substantial population of North Island fern bird (*Bowdleria punctata*). It also contains breeding populations of spotless crake (*Porzana tabuensis*), banded rail (*Rallus philippensis*), brown teal (*Anas chlorotis*) and grey duck (*Anas superciliosa*). It formerly had breeding pairs of bitterns (*Botaurus poiciloptilus*) and individuals of this nationally endangered species still occasionally occur. Marsh crake (*Porzana pusilla*) have been reported but not yet confirmed.

*Reptiles:* Pacific gecko (*Hoplodactylus pacificus*) has been recorded in adjacent vegetation. Other reptile species would almost certainly be found if the swamp was properly surveyed for reptiles.

**Significant plant records (Auckland Museum Herbarium samples).**

**Kaitoke wetland.**

Prasophyllum hectori  
Prasophyllum colensoi  
Thelymitra formosa  
Pterostylis paludosa  
Spiranthes novae-zelandiae  
Baumea arthropphylla  
Sparganium subglobulosum

**Te Ahumata**

Dracophyllum patens  
Stegostyla atradenia  
Olearia allomii  
Rhytidosperma ?gracile  
Petalochilus bartletii  
Thelymitra carnea  
Thelymitra canaea  
Thelymitra ixiooides  
Deyeuxia quadrisecta  
Sticherus flabellatus  
Celmisia ?major  
Lycopodiella lateralis  
Hebe macrocarpa var. latisepala  
Brachyglottis kirkii  
Corunastylis pumil