

Hearing presentation to the further submission by the Auckland Volcanic Cones Society Inc (AVCS) to the Proposed Waikato District Plan (PWDP)

1. Thank you for this opportunity to speak.
2. A brief background of the AVCS: the Society was formed in 1999 as a public response to a particular issue on Te Kopuke, Mount Saint John, Epsom. It was considered by the members that a new house high on this cone was inappropriate development. The Society was successful and an officer of the former Auckland Regional Council (ARC) asked if we would become an advocacy group for the protection of the region's volcanic cones.
3. Our interest aligned with the mandate of the ARC which covered both the Auckland and Franklin volcanic fields. It was difficult to say where one field started and the other stopped. More likely, it was the one field, with those volcanoes in the south erupting earlier.
4. Now of course, through changes to geopolitical boundaries, we are in the Waikato District, although our principal focus and understanding tends to be on its northern part. However, this is not an absolute.
5. Auckland has two dynamic geoheritage statements, these being the two harbours (three if you now include the southern Kaipara) and the volcanic cones. These give the city its regional geographic character. They are very interlinked, as most of the volcanic features are near the coast, or have tidally breached tuff rings and often craters, or they have lava flows running down into the harbours.
6. From my observation, the Waikato District is similar. It has two dynamic geoheritage statements, these being firstly the Waikato River and secondly its tremendous volcanology which extends from the source of the river along its length to its outfall at Port Waikato. Volcanoes line its edge, particularly in the north.
7. However, unlike Auckland, I do not think these two dynamic features are seen in any particularly integrated way. The volcanoes have much less public recognition or perception, despite the fact that in volcanic terms, they are probably mightier. This is subjective of course, but how much do they figure in the Waikato public psyche?
8. I suggest at this stage, not a lot, but that is to lose sight of what makes the region special and distinct. Put quite simply, do you want a district plan that goes on downplaying them, or is now the time to elevate the volcanoes to their proper importance?
9. Huge work has been done by Geoscience NZ (GSNZ) to educate people about and protect the district's important geoheritage. GSNZ has been responsible for the scheduling of three current volcanic Outstanding Natural Features (ONFs). They have already done the field work and made the recommendations for many other ONFs as outlined in their submissions.

In short, they have stressed the scientific and geological importance of the region's volcanoes.

10. Now from the Society's understanding of the issue, nearly all their work is to be downgraded on the basis of amenity value, which was never GSNZ's basis for proposing them as ONFs in the first place.
11. Are the volcanoes just amenity? The Oxford Dictionary defines "amenity" firstly as "**pleasantness of place, person etc**". Surely a volcano is more than just pleasantness, yet this is what your important geoheritage is being reduced to and judged upon. To the Society's mind the volcanoes are being trivialised.
12. Ironically perhaps, most of the Society's battles have been over landscape values and we have engaged our own expert witnesses a number of times on this front. However, we have never said that these were the only values. On the contrary, our position has always been as is clear in the Auckland Unitary Plan, that the volcanoes represent a raft of values - geological, archaeological, iwi, landscape, historic etc. The Waikato District is no different.
13. If I had to rank the values, I would probably say that "geological" was the most important, because it is the very foundation of the volcano upon which all the other values subsequently ride. It is this geological importance that pushes the volcanoes toward being ONFs rather than Outstanding Natural Landscapes (ONLs), or as is mostly the case now, Significant Amenity Landscapes (SALs).
14. A volcano stems from a single event even if its eruption time can run into years. This of itself skews it toward being an ONF rather than an SAL, which can often comprise a number of elements such as vegetation, current land use and even size. These are not part of a volcanological assessment.
15. An SAL is always going to require an "arcadian quality" as mentioned in the section 42 report, or an assessment of its scenic or picturesque qualities. Considerations like legibility, memorability and experiential qualities support SALs, but they are irrelevant when the basis for scheduling the volcanoes as ONFs has been geological and scientific. You are simply not in the same situation and this difference is something the hearing panel needs to decide upon.
16. There is an important feature of the Waikato volcanoes that the Society considers has not been considered properly. Many of the district's volcanic features are eroded volcanoes. They are not so much the "in your face" volcanic cones of the Auckland Isthmus.
17. The subtle difference is actually what makes them so special. However, the feeling I get is that with the proposed SAL classifications, they are being punished rather than celebrated for what they are. Because they do not conform to a preconceived idea of a volcano in

landscape terms, they are being written off. Yet in reality, the district plan should be a strong recognition of what makes you different from your neighbours.

18. At this point the volcanoes of the Waikato are largely where those of Auckland were 150 years ago. Because some of Auckland's volcanic cones have visual prominence, there is an erroneous belief that we have saved our volcanic heritage. What we have saved is in fact only a remnant, as Dr Hayward has pointed out. But what a truly amazing place Auckland would be if we had saved more!
19. Waikato on the other hand is relatively pristine. The great danger is that because your geoheritage is so intact, it is not seen as mattering very much if you lose a little. This will probably happen in ad hoc ways. The truth remains however that even with your relatively larger volcanoes than Auckland's, they can still be easily spoiled.
20. The eroded nature of many, already referred to, means they can be easier to subdivide, use and develop. Housing or any man-made development can easily become visually prominent. There is something very salutary when the section 42 report talks about SALs and says ***“when recognising and providing for areas of amenity value, consideration shall be given to the changing and evolving nature of land management practices that means the visual amenity values may also change”***.
21. To the mind of the Society, this means you are already on a “slippery slope”. SALs are about managing, maintaining and enhancing values which from the Society's experience are questionable subjectivity. It is not the stronger position of an ONF, which has to be **protected** from inappropriate subdivision, use and development.
22. And while it is no doubt a common enough aspiration for every district to express its individuality, the Society does not think that being out of step is the way to do it. Dr Hayward has outlined the approach that other districts have taken toward the planning treatment of their geoheritage. The Society cannot see the advantage for Waikato in being different.
23. An integrated management between the Auckland and Waikato volcanic fields would make more sense, especially as ONFs are matters of national importance. A lesser approach could indicate that lobby groups are getting an upper hand in the district. There is no overt reason why Waikato would want to be a different, especially when on balance its volcanoes are probably bigger and in a better state of preservation.
24. Because the planning process is now so advanced, it is difficult to know clearly what to do. Going back to the beginning and starting again is not going to be an option, but the Society is also wary of pushing too much out onto future planning processes.

25. GSNZ has already done much ONF evaluation. While the Society does recognise the necessity and importance of mapping, the first stage is at least to get the ONFs scheduled. It is critical to append a list and description of the values for which the feature is scheduled.
26. Mapping could be pushed out into a future process, but the Society would recommend a concrete timeframe be put on this. The Society considers, probably like many others, that huge development pressure will be bearing down on the district, especially from its northern neighbor and internally. While time might currently appear to be on the district's side, the clarity and certainty that comes from mapping is essential.
27. As outlined in the Section 42 report, the Waikato Policy Statement says that regional and district plans shall have particular regard to protecting geological features. While it would be nonsensical to protect every volcanic remnant across the district, you certainly need to be protecting the important ones.
28. I use Rangiriri and other Land Wars sites as an analogy. No one would say that you have to protect every fragment from the Land Wars, but you do have to protect the big ones. These serve as markers for the dynamic history that has shaped and is still shaping the district.
29. Likewise the volcanoes are the markers for the dynamic geological forces that have shaped the district even pushing around the course of the Waikato River. Ferdinand von Hochstetter described the many volcanic cones as the visual evidence of the fiery combat in the bowels of the earth. Maori rightly sense taniwha under their land. All this recognises that there is a mighty force undergirding the district. A district plan should celebrate this dynamism because it is giving the Waikato an incredible wow factor.
30. On a final personal note, I mention Mercer. This small town sums up the Waikato for me. I often think it should be the capital because the main forces of the district intersect here. The river runs very close with all its important Maori and European history. It is a center for the Land Wars and all the ramifications of them. Very good farming exists at Pukekawa across the river. And brooding over it all like the proverbial elephant in the room, is the huge Kellyville tuff ring which is a natural wonder. Any trip I make into the Waikato with visitors has to stop here, because it is a microcosm of the whole district.
31. Thank you.

G L Smith
Spokesperson
Auckland Volcanic Cones Society

29 October 2020