

**BEFORE THE HEARINGS COMMISSIONERS FOR THE WAIKATO DISTRICT
COUNCIL**

UNDER the Resource Management Act 1991

AND

IN THE MATTER of hearing submissions and further submissions
on the Proposed Waikato District Plan

PARTIES REPRESENTED **MIDDLEMISS FARM HOLDINGS LTD**

BUCKLAND LANDOWNERS GROUP

RURAL TOPIC – HEARING 25 Zone Extents

**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE FROM STEVE McCOWAN AS A DIRECTOR OF
MIDDLEMISS FARM HOLDINGS LIMITED AND FOR
THE BUCKLAND LANDOWNERS GROUP**

17 February 2021

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MAY IT PLEASE THE PANEL

Introduction

1. My name is Stephen Hal Wright McCowan, and I have an extensive background in the Rural Sector, having gained a Bachelor of Agriculture (Valuation Major) and a postgraduate Diploma of Business and Administration from Massey University. I spent time as a practicing Rural Valuer and Rural Banker before becoming a private Farm Management Consultant which involved all aspects of pastoral and cropping farming including advocacy and mediation roles. Throughout this time, I have farmed on our own account, owning farms in Waikato/Auckland and Australia ranging in size from 200-1500 cows and 2000 bulls. Over the last 20 years I have advised on, as well as completed on our own behalf, a number of wetland, bush, and riparian planting enhancement programs.
2. I have been asked to provide brief evidence on the Economic and Primary Production consequences of not providing/managing the inevitable demand for Rural Residential opportunities. Some of my comments are in response to the comments in the S42A Report.
3. In my eyes I believe it is a travesty that the current PWDP policy frameworks generally preclude additional rural-residential subdivision and development. This statement is supported by my evidence presented in Rural Topic – Hearing 18, 9 September 2020.
4. It is not my intention to repeat this evidence but to further support why Rural Residential opportunities are important to the rural/lifestyle and urban communities we all live in.
5. From my experience having lived and farmed in the rural and rural residential communities for my whole life, there is a clear need to continue to develop the Rural Residential community as these areas provide the opportunity for a huge number of small business to operate from a home-based environment. Without these people living and operating their small business from their rural residential property we will see large farm cost increases as they will be forced over time to relocate their business into expensive commercial zoned areas.

6. The net result is that farm costs will increase as these small business's seek to recover their costs.
7. It is not until you have operated economic farms that you appreciate how many "support business's" you are reliant on to keep your farm business running. Most of these business's need to be based in a rural residential zone for the following reasons;
 - a) Being close to their client base
 - b) To have a low-cost business base to be commercially viable
 - c) To have the land area for sheds and workshops so that they can protect and work on their machinery.
 - d) So they can provide a lower cost service to the rural sector (the rural sector is a price taker not a price maker).
8. Here is a list of business that I know are operating out of their Rural Residential bases;
 - a) Relief Milkers
 - b) Contractors – silage, hay, cropping.
 - c) Weed Spraying Contractors
 - d) Hedge Cutters
 - e) Lawn Mower operators
 - f) Earthworks Contractors
 - g) Digger Operators
 - h) Fertiliser Spreaders
 - i) Fencing Contractors
 - j) Farm Workers
 - k) Fruit/Vegetable Pickers
 - l) Accountants
 - m) Human Resource Consultants
 - n) Milking Machine R&M Specialists
 - o) Builders
 - p) Electricians
 - q) Plumbers
 - r) Concrete Contractors
 - s) Drain layers
 - t) Forestry Contractors
 - u) Nursery operators
 - v) Farm Management Consultants
 - w) Farm Managers
 - x) Farm Workers
 - y) Real Estate Agents
 - z) Farm Merchant Representatives
 - aa) Livestock Agents
 - bb) Farm Engineers/Welders
 - cc) Vets

dd) Farm Maintenance Managers
ee) Well drillers

9. These types of people all love country living v's town and all provide a cost-effective benefit to their rural communities. Not providing for their essential activities will place huge pressure on the economics, functionality and harmony of our farming communities.
10. Costs to the farm owner will increase and the supply of, for example Relief Milkers or a Fencer will drop, making it difficult and more expensive for the farmer to get work done.
11. The evidence is now very clear that Covid 19 has created huge demand for Rural Residential land. People are seeking a safer environment to live in and our councils have to provide for this demand. By doing nothing councils are forcing Rural Residential land prices higher and limiting the lifestyle choice to the super rich (these aren't the people with the skill types that are listed above).
12. In reply to 7. n. and 68. Yes, I agree we don't want fragmentation and loss of productive farm land or high-class soils, however this needs to be balanced for the following reasons;
 - a) Within most farms there are areas that may have high class soils, but due to topography/drains/existing bush & trees/roads etc. there are also numerous areas that can never be farmed economically. Those areas can be used as a house building site and thus provide accommodation and a business base for the many people that service the local rural and urban areas.
 - b) By allowing Rural Residential Subdivision you take the pressure of the urban zoned areas and allow more diverse living opportunities. People servicing the rural sector can live closer to their clients and can provide a cheaper service as they aren't having to pay commercial costs for their premise and have much reduced travel times. Take this option away and more costs will be placed on our intensive rural industries.
 - c) Allowing Transferable title rights coupled with incentivized environmental planting would help stop the fragmentation of our high-class soils, as well as give farmers the economic incentive to

restore their water-ways and return lower quality land back to mother nature.

13. 105.h - Rural Residential Subdivision is a clear way forward to incentivizing the planting and fencing off of our natural waterways, gully's and less productive areas that are prone to soil erosion. In return we all win from an environmental point of view, and we are providing more supply for a population base that now demands "safer" living due to COVID-19 19.
14. Country Side Living Zone (246. 247. – 258.). Country Side Living Zones, as promoted by the relief of Middlemiss/Buckland (refer to the evidence for Hearing 18 – Rural) provide the community with the ability to incentivize the restoration of their waterways as well as returning less productive land due to contour and soil type back to native bush. That land use change will in turn enhance the natural environment and provide in time a huge number of benefits for people such as carbon sequestering, nitrate and phosphate retention as well as clean natural waterways. Farmers cannot afford to complete this work without a financial incentive. Clearly the Auckland City Unitary plan has shown the best way to do this is via Enhancement Subdivision. In order for all farm locations (including farms located outside of Rural Residential markets and Farms on high class soils with no ability to produce unproductive areas for Rural Residential blocks) to have the same benefits, the Transferable Title Right/Country Side Living Zone option gives all farm owners the incentive to restore these areas. This is a win win for everyone.
15. Re zoning already fragmented rural areas into Country side living with the view that these areas in time will be rezoned to future urban is only a problem if our time horizons are too short. Proper forward planning of this zone through design/consenting of house positions with the view to higher density housing in the future will help aid this. The simple facts are that none of us know what the future holds e.g. COVID-19. We do however know that we need to sequester carbon, reduce our nitrate and phosphate loading on our natural waterways and reduce our carbon losses. Incentivized Enhancement Subdivision does all of this in a cost-effective manner and the Buckland area is well located for rural residential activity and also as a receiver area for TDR lots.

16. Unintended consequences of not providing for rural residential land is that, during market conditions where lifestyle block values become expensive in comparison to an economic farm, and there is no more additional rural residential land available, some rural residential buyers will buy economic farms and run them as a “large lifestyle block”. This is likely to mean a change in land use due to ease of management eg. Dairy to Beef or Beef to Lawnmowers. The end result is a loss of farm income, and a reduction in local economic activity.

Middlemiss Farm Holdings Ltd
Steve McCowan
Director