

**BEFORE THE ŌPŌTIKI DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**UNDER** the Resource Management Act 1991

**AND**

**IN THE MATTER OF** a resource consent application by G & S Stilwell for subdivision consent, and land use consent under the National Environmental Standard for Assessing and Managing Contaminants in Soil (NESCS), at 98C Ōhiwa Harbour Road (Onekawa Road), Ōhiwa

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**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF GAVIN BRIAN STILWELL  
ON BEHALF OF G & S STILWELL**

**10 AUGUST 2022**

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## Introduction

1. My full name is Gavin Brian Stilwell. I am one of the applicants, together with my wife Sue Stilwell.
2. I have joint ownership of 98C Ōhiwa Harbour Road, Ōhiwa (**the Property**) with Sue Stilwell.

## Scope of evidence

3. My evidence will cover:
  - (a) The Applicant and property;
  - (b) Subdividing;
  - (c) Community involvement; and
  - (d) Proposals for planting and pest control.
4. I refer to an Appendix 1 that outlines the pest control undertaken on the Property over the last five years.

## The Applicant and Property

5. Sue and I purchased our first farm in 1984. The farm was a run-down dry-stock farm in Mamaranui, Dargaville. Over the next 20 years we expanded our Dargaville farm land area by growing up to 60 acres of kumara, and running a very intensive sheep and beef unit.
6. During this time we became involved in, and won sections applicable to cropping in the Northland Environmental Awards. We also developed a system

to cure kumara off paddock which is still used by 99% of the kumara grower industry today.

7. We had an opportunity to try for something different and in 2009 subsequently purchased a rundown 400 acre property in Taranaki that had 18 hectares (800 trees) of an organic avocado orchard. The rest of the property was covered in gorse.
8. On the Taranaki property - we put 100 acres into QE2 Reserve (our second reserve as we had also made one on the Mamaranui farm), re-fenced, sprayed, and replaced the entire infrastructure. We also developed the avocados into conventional growing.
9. After three years we had the avocados producing, even though they were already five years old when we bought the property.
10. We also started our first commercial passionfruit enterprise by establishing and growing 4000sqm under cover for 6 years. We employed 1-2 part time staff to assist with the running of this operation

### *The Property*

11. In 2015, due to our strong affiliation to the area and our long-standing relationship with the previous landowners, we decided to semi-retire and purchase 98C Ōhiwa Harbour Road.
12. Prior to Sue and I purchasing the Property, the Bryan family (the original owners) had the property planted with kiwifruit since before 1983. The kiwifruit were subsequently removed when the industry collapsed in the 1990's which resulted in the formation of Zespri. In 2002 the Bryan family subdivided the property and the new owners removed the kiwifruit and replaced them with avocados.

13. With our wealth of knowledge, we took to managing the existing 250 avocado trees on arrival and established a small 2000sqm passionfruit orchard near our home in 2016 to offset poor avocado returns.
14. Due to the scale of the orchard, low product returns and inherent risk from weather events the avocado orchard has been demanding whilst returns are low.
15. Avocado returns have become very volatile due to:
  - (a) Bi-annual bearing;
  - (b) Wind/weather issues as the fruit are on the tree 12 months of the year;
  - (c) Work load;
  - (d) Pruning; and
  - (e) Compliance issues.
16. The passionfruit orchard has been challenged by ground disease however due to vital management processes the orchard continues to produce good volumes.
17. In recent years, an increase in avocado planting has also led to an over-supplied industry. This is world-wide. Plus, with the promotion led by pack-houses and nurseries who have a vested interest in numbers going through their facilities, this has led to corporate/hobby growers dominating the industry. This is as opposed to growers who previously dominated the industry and who rely on orchards for their livelihood.

18. In 2019, due to the projected avocado returns as well as the increase in orchard demands, Sue and I decided to explore future options for the Property.
19. We looked at placing the avocado orchard under contract management. However, due to the costs versus orchard gate returns (**OGR**) this could not be justified.
20. We considered the option of removing the avocados and replacing them with a full canopy cover with a crop change to red kiwifruit. But, due to the viable area for covering being less than 2 hectares the investments returns would make it marginal.
21. To put this into context, with reference to the New Zealand Kiwifruit Growers Incorporated (NZKGI) website's February 2022 newsletter, there are approximately 12,185 hectares of producing kiwifruit in New Zealand. Furthermore, Zespri is expecting to complete another 5000 hectares of SunGold kiwifruit in 2023 (gold and red varieties in addition to this).
22. At less than 2 hectares our production would equate to less than 0.01% of the current production.
23. We believe that the avocado industry could produce viable returns if some fundamental changes occurred within the industry. However, we have been through many downturns in our 35 years growing crops and in each downturn you need to make key decisions. You cannot expect different results doing the same things. Often it took three to five years to fully recover.
24. Regardless of improved returns, the scale and location of the Property's orchard, plus the increased challenging growing conditions, means the orchard is marginal.
25. Another option we considered was to increase the passionfruit enterprise, but this is a very high risk, labour intensive crop that would require skilled staff

who are not readily available. Disease in passionfruit is currently affecting 80% of the industry and while we are managing this on our orchard, people underestimate the work involved thus there are more failures than successes in this industry i.e. people grow too large an area and can't manage it effectively.

26. Due to the avocado orchard demands and returns we explored the option of subdividing our land and fulfilling our retirement plan after 40 years of farming.
27. We saw a well-designed subdivision complementing the already expanding housing development going on around us. The development would also give us the opportunity to invest in further native planting and infrastructure whilst realising some personal financial gain as a retirement fund.
28. This has become more important as the OGR would not allow us to live here if relying on the pension alone and like all farmers producing a wholesale product with retail input.
29. I have spent five years sampling kiwifruit so know nearly every orchard from Whakatane to Gisborne and there is little opportunity for this to expand in our area.
30. The below map shows some of the existing and new commercial orchards within the area (green dot being kiwifruit, blue dot being avocado and red arrow showing our property). There is no doubt room for growth in the Bay of Plenty region, but not within the Ōhiwa Peninsula. The local areas which have good capacity, are well suited and we expect to see further horticultural development are Paerata Ridge, Tablelands, Hukutaia Road and further up the East Coast.



## Subdividing

31. Sue and I understood that the development was going to be a discretionary activity and was likely to be notified. We felt that if the development of our land was undertaken correctly then it would add to the community and the natural environment.
32. In late 2021 and prior to any design development works commencing Sue and I approached all 12 neighbours and Upokorehe Iwi to discuss their thoughts on the potential development. Due to the positive feedback from the Iwi and much of the community we decided to pursue subdivision designs and design approval.
33. As part of our neighbourhood and Iwi consultation process, Sue and I agreed to:
  - (a) Sell proposed lots 8 and 14 to our neighbours at market value for the purpose of further native planting, view security, grazing and a buffer zone for the Bryans' kiwifruit operation;

- (b) Increase the western boundary setback to lot 12 to improve privacy to our neighbours within Ōhiwa Cove;
- (c) Plant natives on the western boundary of lots 10-12 and further native planting throughout the development;
- (d) Maintain the pest control program during and after development; and
- (e) Implement strict covenants on all buildings.

### **Community involvement**

34. Sue and I have a long-standing commitment to our community and play a role in the:

- (a) Ōhiwa harbour restoration;
- (b) Local and wider native planting projects;
- (c) Local pest control projects; and
- (d) Community hall maintenance and committee members among many others.

35. As part of the proposed development, we maintain a strong commitment to the land and our community.

36. Sue and I wish to retire in our current home and this growing neighbourhood.

### **Proposals for planting and pest control**

37. I have a background in Forest and Bird work and was involved in the rediscovery of the presumed extinct Taiko (Magenta petrel) on the Chatham



Islands between 1978-83. I was also involved in the establishment of Maude Island for Kakapo and Takahe release between 1976-1978. I have vast experience in pest control within native bush, rural properties, and within the communities we have lived in.

38. We sponsor an ongoing pest control program and trap line in Puketi Forest in Northland and have done so for over 30 years.
39. The results we have seen over the last five years on the Property, and within the Ōhiwa Peninsula have been profound and are a credit to the work which our community has been doing.
40. The planting of over 3000 native trees as opposed to the monoculture of the avocado orchard will greatly enhance the biodiversity. It will provide not only an aesthetics benefit complementing the Reeves reserves, the Pa Site and Mountain Holdings Limited bush, it will provide a further link to existing planting for flora and fauna. This planting in conjunction with the pest control plan will create an ecosystem for increased population and permanent habitation.
41. The trees selected within the landscaping plan knit with the local bush and provide a variety of flowers and fruit in which local natives prefer. The current planting on Lot 9 which was once a formal garden, completely replaced with 'islands' of native plantings, ranging from 3-6 years old, demonstrate what can be achieved.
42. Sue and I have been involved in the Ōhiwa Sanctuary since its inception.
43. Our pest control has to date resulted in:
  - (a) In the last five years, over 300 pests removed from the Property alone;

- (b) Five kiwis now live in the area;
  - (c) A significant increase in small bird numbers;
  - (d) Sea birds have returned to nesting on the pa site;
  - (e) A massive decrease in the rat population on the Property; and
  - (f) In general, the Ōhiwa Harbour is returning to its previous value as a safe harbour for birdlife. This is due to the pest control and restoration planting which we are both involved in.
44. Attached at Appendix 1 is the pest control scheme currently in place.
45. Sue Stilwell and I wish to carry out the following activities as part of the consent:
- (a) Remove around 600 exotic trees and plant approx. 1ha or over 3000 natives;
  - (b) Strategically plant native trees to the ridgeline to bring back natural character to this landscape. As agreed with Te Upokorehe Iwi;
  - (c) Plant, manage and maintain the native trees for 3 years. Based on the native planting which occurred between 2015 – 2018 on lot 9, we expect upwards of 1mtr of growth per year on almost all trees. For the trees down on the lower areas, which will not be as exposed to wind/ sea breeze, this is likely to be more. 3 years of management will ensure trees establish well;
  - (d) Have a covenant placed on all native trees;

- (e) Remove approximately 200 avocado trees and maintain the remaining trees within the proposed subdivision sections;
- (f) All retained trees to be cut down to approximately 4 meters. This will allow for easier maintenance and mitigate the risk of trees being too close to future homes;
- (g) Maintain the passionfruit production whilst utilising approximately 1.5 hectares of the remaining viable horticultural land for the development of homes;
- (h) Maintain approximately 2.1 hectares of the existing grazing land (being part lot 6 and lot 8);
- (i) Maintain or improve the visual effects to the surrounding environment by removing shelterbelts, planting natives, upgrading roads, installing new timber rail fencing, and placing strict covenants over the proposed development; and
- (j) Maintain and improve the community pest control scheme and place a covenant on cats within the development. As a dog owner myself I find dogs much easier to control. We will be requiring any dogs within the development to be Kiwi aversion trained, under control always and contained during the night.

## **Conclusion**

46. We understand that the Council planner has concerns with the proposal and as discussed by Mr Crossan we propose a 7 lot subdivision as an alternative in an effort to address those concerns.

47. Sue and I ask the commissioner to grant resource consent to the subdivision (either 9 or 7 lots), subject to the conditions discussed by our planner.

Gavin Stilwell

10 August 2022

**Appendix 1**  
**Pest Control over the last 5 years**

**2018**

<b>Animal</b>	<b>Number Killed</b>
Possoms	46
Rats	9
Hedgehogs	2

**2019**

<b>Animal</b>	<b>Number Killed</b>	<b>Method</b>
Possoms	24	Shot
Rats	15	13 -DOC 200 traps 2 - Shot

\*Used 20kg rat poison in D Block.

**2020**

<b>Animal</b>	<b>Number Killed</b>	<b>Method</b>
Possoms	32	Mostly shot
Rats	25	Traps
Hedgehogs	13	Traps
Mice	8	Traps
Hares	2	Shot
Cats	1	Trap
Magpies	4	Shot

\*Over 10kg of Ditrac used.

**2021**

<b>Animal</b>	<b>Number Killed</b>
Possoms	35
Rats	43
Hedgehogs	19
Cats	4
Hares	1

**2022 (as of 1 August 2022)**

<b>Animal</b>	<b>Number Killed</b>
Possoms	11
Rats	23
Hares	1
Cats	1

\* Over 8kg poison used in the bait stations

