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Report to the Landcare Committee
from Susan Edwards, Manager, Regional Parks (Strategy & Marketing)

Kilmister Block, Belmont Regional Park

1. Purpose

- To update the Committee on the Hutt City Council's decision to sell the land in the Kilmister Block below the 250 metre contour.
- To seek the agreement of the Committee to a letter being sent to the Hutt City Council reaffirming the Regional Council's position on the proposed sale.

2. Current Situation

At its meeting in December 1999, the Hutt City Council decided to sell the land in the Kilmister Block below the 250 metre contour (excluding Speedy's Stream bush).

The vote was close, with the Mayor using his casting vote to sell the land.

We understand that subsequently some Councillors against the sale, have sought a rescinding motion. This is likely to be heard in March.

There was public opposition to the sale at the December meeting, with all but two submitters against the sale. A petition against the sale, signed by almost 3000 people, was presented to the City Council.

A letter in The Hutt News on 18 January by Mayor Terris states:

I accept that considerable community concern exists about the possibility of this land being sold to private developers, and so have asked our Council staff to investigate alternatives which could be pursued, to both preserve the recreation values involved, and also to ensure that some proceeds follow to allow for debt reduction. These options could include:

- (a) *a deal involving the WRC and ourselves;*
- (b) *purchase by another agency;*
- (c) *using the Hutt City Council's own reserve fund to make a financial transfer to apply an amount of money to debt reduction and then give the land over to the WRC.*

Earlier in the article Mayor Terris says:

However, it is important to stress that if the WRC wishes to consolidate the regional park, it can do so by buying the Kilmister land. Indeed, it has an obligation to do so.

This statement suggests a potential approach to the Regional Council.

3. **Regional Council Position to Date**

The Regional Council has not formally considered the proposed sale. A request for the Council's view was sought by Hutt City Council in October 1999. However, the timeframe for response did not allow consideration by the Council, so officers sent a response (copy attached) based on our understanding of the Regional Council's view. The matter had been traversed in several managers reports, Councillor and Chairperson requested briefings. These discussions provided the basis of the comments in the response.

A summary of the position to date is:

- A preference for the whole of the Kilmister Block to be retained in the Park.
- The key areas of the Kilmister Block for retention in Belmont Regional Park are the:
 - land above the 250 metre contour;
 - geological features (peneplain remnants and Boulder Hill);
 - bush remnants;
 - walkways;
 - land and bush adjacent to Speedy's Stream.
- The Regional Council acknowledges the Hutt City Council's right to decide the future of the land it owns.
- The remaining land, (e.g., above 250 metre contour), should be vested in the Regional Council for Regional Park purposes.

These sentiments were confirmed by the Councillors who attended the Hutt City Council hearing on the proposed sale.

On the issue of the Regional Council purchasing the land either above or below the 250 metre contour, the position has been that the Council would be unlikely to do so as:

- it could set a precedent for other landowners in Belmont Regional Park to ask the WRC to purchase their land (there are five other landowners);
- it could set a precedent for other Hutt City Council land within Belmont and East Harbour Regional Parks;
- the WRC doesn't have sufficient funds in its land purchase account to acquire the areas we may potentially be asked to acquire;
- the WRC may have other priorities for purchasing land, (e.g., to resolve the access problems to East Harbour Regional Park);
- the majority of visitors to Belmont Regional Park, (e.g., between 70-80 percent) come from the Hutt City areas, therefore, it is appropriate that the Hutt City Council maintains its contributions to the Park.

4. **Proposed Action**

In view of the proposed rescinding motion, it might be useful for the Regional Council to clearly state its position on the sale to Hutt City Council. If the Committee concurs with the sentiments expressed here, it would be appropriate for the Council Chairman to write to the Hutt City Council formally advising of the Regional Council's position.

5. **Communication**

In view of the extensive media coverage of this issue, there is unlikely to be anything gained by the Council issuing a press release at this stage.

6. **Recommendation**

That the Committee approves the Council Chairman writing to Hutt City Council to convey the key points outlined in this report on the Regional Council's position on the proposed sale of the Kilmister Block and that it will be unlikely to purchase the land if offered for sale.

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