



Southern Environmental Association

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World Wetlands Day, 2nd February 2009

Hon. Tim Groser, M.P.
Minister of Conservation
Parliament Buildings
Fax No. 0-4-817 6511
WELLINGTON

Hon. Simon Power, M.P.
Minister of State Owned Enterprises
Parliament Buildings
Fax No. 0-4-817 6503
WELLINGTON

Dear Mr Groser and Mr Power,

WORLD WETLANDS DAY: REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT TO ACT TO DESIGNATE OPAU WETLAND IN WELLINGTON CITY AS A NATURE RESERVE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

On this, World Wetlands Day 2009, we are writing on behalf of the Southern Environmental Association to request that the Government take steps to designate the Opau Wetland, south of Makara, in Wellington City, as a Nature Reserve in terms of the Reserves Act 1977.

Background to World Wetlands Day

As noted above, today, 2nd February 2009, is World Wetlands Day. It marks the date of the adoption of the Convention on Wetlands on 2 February 1971, in the Iranian city of Ramsar on the shores of the Caspian Sea. Each year since 1997, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and groups of citizens at all levels of the community have taken advantage of the opportunity to undertake actions aimed at raising public awareness of wetland values and benefits in general, and the Ramsar Convention in particular.

The Opau Wetland

The Opau Wetland in Wellington City has been owned by the Government for many years – previously by the New Zealand Post Office and Telecom (when that company was State-Owned), and more recently through Meridian Energy Limited.

The Opau Wetland is the only remaining sizable swamp within Wellington City boundaries that is in a relatively natural condition. It is also the only wetland in Wellington City with raupo (*Typha orientalis*) present.

The wetland occupies the lower part of the Opau Valley and is edged by various attractive remnant stands of coastal forest and regenerating shrublands. The indigenous vegetation around the edges of the swamp is important for the ecological integrity of the swamp.

The significant ecological values of this wetland were highlighted in 2006 by ecologist Dr Maggy Wassilieff in evidence to the Environment Court.

We are enclosing a plant species list and a number of photographs of the Opau Wetland.

We note that the Opau Valley swamp and the surrounding vegetation are not required for the purposes of Meridian's wind farm which is currently being established on ridges on the same block of public land. Moreover, public access around the swamp would not create any security issues for the wind farm, because the turbines and access roads are located far above the wetland.

It is regrettable that a publicly-owned wetland site with such ecological values still does not have the highest form of legal protection.

Key Issues

Key issues relating to the Opau Wetland are as follows:

- Despite its considerable ecological importance, it does not have reserve status
- Although it is public land, public recreational access is still restricted; yet such restriction is not required for the security of the wind farm to be operated on ridge tops high above the wetland.
- Over the years, the swamp and forest ecosystems of the Opau Valley have been unnecessarily damaged by wandering stock.
- Although the wetland is currently owned by Meridian Energy, its key values are ecological, and it does not have obvious energy production potential. .

Recommendations to the Government for protection of the Opau Wetland

We formally request the Government to initiate the following steps:

1. Designate the whole of the Opau Wetland and adjacent vegetation around the rim of the wetland as a Nature Reserve in terms of the Reserves Act 1977.
2. Permanently remove all sheep and other introduced stock animals (such as sheep) from the site, by fencing off the site.
3. Implement an ongoing pest animal control plan to control possums on the site.
4. Set in place a plan to provide for unrestricted public walking and cycling access within (say) three years, including the creation of formal walking tracks around the wetland, well away from any wind turbines.

Legal ownership

A secondary issue is the legal ownership of the site. As part of the process of fully protecting the Opau Wetland, there would need to be discussion as to the most sensible ongoing legal ownership of the wetland site. This discussion would need to involve local authorities, conservation organisations which could play a role in the stewardship of the site, and Meridian itself. It seems unlikely at this stage that Meridian Energy would be the optimum long term legal owner of the site, due to Meridian's commercial objectives as a State Owned Enterprise. However, the identity of the legal owner of the wetland is less important than securing its full protection.

Conclusion

SEA hopes that the Government will find it possible to take positive action in response to this request, and we would be keen to be involved in any process that you may initiate to explore the issues and requests which we have raised.

We are copying this letter to the Ramsar Convention Secretariat, the Department of Conservation (Wellington), Wellington Botanical Society, the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society (Wellington), Quartz Hill Reserve Charitable Trust, Meridian Energy Limited, and various news media for their information.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,


Robert Logan and June Epsom
Secretary and Chairperson
Southern Environmental Association
phone 04 38 38 109 and 04 384 5175
fax 04 4 387 2639

Copies to:

Ramsar Convention Secretariat: Fax 0041-22 999 0169; ramsar@ramsar.org

Department of Conservation

Wellington Botanical Society

Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society

Quartz Hill Reserve Charitable Trust

Meridian Energy Limited:

LIST SOME INDIGENOUS VASCULAR PLANTS OF OPAU VALLEY, MAKARA,
WELLINGTON, CENTRED ON NZMS 260 SHEET R27 Pt.Q27 GR 950515,
COMPILED ON 30 AUGUST 1998 BY BJ MITCALFE AND JC HORNE, REVISED
BY WELLINGTON BOTANICAL SOCIETY, 5/9/98.

| BOTANICAL NAME | MAAORI NAME | COMMON NAME |
|----------------------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| GYMNOSPERMS | | |
| <i>Dacrycarpus dacrydioides</i> | kahikatea | kahikatea |
| MONOCOT TREES | | |
| <i>Cordyline australis</i> | tii koouka | cabbage tree |
| <i>Rhopalostylis sapida</i> | niikau | nikau |
| DICOT TREES AND SHRUBS | | |
| <i>Brachyglottis repanda</i> | rangiora | rangiora |
| <i>Carmichaelia</i> sp. | tarangahape | broom |
| <i>Carpodetus serratus</i> | putaputaweetaa | putaputaweta |
| <i>Coprosma areolata</i> | | thin-leaved coprosma |
| <i>Coprosma grandifolia</i> | kaanono | kanono |
| <i>Coprosma propinqua</i> | | |
| <i>Coprosma rhamnoides</i> | | |
| <i>Corynocarpus laevigatus</i> | karak | karak |
| <i>Dysoxylum spectabile</i> | kohekohe | kohekohe |
| <i>Geniostoma ligustrifolium</i> | | |
| var. <i>ligustrifolium</i> | hangehange | hangehange |
| <i>Griselinia lucida</i> | puka | broadleaf |
| <i>Hebe parviflora</i> | koromiko taranga | tree hebe |
| <i>Hedycarya arborea</i> | porokaiwhiri | pigeonwood |
| <i>Kunzea ericoides</i> | kaanuka | kanuka |
| <i>Leptospermum scoparium</i> | maanuka | manuka |
| <i>Leucopogon fasciculatus</i> | mingimingi | big mingimingi |
| <i>Leucopogon fraseri</i> | paa tootara | patotara |
| <i>Macropiper excelsum</i> | kawakawa | kawakawa |
| <i>Melicope ternata</i> | wharangi | wharangi |
| <i>Melicytus ramiflorus</i> | maahoe | mahoe |
| <i>Myoporum laetum</i> | ngaio | ngaio |
| <i>Myrsine australis</i> | maapou | mapou |
| <i>Olearia paniculata</i> | akiraho | akiraho |
| <i>Olearia solandri</i> | takupurenga | coastal tree daisy |
| <i>Ozothamnus leptophyllus</i> | tauhinu | tauhinu |
| <i>Pennantia corymbosa</i> | kaikoomako | kaikomako |
| <i>Pseudopanax crassifolius</i> | horoeka | lancewood |
| MONOCOT LIANES | | |
| <i>Ripogonum scandens</i> | kareao | supplejack |
| DICOT LIANES | | |
| <i>Calystegia soldanella</i> | panahi | shore bindweed |
| <i>Calystegia tuguriorum</i> | poowhiwhi | NZ bindweed |
| <i>Clematis forsteri</i> | pikiarero | small white clematis |

OPAU STREAM CONT'D, PAGE 2.

| | | |
|--------------------------------|------------|---------------------|
| <i>Metrosideros diffusa</i> | raataa | white climbing rata |
| <i>Metrosideros perforata</i> | akatea | clinging rata |
| <i>Muehlenbeckia australis</i> | pohuehue | pohuehue |
| <i>Muehlenbeckia complexa</i> | pohuehue | pohuehue |
| <i>Parsonsia heterophylla</i> | kaiwhiria | parsonsia |
| <i>Rubus cissoides</i> | taataraamo | bush lawyer |

FERNS

| | | |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Adiantum cunninghamii</i> | huruhuru tapairu | maidenhair |
| <i>Arthropteris tenella</i> | | jointed fern |
| <i>Asplenium bulbiferum</i> | manamana | hen & chickens |
| <i>Asplenium hookerianum</i> var. <i>colensoi</i> | | |
| <i>Asplenium flabellifolium</i> | | necklace fern |
| <i>Asplenium flaccidum</i> | makawe o Raukatauri | hanging spleenwort |
| <i>Asplenium hookerianum</i> var. <i>hookerianum</i> | | Hooker's spleenwort |
| <i>Asplenium oblongifolium</i> | huruhuru whenua | shining spleenwort |
| <i>Asplenium appendiculatum</i> ssp. <i>maritimum</i> | | |
| <i>Blechnum chambersii</i> | nini | lance fern |
| <i>Blechnum filiforme</i> | paanako | threadfern |
| <i>Blechnum minus</i> | kiokio | swamp kiokio |
| <i>Blechnum novae-zelandiae</i> | kiokio | kiokio |
| <i>Cyathea dealbata</i> | ponga | silver fern |
| <i>Cyathea medullaris</i> | mamaku | black tree fern |
| <i>Hypolepis ambigua</i> | rarauhi nehenehe | |
| <i>Lastreopsis glabella</i> | | smooth shield fern |
| <i>Lastreopsis velutina</i> | | velvet fern |
| <i>Microsorium pustulatum</i> | koowaowao | hound's tongue |
| <i>Microsorium scandens</i> | mokimoki | fragrant fern |
| <i>Pellaea rotundifolia</i> | tarawera | round-leaved fern |
| <i>Pneumatopteris pennigera</i> | paakau | gully fern |
| <i>Polystichum</i> sp. | pikopiko | shield fern |
| <i>Pteridium esculentum</i> | raarahu | bracken |
| <i>Pteris macilenta</i> | titipo | sweet brake |
| <i>Pteris tremula</i> | turawera | shaking brake |
| <i>Pyrrosia eleagnifolia</i> | ota | leather-leaf fern |

ORCHIDS

| | | |
|----------------------------|----------|------------|
| <i>Pterostylis banksii</i> | tutukiwi | greenhood |
| <i>Thelymitra</i> sp. | maaikuku | sun orchid |

GRASSES

| | | |
|--------------------------|--------|----------------|
| <i>Cortaderia toetoe</i> | toetoe | toetoe |
| <i>Poa cita</i> | wii | silver tussock |
| <i>Poa imbecilla</i> | | weak poa |

SEDGES

| | | |
|---------------------------|---------|---------------------|
| <i>Carex flagellifera</i> | maanaia | Glen Murray tussock |
| <i>Carex lessoniana</i> | rautahi | |

OPAU STREAM CONT'D, PAGE 3.

| | | |
|---|---------------|-------------------------|
| Carex secta | puurei | |
| Carex dissita | | |
| Cyperus ustulatus | upoko tangata | giant umbrella sedge |
| Isolepis cernua | | slender clubrush |
| Isolepis prolifer | | three-square |
| Uncinia leptostachya | | |
| Uncinia uncinata | matau a Maui | hooked sedge |
| RUSHES | | |
| Juncus pallidus | | giant rush |
| Juncus planifolius | | grass-leaved rush |
| Luzula picta | | woodrush |
| MONOCOT HERBS (other than orchids, sedges and rushes) | | |
| Astelia fragrans | kakaha | bush lily |
| Phormium cookianum | wharariki | coastal flax |
| Typha orientalis | raupoo | raupoo |
| DICOT HERBS | | |
| Acaena anserinifolia | piripiri | bidibid |
| Aciphylla squarrosa | taramea | speargrass |
| Cardamine debilis | panapana | NZ bitter cress |
| Centella uniflora | | centella |
| Craspedia uniflora | | |
| var. maritima | | woollyhead |
| Crassula sieberiana | | a crassula sp. |
| Dichondra repens | | Mercury Bay weed |
| Disphyma australe | horokaka | NZ iceplant |
| Einadia triandra | poipapa | pigweed |
| Epilobium nummularifolium | | creeping willowherb |
| Epilobium rotundifolium | | round-leaved willowherb |
| Lilaeopsis novae-zelandiae | | |
| Hydrocotyle moschata | | hairy pennywort |
| Hydrocotyle heteromeria | | waxweed |
| Leptinella dioica | | shore cotula |
| Leptinella squalida | | |
| Lilaeopsis novae-zealandiae | | |
| Linum monogynum | rauhuia | NZ linen flax |
| Lobelia anceps | punakuru | shore lobelia |
| Oxalis exilis | | yellow oxalis |
| Parietaria debilis | | NZ pellitory |
| Plantago raoulii | kopakopa | plantain |
| Samolus repens | maakoako | |
| Senecio lautus | | shore groundsel |
| Stellaria parviflora | kohukohu | chickweed |
| Tetragonia trigyna | kookihi | NZ spinach |
| Urtica incisa | ongaonga | stinging nettle |



