

Kia koutou. My name is Helen Grove. I am here to speak to you on behalf of myself, my whanau, my community in Hawkins Hill and my wider community of Mana Whenua.

Before I begin, I would like to be extremely clear that myself, my whanau and my communities do not oppose the protection of indigenous biodiversity nor oppose committing to protecting rural land for our future mokopuna. On the contrary, we in fact strive to protect the land we have been so lucky to receive and live our life on the land using principles of tikanga passed on from our ancestors to maintain the fauna and flora. It is because we wish for this land to thrive and continue to be used for future generations that I am here to make this speech today. There is no doubt that measures need to be taken to protect Aotearoa's beautiful environment, but my whanau and I strongly believe that many of the suggestions raised via SNA's cause more damage to the land and the people who live on it than not. Despite the very well-meaning intentions behind the introduction of SNA's, there has been a disconnect from the theory of them and the reality of many rural land owners. Today I urge the council to listen and be the voice of progress and guardianship that we need in order to look after those in rural areas.

I would like to begin by telling you a bit about how I came into the position of land ownership. I am a Poneke local, who attended Hataitai School and Wellington East Girls College. I have worked in numerous industries across the city including hospitality and currently healthcare. I was fortunate enough to become a mother in 2006. My goal since then has been to purchase a home or land for my family to live on. Unfortunately when my child was very young, my partner experienced health issues which we soon learned to be cancer which was rapidly progressing. After several years, our family was able to push through and we received the miracle of my partners health returning. As we began to rebuild our lives, it was evident we were starting at square 1, maybe even minus one. Between medical costs and the costs to restart our lives, the idea of owning a home seemed beyond out of reach.

But in 2018, a conversation at my laundromat changed everything and we became aware of an opportunity to buy land in Hawkins Hill. Upon seeing the land, I felt such hope for the future of my family. I was excited to finally have a home for my children, and to live in the ways like my ancestors. We put months of negotiations, planning, hard-work and our entire savings into acquiring this land with the goal to build a home for ourselves and our future generations. What we did not anticipate was.....

I am telling you this back story so you understand that we are regular people, who were blessed with something we wanted to guarantee our family's security despite years of bad luck. We are not uber wealthy people with goals to exploit the land or erect high rises, we are people who want the best for our whanau. Our goal has always been to protect the land, live by my whanau's tikanga to care for it and to ensure that my mokopuna have a place to call home. But we cannot keep pouring money and resources that we do not have into this land if council does not step up to protect our constitutional rights as citizens, mana whenua and land owners.

Government has introduced SNA's and provided a very loose structure with wide gaps, that without Council stepping up to vouch for the community, allow for the breach of constitutional rights, breach of Te Tiriti and Tikanga, and damage to the biodiversity and people and iwi's livelihoods.

When we contemplate areas of law concerning constitutional rights, we must use a higher level of caution and consideration in order to ensure that those rights are upheld. This is a principle long engrained in our country's history, acknowledged in our old ways of applying tikanga principles and in the ways brought during colonisation. It is indisputable that rights must be protected. When our government introduced the SNA's, the conditional rights to land ownership were not adequately upheld nor properly acknowledged. My daughter always refers to a quote from Sir Geoffery Palmer when she talks about this area of law: when the government diminishes or expands the scope of human rights, they must look the people in their eyes and tell them. This did not happen. The government has continuously diminished the people's right to their own property without adequately acknowledging what they are doing to people. This is why we urge the council to act, and breach the gaps that harm people left by the government.

I have contemplated speaking to you about the numerous ways in which the government has imposed the SNA's both unlawfully and unconstitutionally - but I believe that today it is more important to speak to you on how the SNA's negatively impact our communities and how council might better protect both the land and land owners.

You have heard from myself and other members of my Hawkins Hill community as to how many of us are humble land-owners with the sole intentions of living off the land and protecting it for our descendants and community. This is a shared sentiment across many rural land owners in Aotearoa.

The SNA's currently impose an attack on whenua Maori and the interests of many iwi and mana whenua. Across the country we are seeing numerous councils grabbing up great amounts of Maori land under SNA's such as the Far North District Council which allocated 135,694 hectares of Maori land as 'untouchable', around 48% of districts Whenua Maori, and Whangarei allocating 80,000 hectares of land as SNAs which resulted in half of the Maori land in the region being allocated. To me and my community, this is an undermining of kaitiakitanga principles, a breach of the constitution and theft of land.

My daughter who studies law raised a point she learnt in her courses. If I were to steal your bike, ea, or hurt, is not that I am riding the bike around the city, it is that you no longer can use that bike. Applying that logic to this situation, it is beyond clear that what the government has allowed for is *theft*. This is a repeat of our colonial history, where land was taken through force, manipulation and laws like the *Land Works Act* from our communities. This land is supposed to be protected, through Te Tiriti, through the Bill of Human Rights, through countless acts, negotiations and sentiments from Government.

And currently, it is not.

Our mana whenua have been let down by our government and their lack of action and protection. Alongside many well meaning home and land-owners across the nation and many individuals working in agriculture, who are the backbone of our country's economy. Today I urge the council to listen to what we are saying. We do not dispute the need for protection of indigenous areas, but we encourage council to work and listen to home owners and iwis on ways to collaboratively protect biodiversity while also preventing harm to individuals.

To be frank, the current restrictions of the SNA's are far too intense and harmful. They have been created by people who clearly do not understand tikanga nor understand biodiversity. They cause damage both to people's livelihoods via immense expenses and run-around strategies, but also to the nature as many of the restrictions are defined poorly or are non-existent and there is not an adequate structure of people with adequate biodiversity knowledge to provide a clear process. A clear example of this is:

Finally, the Environmental Defence Society chairman and executive direction Gary Taylor stated that he hoped kiwis would be 'united in wanting to protect what is left of indigenous forests and wetlands'....

We are. We have been. Our communities have been fighting for land protection for decades. We know it more than most people. But we want our rights to be upheld. We want collaboration, and we need it in order to achieve the goals government has outlined. We need better processes with people who actually have expert knowledge in the fields of biodiversity and tikanga, and we need collaborative processes for community members to engage in. We need the voices of people who have poured their life, soul and bank accounts into this lands protection to be heard.

To quote a Whakatauki you likely will have heard many times before. He Waka eke noa. We are all in the waka together. Gary Taylor is correct, we all want to protect this land. So let us work together, to protect each other and care for this land in th best way we can. As the capital city of this country, we urge you to be the change and the progress and show other councils the way to protect the land *AND the PEOPLE*.