

**BEFORE HEARING COMMISSIONERS
IN TAUPŌ**

UNDER THE Resource Management Act 1991 (“**Act**”)

IN THE MATTER OF Proposed Plan Change 42 Rural Chapter - General Rural Environment and Rural Lifestyle Environment

AND IN THE MATTER OF a submission seeking the rezoning of the site located at 387 Whakaroa Road to Rural Lifestyle Zone and other relief

BETWEEN **STEVE HAWKINS**
Submitter

AND **TAUPŌ DISTRICT COUNCIL**
Planning authority

STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF TREFFERY BARNETT

Before a Hearing Panel: Chairperson David McMahon, Commissioner Liz Burge, and Councillors Yvonne Westerman and Kevin Taylor.

INTRODUCTION

Background, qualifications and experience

1. My full name is Treffery Barnett. I am a senior ecologist and the Technical Director Freshwater with Bioresearches, Consulting Biologists, Auckland, a subsidiary of Babbage Consultants Limited.
2. I have practiced as a consultant ecologist for the past 30 years. I specialise in freshwater and coastal ecology and I have been responsible for undertaking and coordinating numerous assessments of rivers, streams, wetlands, estuaries and coastal environments throughout New Zealand.
3. I have a Bachelor of Science and Master of Science (Hons) both from the University of Auckland and I am a member of the New Zealand Freshwater

Sciences Society, the Ornithological Society of New Zealand, and Environment Institute of Australia and New Zealand

Involvement in the Project

4. I was engaged by Te Tuhi Estate Limited in December 2022 to assess the ecological values of the site and identify ecological constraints to the proposed development.
5. I carried out in-field ecological investigations of the site on the 19th and 20th January 2023, and am the primary author of the ecological report for the site dated 11 August 2023, titled "Te Tuhi Precinct Plan Change: Baseline Ecology".
6. I understand that the submitter, through Te Tuhi Estate Limited, is advancing its Proposal through this Plan Change 42 process as well as pursuing a resource consent application. Much of the technical work and documentation will be common to both processes. The application for resource consent is expected to be lodged shortly, and is expected to be advanced in parallel with the Plan Change 42 process (although any hearing of the resource consent may be deferred until the outcome of submission on Plan Change 42 is known).

Purpose and scope of evidence

7. The purpose of this evidence is to confirm and summarise the findings in the report that I led the authorship of: "*Te Tuhi Plan Change: Baseline Ecology*". I attach a copy of that report to this evidence as **Appendix 1**.

Expert witness code of conduct

8. I have been provided with a copy of the Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses contained in the Environment Court's 2023 Practice Note. While this is not an Environment Court hearing, I have read and agree to comply with that Code. This evidence is within my area of expertise, except where I state that I am relying upon the specified evidence of another person. I have not omitted to consider material facts known to me that might alter or detract from the opinions that I express.

EVIDENCE

Summary of findings in “*Te Tuhi Plan Change: Baseline Ecology*”

9. The site is a 344 ha property located in a rural setting, primarily vegetated in pasture and with mixed-stock farming the current land use.
10. The Te Tuhi Estate is current zoned Rural and overlooks Lake Taupō to the west – south and east. The site is bounded by Scenic Reserves to the east and south, a Recreational Reserve to the south-west, and two smaller Scenic Reserves form part of the upper north-west boundary, with the remainder of the upper north-west boundary a pastural block (Figure 1).
11. The terrestrial vegetation units identified on site were:
 - (a) Exotic grassland;
 - (b) Exotic trees;
 - (c) Early stage native restoration planting / regenerating shrubland; and
 - (d) Regenerating native broadleaf forest.
12. No reserves or protected natural areas were identified on site.
13. The botanical and habitat values of the exotic grassland and exotic trees were assessed as negligible or low.
14. The botanical and habitat values of the early stage native restoration planting shrubland and the regenerating native broadleaf forest were assessed as low to moderate, primarily due to the potential for provision of habitat for ‘at-risk’ fauna.
15. The site provides habitat for Not-Threatened common native birds, one ‘At Risk-Declining’ native bird (the pipit), and one ‘Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable’ native bird (the long-tailed cuckoo), and is considered to have moderate ecological values for avifauna, based on the proximity of records for these species.
16. Overall, the value of the site as it pertains to native herpetofauna is considered moderate, due to the lack of observations within 5 km of the site, but the presence of habitat that may suit the ‘At Risk – Declining’ cretulate skink.

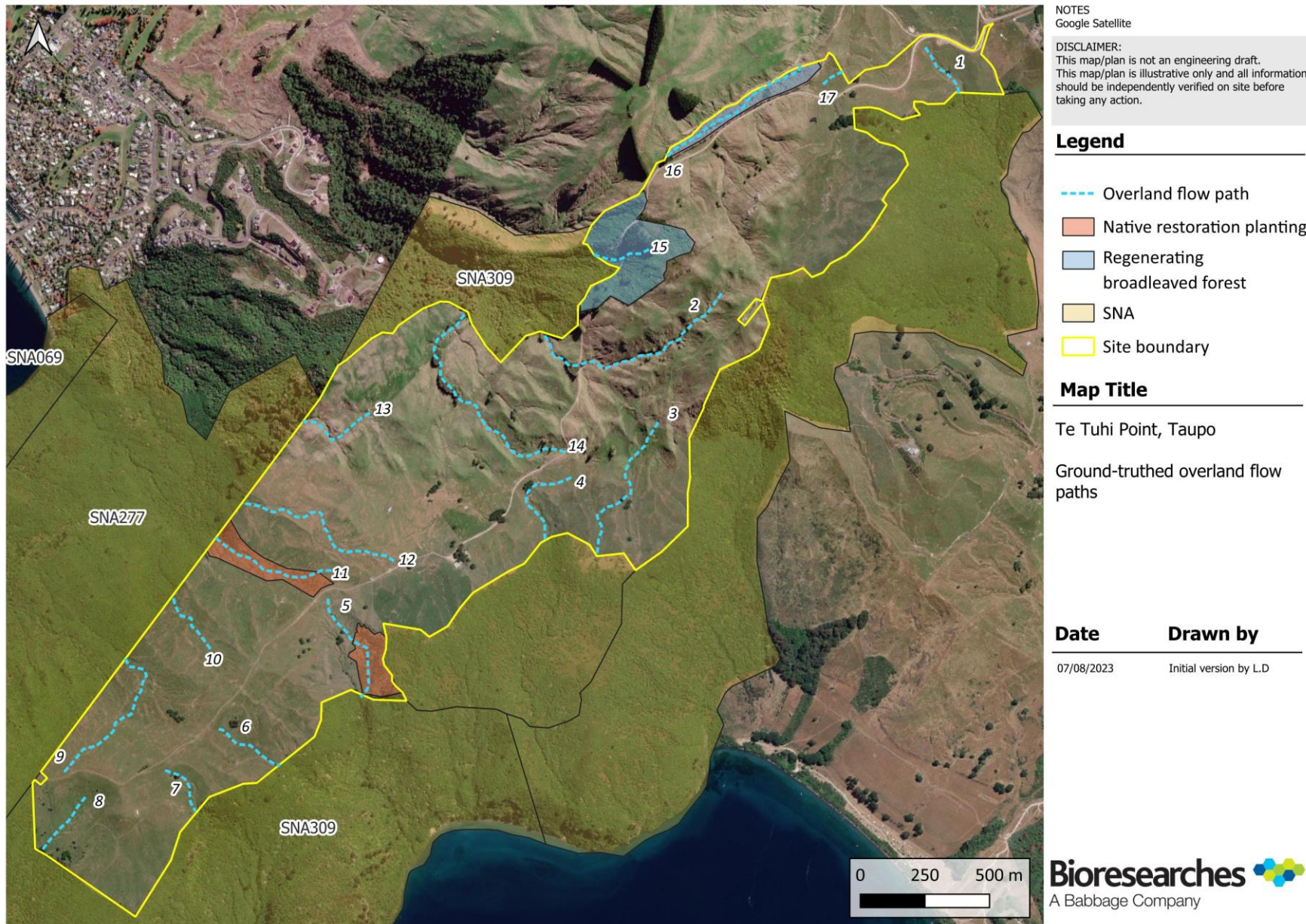
17. The site generally lacked mature trees, with the exception of a few large and isolated exotics and the possibility of some larger trees in the regenerating mixed native broadleaf forest. The regenerating mixed broadleaf forest may provide suitable bat habitat, and is more likely to support roosting due to the closed canopy than the isolated exotic trees. However, due to the lack of bats within a 25 km radius of the site, the ecological value of the site in relation to bats is considered low.
18. The seventeen predicted flow paths, plus numerous other flow paths in gully systems, were ground truthed and classified during the site assessment as to their artificial, intermittent or permanent classification. These predicted watercourses within the Te Tuhi Estate were found to be largely absent, consisting of overland flow paths and vegetated with pasture grass.
19. With the exception of a stream located in the base of the gully in the regenerating broadleaf forest area north west of the entrance road (Figure 1, flow path 16), there were no streams identified within or near the proposed development sites.
20. No natural inland wetlands or potential wetlands were present within 100m of the works areas proposed for Te Tuhi Point, and there were no indicators (based on desk top and the site visit) for wetlands in the wider site.
21. The ecological value of the freshwater habitats of the site are assessed as negligible due to the lack of permanent or intermittent habitat within the site.
22. Recommendations to minimise the potential for adverse effects on native fauna include a lizard survey prior to commencement of development; and to avoid vegetation clearance during the bird nesting season (September to February), or, if unavoidable, pre-vegetation clearance surveys and management.
23. The extensive revegetation that is to accompany the development of the site provides numerous ecological benefits, including connection to the wider landscape, food resources and habitat for native fauna. The native vegetation cover of the site will greatly increase, from its current position as predominantly sparse farmland. The surrounding native forest within

the reserves neighbouring the site will also receive ecological benefits, due to the buffering effect of the planting along the site's boundaries.

11 August 2023

Treffery Barnett

Figure 1. Te Tuhi Point Habitats and Predicted Flow Paths.



Annexure A
Te Tuhi Plan Change: Baseline Ecology