

**BEFORE A HEARINGS PANEL
APPOINTED BY NELSON CITY COUNCIL**

IN THE MATTER of Private Plan Change 28 – Maitahi Bayview

**AND IN THE MATTER of Clause 21 of the First Schedule of the Resource
Management Act 1991**

**EVIDENCE OF ANNETTE MILLIGAN FOR SAVE THE MAITAI INC
PERSONAL STATEMENT ON THE VALUE OF THE MAITAI VALLEY
AND CONCERN ABOUT THE POTENTIAL LOSS OF THIS TREASURE
DATED 11 JULY 2022**

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INTRODUCTION

1. My name is Annette Margaret Milligan. I have lived in the region since 1982 and in Nelson city for the past 35 of those 40 years.
2. I have a BA (Otago University), Dip Teaching (Dunedin Teachers' College), Diploma Nursing (Nelson Polytechnic). In 1989 I established the Independent Nursing Practice (INP) Medical Clinic in Nelson, a women and adolescent-focused, nurse-led sexual and reproductive health centre that was one of the first of its kind and unique in its approach. In 1993 I was one of 500 women awarded a New Zealand Suffrage Centennial Medal. Other awards for my work include a Mobil Radio Award for Best Information Series in 1992 and the Commonwealth Award for Excellence in Women's Health in 1997.
3. In 2019 I was made an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to health, in particular to nursing.
4. I have a deep interest in health and well-being, including physical activity, and in this regard I have strong ties to the peaceful, rural setting of the Maitai Valley, which I believe to be a vital component of community health.

INFORMATION RELIED UPON

5. I have not read all of the information that has been lodged in relation to PPC28, but I have looked at the most recent Structure Plan in Mr Milne's evidence so that I understand in a general sense what type of development is proposed.
6. I have also seen the indicative masterplan provided as part of the applicant's rebuttal evidence.

EVIDENCE

Personal Context

7. I have a strong interest in health and well-being including physical activity, which I embedded into my life in 1986 with the realisation, in my early 30s, that if I wanted to be healthy, I had to change some things in my life. I started running, became a competitive triathlete and have never stopped running, walking, cycling and swimming.

8. In 1989, I founded a nursing practice. At the time, it was pioneering, controversial and unfunded. The stress and workload to build the clinic in those early years was simply colossal. For two years, I worked 21 days on, 1 day off. Even at the time, I knew that the only way I could manage the pressure was through high quality physical activity, including running.
9. It wasn't just the running itself: it was running on tracks through paddocks, valleys, and bush. In short, it was nature that gave me the strength to keep going. There were remarkably few such tracks through Nelson and consequently the vast majority of my running was done on city streets.

Value of the Maitai Valley

10. One of the few wilderness tracks for running was over the Tantragee Saddle into the Maitai Valley, alongside the golf course which feeds onto the track beside the Maitai River. Nearly 40 years later there are still very, very few other choices if you want long walks or runs through the natural environment in Nelson. Inner city tracks are more plentiful, but they are short and if you are a runner, it is only a few minutes before you are on the asphalt again.
11. There is the world of difference between walking or running the Maitai walk and covering the same distance through an urban space – not a small difference, but one of many orders of magnitude.
12. In “the Well Gardened Mind” psychiatrist Sue Stuart-Smith quotes Oliver Sacks who wrote “the effects of nature’s qualities on health are not only spiritual and emotional but physical and neurological. I have no doubt that they reflect deep changes in the brain’s physiology, and perhaps even its structure”.
13. Green spaces, parks and gardens have a deep restorative effect on the people who access these areas. If you doubt the validity of what I say, stand for a few minutes in the city and then a few minutes in the tranquil rural setting of the Maitai and judge for yourself the qualitative difference of the experience.

Negative effects of urban sprawl into recreation areas

14. It is deeply saddening that while the incidence of mental health problems, especially depression and anxiety, are increasingly common, the environments which can act as an antidote are decreasing.

15. Even while the benefits of spending time in nature are increasingly recognised, the spaces where we can partake of these activities are at risk. Every city that loses those open nearby and easily accessible spaces, faces irreparable damage.
16. Housing is necessary of course, but not at the expense of the very areas which promote health and wellbeing for people. When there is intensification of housing, as there surely must be, there is all the more reason to ensure that there are large, open areas with an essentially rural, undeveloped character that allows people to feel as if they have escaped the city.
17. I am aware that the lawyer for the applicant says we have to developed the Maitai in order to retain and develop the vibrancy of the CBD. As someone who has lived and worked in Nelson for 40years, I completely disagree with this statement. Nelson's CBD is a vibrant place right now, and always has been. Intensification within the existing city would support this vibrancy, with people easily able to access its shops, restaurants, and bars, at the same time protecting easy access to large, natural, open space. I cannot see how development some distance away in an area disconnected to the CBD would support its vibrancy, and it certainly would not protect access to green space with a rural, open character.

The unique character of the Maitai Valley

18. The Maitai Valley is this area for Nelson and there is nothing else which is so close and fulfils this criteria. It is vital to preserve it. While I have read submissions that pick apart small areas of the Valley and deem some of them to be of little or no value, these comments ignore the greater issue: it is the Valley as a whole which needs to be considered. There are areas of formerly farmed area which may well have little value in terms of natural significance in themselves, but when seen as part of the whole Valley, they are very important to the sense of wildness, the sense of openness, the sense of tranquillity. This will be lost if this area becomes residential. Those areas which are not described as not having value, could be restored and would then be a very important part of the ambience of the valley. In our region, and nationally, there is extensive activity in restoring swamplands and areas which have been stripped of their original vegetation to return them to a state where they can support a bio-diverse habitat, often of endangered species of plants, birds, insects and fungi.

19. The track along the Maitai is unique. It is the only track of its kind in New Zealand. This is the only place in New Zealand, where you can walk alongside a river from its source to the sea. It is a track that makes one road crossing over Trafalgar Street and that is it – the rest winds along the river. That is the reason that so many of us chose the Maitai as the place to take children and dogs – it is so peaceful and so safe.
20. The site is located in an area that acts as a gateway between Nelson city and the rural, natural environment of the Valley. Using it for residential development would erode this shift from urban to rural and open.

Negative effects of urban development in the Maitai Valley

Noise

21. I do not live near a main road, and yet in the mornings I hang out the washing, I hear a noise. It's like a very peculiar hum, almost like a background roar. It's the sound of people driving to work on a winter morning in Nelson, and it is significant in volume. Of all the pollutions affecting our 21st century world, noise is one of the most pervasive and one of the hardest to mitigate. The sound of silence is an increasingly rare sound in our 21st century world yet it is an important one for restoration of the mind.
22. Most of us have learned to tune out much of the background noises. Then came a nationwide lock-down in 2020, and so many people realised that this background noise does affect us. Many noticed they could hear birds. Many appreciated just having quiet around them.
23. If the development proposed in the Maitai Valley were to go ahead, the quiet and calm of the Maitai would be lost forever. It cannot be mitigated. There will be a dull but very audible hum, in the morning and in the evening, when folk who work during the day want to enjoy what they always have – access to a quiet valley for walking, running, cycling, exercising dogs, having a picnic after spending the day in an office over the summer.

Transport

24. I know there are some who hope that most of the residents in the proposed subdivision will walk or cycle.

25. I live closer to the Nelson CBD than the Kākā Valley and I've commuted by cycle in this city for 40 years. I can say with confidence that while it is true that there are more people walking and cycling today than 40 years ago, the car remains by far the most common commuting vehicle. Where you have cars, you have noise and pollutants that come with tyres and fossil fuels, the remains of which will run from the asphalt into the waterways.

Historical context of protecting the Maitai Valley for the community

26. The Maitai Valley is special. Nelsonians have always understood this. We can go back to 1910–1911 when a deputation, understanding just how precious the Maitai is, went to government to purchase the Maitai Valley. It was unsuccessful, but undeterred, there was a petition delivered to the Nelson City Council in 1914 to allow access to the swimming holes.
27. In 1915, a poll of ratepayers agreed that there should be a purchase under the Public Works Act and so we have access to Sunday Hole, Denne's Hole and Black Hole. In protecting these swimming holes, generations have continued to enjoy swimming in a river, near a city. Something not possible in many other urban areas of the nation.
28. Later, in 2005 and 2006 there was strong support for not extending residential housing into the Maitai. The message from the public could not be clearer. The Maitai Valley is our jewel in the crown. Having a large, open recreational space, right on our back door, is something which once lost, can never be replaced.
29. I am an active member of my community and I keep up to speed with proposed changes in the Nelson City Council Plans. I know that changes can happen subtly and swiftly. I know that town planning has a profound impact on our lives and that changes made are permanent.
30. I had never heard of Kākā Valley until it was pointed out to me, yet Nelson City Council chose to use this name in the consultation that resulted in the opening up of the valley to urban sprawl. Nelson City Council received only four responses to this most controversial of proposals precisely because Council's intentions were not made clear to the public. Now our opportunity to contribute to one of the most important planning decisions in Nelson's history has been denied us. How could the Council have expected to conduct a genuine consultation if they did not use the known name of the area?

31. Like the rest of the community, when news of the proposed subdivision broke in 2020, I had no reason to suspect that the fundamental qualities of the Maitai, a place of open spaces, natural landscapes, clean water, and rural tranquillity, were about to be threatened by a housing development which can only result in the loss of all those qualities which I so highly value. And yet here we are.

Alternative visions

32. As soon as housing is established, there is degradation of the natural environment. There is noise, there is light pollution, there is pollution from vehicles - none of which can be fully mitigated. A residential development in this area would destroy what has made the Maitai Valley special for over a century and it will never be able to be recovered.
33. What if we were to re-think what could the Maitai Valley could be? What if we were to make Nelson a National Park City in New Zealand? What if we were to harness the energy which has mounted in response to the proposed subdivision to build something of national significance which would benefit everyone?
(<https://www.nationalparkcity.org/>; <https://www.stuff.co.nz/the-press/opinion/300386963/lets-make-christchurch-a-national-park-city>)
34. There is a new movement – one to create fantastic cities which offer the qualities people need, which are buzzing, thriving places where people really want to live. We need housing, we need jobs, we need schools and we also need spaces to recreate and restore our souls – this is the aim of the National Park City concept:

“Cities where people and nature are better connected. Cities rich with wildlife, where every child and young person benefits from exploring, playing and learning outdoors. Cities where we all enjoy high-quality green spaces, where the air is clean to breathe, where it’s a pleasure to swim in the rivers and where we can all live lives that are more harmonious with ourselves, our communities and our planet.

Together we can make our cities greener, healthier, wilder and fairer places to live.

Together we can make our cities National Park Cities. Why not?”

CONCLUSION

35. When I most needed those large natural, rural spaces in the 1980s, the Maitai Valley was my refuge. It has been for 40 years and continues to be. I still walk along that

river to get away from ‘the city’. Can you ensure that this will be there, as therapeutic as it always has been, for those who come after us?

36. Will you honour the will of the people of this city? It was first expressed more than 100 years ago, to preserve the Maitai Valley and river for recreation. This is not some recent flight of fancy – this is a long-standing history of successive generations doing what they could to ensure that the essence of the valley is preserved.
37. Will you do what you can to support what was formally started in 1910? The community at that time saw that the valley is precious and tried to protect it. They failed in that round, but succeeded in 1914 and 1915, in preserving the valley. At every opportunity, the people of Nelson have expressed the same view – the Maitai Valley is important for its recreational attributes and should not be used for housing. Will you ensure that the Maitai Valley is not rezoned for housing?
38. Will you protect the Maitai River? There is no question that there will be degradation if this development were to go ahead. Can we imagine a world in which we would be unable to swim in the Maitai on a summer day after a long day at work?
39. Will you ensure that this Valley remains as an open, un-urban, recreational space for the people who need it in 2022 and beyond? These are decisions which affect everyone for all time.
40. Will you listen to my plea – yes we need bread, but we need roses too.... We need housing, jobs, businesses... but of what use is this if we have destroyed the diamond right at our back door?
41. On this basis, I respectfully ask for you to decline the plan change request.

Annette Milligan ONZM

11 July 2022