

**BEFORE COMMISSIONER WASLEY APPOINTED BY NEW PLYMOUTH
DISTRICT COUNCIL**

UNDER the Resource Management Act
1991

IN THE MATTER of an application under section
88 of the Act by GREGORY PAUL
HOW AND DEBORAH RUTH
HOW to the NEW PLYMOUTH
DISTRICT COUNCIL for land use
consent to establish and operate
North Egmont Retreat
commercial accommodation at
1844 Egmont Road, Kaimiro,
New Plymouth

STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF
GREGORY PAUL HOW AND DEBORAH RUTH HOW

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1. As we, Greg and Deborah How continue with our process for our application for resource consent for North Egmont Retreat we will endeavour to try and paint the picture of what our vision and goals are for the project with this evidence.
2. First may we give the definition of “Retreat”. There are different definitions but as a noun the best one to describe “North Egmont Retreat” is, and I quote from Your Dictionary, “*a time away in a quiet and secluded place where you can relax*”¹.
3. Our application is not just about putting in some motor home parks and constructing some buildings. It is about bringing together a collective of operations so that we can hopefully achieve our long-term goal of “*sharing our special piece of paradise*”.
4. Where is our special piece of paradise? 1838 and 1844 Egmont Road approximately 2 kilometres from the Egmont National Park and on the main route to the North Egmont Visitors Centre, 10 kilometres from the rural service town of Inglewood and approximately 18 kilometres to New Plymouth.
5. Situated there is 47 hectares of land which has Peters Road to the North as its boundary, the Waiwhakaiho River to the West, farmland to the South and Egmont Road to the East.
6. What happens within our 47 hectares? An organic dairy farm milking between 50 and 60 cows, with young stock reared on the farm as

¹ <https://www.yourdictionary.com/retreat>

well. 70 organically reared pigs supplying the domestic organic market. Organically grown medicinal herbs, which are made into a variety of products for humans and animals.

7. Farmyard animals include Appleyard ducks, chooks and the rear breed Red Turkey's and our own beehives.
8. Who are we? We probably come under the classification of farmers, but we actually see ourselves as guardians of the land and care givers of the animals for the time we own the land.
9. We are very passionate about the land and our animals and will leave the land in a better state than when we took it over.
10. You need to have a passion for organics to be able to create the cycle of having a healthy soil which will help create a sustainable environment for the animals, who will in turn provide for us.
11. Our goal for organics *"is to be as self-sufficient as we possibly can"*.
12. We were both born in Taranaki, both brought up on farms and, apart from 18 months working for an accountant, I have spent the rest of my life in the farming sector.
13. Deborah has worked in a variety of sectors and then joined me in farming and has the passion for the herbal side of our operation.
14. ***Why North Egmont Retreat?*** There are multiple reasons for us to hopefully create the North Egmont Retreat. The main reason from our point of view is that, by adding it to our existing operations, it

makes our 47 hectares multipurpose, with each operation complementing each other - which in turn helps us achieve our ultimate goal of “*sharing our special piece of paradise*”.

15. Who do we want to share it with? The Retreat will have two parts to it. Let’s start with the motorhome parks. We propose to have 24 motorhome parks with an amenities building which has management accommodation above it.
16. Ever since the Lonely Planet wrote a review on Taranaki we have seen an increase in tourism and, in our situation, an increase of motor homes en route to the North Egmont Visitors Centre (travelling past our property). Lonely Planet named Taranaki as one of the world’s best regions to visit in 2017 as per the attached article in **Annexure A**.²
17. With extra funding being put into the tracks within the Egmont National Park, including the Taranaki Crossing, we believe even more people will visit the mountain whether it be to climb to the top, tramp or just go up to the Visitors’ Centre. These issues have been discussed by the media in recent times such as in the attached articles in **Annexure B**.³
18. A large percentage of these people will be from outside the region or overseas tourists – who, in most cases, will be looking for some form of accommodation.

² <https://www.stuff.co.nz/taranaki-daily-news/news/south-taranaki-star/85737359/lonely-planet-names-taranaki-one-of-the-worlds-best-regions-to-visit-in-2017>

³ *Popular Mt Taranaki walking tracks and huts receive \$19.1m upgrade*, Taranaki Daily News, 4 September 2019; *Crossing upgrade begins*, Taranaki Daily News, 6 March 2020.

19. We also believe that if you want to holiday at the beach you find accommodation near the sea; so if you want to enjoy the different activities that the mountain offers you will look for accommodation close to the mountain - of which there is very little in close proximity to the northern slopes.
20. With the increase in numbers using the mountain, especially over the summer/autumn period, it has created congestion for parking at the Visitors Centre; in respect of which the NPDC has trialled different ways to solve the problem. In August 2019 the Council advised it would spend \$980,000.00 on parking at North Egmont Visitors Centre to ease traffic congestion.⁴
21. In 2018 the Council ran a trial shuttle bus service from our property and it was interesting on talking to different couples at different times. On asking them why they came to Taranaki, I got basically the same answer. They wanted to do some tramping; all the major walks in the South Island were fully booked and, when arriving in the North Island, they were advised to go to Taranaki because the Tongariro crossing is overcrowded.
22. Not everyone uses a motor home. So, to cover the needs, accommodation wise, of other types of visitors and tourists - is why we propose to build 10 self-contained chalets. With very little existing accommodation in Inglewood, the chalets will add an extra dimension to that service.

⁴ See: *Popular Mt Taranaki walking tracks and huts receive \$19.1m upgrade*, Taranaki Daily News, 4 September 2019, Annexure B

23. As an example, at the recent Colgate Games held in January 2020 at the TET Stadium, Inglewood (athletics Mondo track) organisers struggled to find enough accommodation for participants and their families who came from all over the North Island. There is talk that they want to hold them here again next year as it was a very well-run event.
24. What we are trying to achieve is that people can come and relax, enjoy the peace, tranquillity and space of rural living, experience the fresh air, the solitude of silence or interact with the animals, get a better understanding or experience of grass roots farming.
25. Fewer and fewer people get this opportunity with today's fast pace and busy society.
26. What we have to offer can be stimulating or healing in so many different ways. It might be just sitting on the riverbank watching and listening to the water flow by, or just the silence of being in our small block of native bush, which in turn is all part of relaxing.
27. ***Management of North Egmont Retreat.*** We understand the needs and processes of having a resource consent, and rules and regulations. If there is one thing we have learnt from farming it is having the ability to be able to adapt to any given situation. We adapt our systems on a daily basis whether it be climatic, seasonal or whatever may be thrown at you on any given day.
28. We see the running of the Retreat as being not too dissimilar to farming; we will need to be able to adapt our systems. We see the key to it as having good communication with our guests.

29. We want them to enjoy their stay so by communicating with them, by asking them to do things rather than telling them, you will get a far better response and reaction.
30. I am sure they will let us know if they aren't happy with something.
31. One of our goals will be to try and meet the needs of our guests so they do have an enjoyable stay as positive comments become free advertising.
32. We will communicate our requests by way of verbal, written and signage communication at booking, check in and check out points. It will also be clearly stated on the website and any advertising material. To this end, we have developed the North Egmont Retreat Management Plan and Rules and Conditions of Occupancy submitted to the Council in BTW's response to further information request dated 25 September 2020.
33. It then becomes the choice of the intended guests whether they come and stay or not.
34. ***Acceptance of Change.*** I have lived rurally all my life and have seen and experienced many changes over the years. A couple of examples are – with the amalgamations of farms the rural population declined to the point that a lot of rural schools have closed over the years. With the amalgamations, surplus farm houses were sold off - and then we have had the subdivision of life style blocks, which in turn has bought the population back to the country areas. That has now created the problem of rural schools which are now zoned with capped rolls and with little room for expansion.

35. This has also increased the amount of traffic in rural areas. As an example, Upper Upland Road used to have 6 houses and over about a five-year period went to 17. Peters Road, which is all of 1 kilometre long, has gone from 2 to 6, with one still to be built. This has happened within the last five years.
36. Egmont Road from the speed limit signs to the mountain gates has had, according to my count, 30 new houses built, with most of them happening within the last seven years.
37. With these lifestyle properties comes a whole range of new impacts to the rural areas. I have not yet seen a working couple drive to work together in the same vehicle.
38. Along with the increase in vehicles comes the increase in dogs, cats, horses etc. I once used to be able to drive stock along the road between farms, but would not even consider that an option today.
39. I have experienced the boom of the oil and gas industry which impacted on the rural areas, whether it be well sites, pipelines, or seismic surveys. These examples would have all gone through a resource consent process. You couldn't, in realistic terms stop them if you disagreed. They were progress and a sign of things at that particular point.
40. It was easier to embrace the changes, go with the flow and go forward with life rather than oppose it. If I was to make one crystal ball prediction it would be a far greater range of diversification of farmland.

41. To explain, Tegel struggles to find new property in North Taranaki to build new chicken sheds as they know they would struggle to get resource consent, as the impact is significantly greater and on a denser population than it used to be.
42. A change that is happening is that Fabish & Jackson, local builders based in Inglewood, who have specialised in cowsheds and chicken sheds, have just recently built three big piggeries - and are waiting for the plans to come through to build three more. Once again this is a change of the times.
43. We do not oppose the advent of lifestyle blocks or the people that choose to live rurally. Change will impact their lifestyles to a certain degree. But for farm owners change actually has a far greater impact on our livelihoods than our lifestyles. Agriculture and now tourism are the backbone of the country.
44. Tourism in Taranaki, in the past, was relatively non-existent as Taranaki was always considered to be off the beaten track. It is now all changing.
45. With an increase in tourism numbers comes the need for an increase in infrastructure. They all need parking spaces and somewhere to sleep, along with suitable personal needs infrastructure. The more that the private sector can provide the better.
46. Another sign of the times is the cyclists that use the rural roads. As a society more people are taking to riding bicycles for whatever reason. This alone can have a huge impact on our livelihood.

47. Animals, if by the road, don't see them coming, but they hear something, I presume some high-pitched noise that is made from the spokes cutting through the air. It is something I haven't heard but I have had cows bolt or spooked on numerous occasions.
48. **Employment opportunities.** Our proposal, if it goes ahead, will create extra employment whether it be groundsmen, cleaners, admin, house, or farm staff (to assist with the farm while we are running the Retreat).
49. As we propose doing it in stages, as the project grows so will the number of employment opportunities.
50. Through the construction stage all local tradesmen will be employed, and apart from the logs and erection of the outside walls of the chalets and amenities building, which will come from the South Island, all materials will be sourced from local businesses.
51. There will possibly be opportunities for start-up businesses or existing ones to piggyback off our project as well. For example, with the NPDC putting in a car park at the mountain gates a shuttle service will be required to transport people up and down the mountain; and, with the funding approved to upgrade and form new tracks within the National Park, numbers will only increase.
52. We are aware there has also been pressure on the Tongariro Crossing with the volume of tourists heading there in recent times – and there are plans to upgrade SH43, the Forgotten World Highway, to allow people to travel that route more easily to Taranaki attractions. The

Forgotten World Highway is due to get an extra \$13.4m of funding for such upgrades as recently reported.⁵

53. We feel our proposal will be beneficial for the region (and country) and we have received letters of support in this context from Barbara Kuriger, MP for Taranaki-King Country, Holidayparks New Zealand and the New Zealand Motor Caravan Association Inc. – copies of which are attached in **Annexure C**.
54. Those letters note that Taranaki is a popular holiday destination (reiterating our views in this evidence), and highlight many positives about our proposal; including, for example, how the retreat - *“will help reduce pressure on public infrastructure, including responsible camping sites across Taranaki”*⁶ – *“... and will provide more options for visitors and will encourage more use of commercial facilities rather than free camping options”*⁷ – *“... as trampers and tourists will have a designated place to camp, rather than travelling around the region at all times of the night and day looking for available accommodation near to the Pouakai Ranges.”*⁸
55. We are aware of these issues in our local area; and recently some locals have been becoming annoyed with unauthorised campervans parking overnight at the golf club, Lepper Road.

⁵ <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/119865366/taranakis-remote-forgotten-world-highway-to-get-extra-134m-for-upgrades>.

⁶ Letter dated 29 July 2020, James Imlach, National Manager, New Zealand Motor Caravan Association Inc., Annexure C.

⁷ Letter dated 14 July 2020, Fergus Brown, Chief Executive, Holidayparks New Zealand, Annexure C.

⁸ Letter dated 23 June 2020, Barbara Kuriger, Member of Parliament for Taranaki-King Country, Annexure C.

56. We have also received letters of support and references from other locals in the district who can see the positive benefits of our proposal, including from the owner/operator of the Volcanoview Tavern situated on Egmont Road – copies of which are all attached as **Annexure D**.
57. **Environment.** This is a biggy for us. **Lighting.** We aim to have minimum lighting within the retreat area. We see darkness as being part of rural living – and is very much part of the lifestyle we love and cherish (and want to share with others) and do not want to compromise. We will be striving to get the balance right as we fully understand there are certain requirements that have to be met.
58. Expert advice has been sought and a draft lighting plan has been drawn up. There are ways to lessen the impact of lighting. By using sensor lights, and with the strategic planting that is in the landscape design, we believe there will be minimal impact, if any, on anyone outside the retreat (and minimal impact on us, and those within the retreat).
59. Within our Retreat Management Plan, we will also be informing guests with motor homes of the minimum lighting (to minimise impacts on the surrounding environment), and checking that they have additional means of lighting, such as torches, if required. As we are not electricians we have to place our trust in the experts and qualified tradesmen that they get the balance of what is required and keeping it to minimal impact, which is the brief we specifically set for our expert lighting consultant (Jason Cudby).

60. **Traffic** – we cannot put an exact figure on any increase in traffic that the Retreat might create. Our thinking is that a good percentage of our guests will be travelling up to the mountain anyway. There has been an increase of traffic over the last five years and we would be very surprised if there is no further increase (regardless of our proposal). Our aim is to capture some of that existing visitor traffic.
61. The upgrade of tracks and the development of the Taranaki Crossing has begun and, when finished, I am sure it is only going to see more people visit the mountain.⁹
62. The \$19.13 million upgrade is significant along with the \$980,000.00 the District Council is spending on the car park at the North Egmont gates to the National Park.¹⁰ We would encourage guests to use existing and any new shuttle services to help ease any further congestion.
63. **Wastewater/Septic Tank** – Once again we will be placing our trust in the experts to design and create the infrastructure to meet the requirements which will need to be met to gain building consent without adverse impact on the environment.
64. **Landscape design/visual effects** – This will be explained in more details in Erin Griffith’s evidence, but we do have to say it has been, and will be, exciting to develop and implement the plans she has created with us.

⁹ See: *Crossing Upgrade Begins*, Taranaki Daily News, 6 March 2020, Annexure B

¹⁰ See both articles in Annexure B

65. This type of thing is nothing new to us and our passion and principles for organics is about ongoing planting to protect and enhance the environment.
66. We are totally committed to protecting the environment and trust that once again our passion and principles for organics comes to the forefront, and that you believe us that by creating the retreat there will be little impact or detrimental effect on the immediate and surrounding environment.
67. It is also a huge part of our vision and goals of the retreat that we can promote, and show people that there are, alternative ways to doing things - so that future generations can enjoy sustainable living.
68. We have put a lot of thought into the project to get the balance right.
69. An example is the reason why the chalets and amenities building will be made of logs. They will naturally blend into the landscape, plus they fit into the rural and mountainous aspect of its location. Imagine a log house in a new subdivision in town surrounded by brick or plaster houses (it would simply not be a good fit in our opinion).
70. ***Farm Tours for staying guests (only)*** – this will be at managements discretion as climate, animal welfare and seasonal tasks will have to be considered. Charge will be done by way of donation of which a minimum of 50% will be given to charities and volunteer organisations such as Taranaki Rescue Helicopter Trust, Search & Rescue, St Johns Ambulance etc; all vital organisations for the wellbeing of people using the mountain.

71. Organically grown medicinal herbs. This is Deborah’s specialty, and I won’t go into it too much as it is a vast field, and there is huge potential as well. There are numerous products that she makes whether it be for humans or animals, and she has developed some unique processes. Any questions will need to be directed to her.
72. I started off trying to paint a picture but have probably ended up with a mural. I have yet to find a negative that will correct a positive, but I do know a positive will normally correct a negative. What I have found over time is that a negative will always make a positive a lot stronger.
73. We believe that the retreat has many positive benefits, local and regional. With 15,500 people walking the Pouakai Track in 2017-18 – and DOC estimating 40,000 people using all tracks by 2025 (as per the attached article in **Annexure E**¹¹) – accommodation handy to the National Park, and handy to the North Egmont Visitor Centre, has to be of some benefit in years to come – particularly with the numerous walks accessible from the North Egmont Visitor Centre – such as those referred to **Annexure F**¹² – and **Annexure G**.¹³
74. As dairy farmers we know to make a good cheese, all good things take time. To make an exceptional cheese you need more time and patience, and as it matures it will develop its unique flavour.

¹¹ *DOC: Visitors need to prepare for conditions*, Taranaki Daily News, 11 March 2020

¹² *A Walk a Day, 365 Short Walks in New Zealand*, Peter Janssen, New Holland Publishers 2020, pages 120, 126, 127.

¹³ *North Egmont Walks Nga hikoi o Mouna Taranaki Egmont National Park*, Department of Conservation, October 2015

75. With time and patience, the retreat will be unique as it matures, and we wholeheartedly believe it will end up being exceptional.
76. If resource consent is granted, we look forward to the real challenge starting; but with good practical communication and discussion all problems are solvable.
77. **Officers Report** - we have read the Officer's Report and thank the Officer for her comprehensive report. We generally agree with the report and recommended consent conditions (subject to the comments from our experts). However, we would like to note that the Kaimiro Community is a lot bigger than 10 families as stated in section 6.2, paragraph 163, bullet point 12 (as suggested by the submitter).

CONCLUSIONS

78. In conclusion, the location is handy to North Egmont National Park, handy to Inglewood and New Plymouth, and the retreat could provide much needed accommodation for the Inglewood area (and could provide more accommodation for big events in New Plymouth e.g. Americana, Womad, concerts at Bowl of Brooklands etc).
79. It might help with easing congestion of parking at North Egmont and will provide safe and secure parking for guests.
80. It will also provide employment opportunities, and potential opportunities for other start up and existing business to piggyback off ours.

81. The retreat will bring people together to experience rural living, peace and quiet, darkness, grass roots farming, organic farming, interact with farm animals, organic medicinal herbs, small block of native bush, forever changing views of the mountain, our knowledge and experiences; just simply to rest and relax.
82. The retreat will promote our iconic Maunga, walks in Egmont National Park, other local attractions, other regional attractions, organic farming and the alternative ways to conventional farming, the medicinal use of organic herbs, organic products, the coming together of rural and urban people, and peoples and communities social, economic and cultural wellbeing and health and safety, ongoing sustainability of the environment, visual proof of the benefits of the predator control programmes, the whole of New Zealand to international tourists.
83. Thank you. North Egmont Retreat, *"Let your journey be part of ours"*.

GREGORY PAUL HOW AND DEBORAH RUTH HOW

27 OCTOBER 2020

ANNEXURE A

- *Lonely Planet names Taranaki as one of the world's best regions to visit in 2017, Taranaki Daily News, 26 October 2016*

ANNEXURE B

- *Popular Mt Taranaki Walking Tracks and Huts receive \$19.1m upgrade*, Taranaki Daily News, 4 September 2019
- *Crossing Upgrade Begins*, Taranaki Daily News, 6 March 2020

ANNEXURE C

- Letter dated 23 June 2020, Barbara Kuriger, Member of Parliament for Taranaki-King Country;
- Letter dated 14 July 2020, Fergus Brown, Chief Executive, Holidayparks New Zealand;
- Letter dated 29 July 2020, James Imlach, National Manager, New Zealand Motor Caravan Association Inc.

ANNEXURE D

- Letter dated 27 February 2020, J. Vergroesen, Director, Mamoeth New Zealand Limited, T/A Volcanoview Tavern, 1917 Egmont Road, Kaimiro, New Plymouth;
- Letter dated 10 March 2020, W. Dombroski, 56 Lower Lepper Road, Inglewood, New Plymouth;
- Letter dated 16 March 2020, Susan and Warren Gill; Shannon Hollins and Scott Sutherland (1825 Egmont Road); Carl Frost (568 Lepper Road); Fred Gill and Cushla Gill (438 Lepper Road); Wayne Gill, Tracey Gill and Bradley Gill (545 Lepper Road); John and Sharron Frederickson (491 Lepper Road); Peter Terlinden (534 Lepper Road); Egmont Road/Lepper Road, Kaimiro, New Plymouth.

ANNEXURE E

- *DOC: Visitors need to prepare for conditions*, Taranaki Daily News, 11 March 2020

ANNEXURE F

- A Walk a Day, 365 Short Walks in New Zealand, Peter Janssen, New Holland Publishers 2020, pages 120, 126, 127.

ANNEXURE G

- *North Egmont Walks Nga hikoi o Mouna Taranaki Egmont National Park*, Department of Conservation, October 2015