

## **Makara/Ohariu Community Board Meeting. November 2010**

### **Report 1. Signs at Makara Beach. Discussion Paper:**

#### **Introduction**

This paper is tabled as a background to Report 1. Verbal Report. Signs at Makara Beach, for the Board to consider at its 16 November, 2010 meeting.

#### **Background**

I have been approached by a dozen or so Makara Beach residents requesting the Community Board take up the issue of the placing of signs relating to the lighting of fires, and minimum fish size and daily catch limits at Makara Beach. I raise also the need for signs about some sections of the beach being unsuitable for two wheel drive vehicles, because of deep stone drifts and pits that routinely bog vehicles.

It was reported that residents have requested the Rural Fire Authority, and the Ministry of Fisheries, in the past to erect signs, but have been told this will not be done because the signs will be vandalised. Informal approaches appear not to have borne fruit, and there is considerable frustration amongst beach residents on these issues. Residents are vigilant and do their best, but feel they need more support.

#### **The issues**

##### **(i) Fires**

It is common for fires to be lit by visitors to the beach: both during the day and at night, and for some fires to become a problem either because they are lit in high winds, are too big and shower sparks on dry combustible material, or are simply not extinguished when people leave. On most occasions residents deal with the problem and extinguish the fires themselves; on other occasions the fire service has been called. Residents report they observe people are only cautioned they need a permit to light an open fire. While an educational approach is right and should be maintained, it has, by itself, done nothing to alleviate the problem (recently there was a fire with flames over 5 m high).

The residents want signs erected that both educate people, and advise there are consequences. Firstly, that lighting fires can be dangerous in this area. Winds rise quickly; there are dry hillsides of combustible materials within a few metres, and houses within twenty metres; large pieces of wood smoulder for days, with a danger of re-ignition; and that it takes 30 minutes for a fire appliance to reach the beach.

Secondly, that it is illegal to light open fires without a permit; there are penalties i.e. substantial fines; and action **will** be taken if an appliance is called to a fire on the beach. Residents want both information to be available, and for there to be a consequence once the signs are there and people are aware. Residents want the excuse, "I didn't know", to be less readily accepted.

##### **(ii) Fish size and catch limits**

Residents regularly see people collecting paua in areas they know contain no legal sized animals; see individuals/groups with supermarket bags of undersized paua; and boats coming in with more than the legal combined number of fin fish, or barely legal (which is really under-size) paua, crayfish and fish. It is commonplace to see people without a paua or fish measuring tool. Numerous and large piles of undersized paua shells are found south and north within walking distance of the beach.

Tabled Information  
Reference 105/10MB(a)

There is a real concern by residents about the pressure on the fishery from this type of recreational fishing. The accumulated impact is not insignificant. Residents observe that many offenders also use the excuse “*I didn't know*” when questioned by locals. While MAF is more likely to prosecute or formally caution people, the same offenders often return to the beach time after time. Residents want signs to let people know MAF has an active presence, the locals will report suspicious behaviours, and that people taking undersize, or over limit catches, will be caught.

### (iii) Bogging and speed runs

Vehicles regularly become bogged on the beach, and residents are often approached to pull them out. Nobody minds helping others out if they can, but much of it is at night, and much of it could be avoided. Bogging is particularly prevalent in: the area immediately in front of the car park, which is a deep gravel sink: the beach close to the river mouth, which is particularly soft: and at the very front of the beach. A lot of damage to the beach is caused by vehicles speeding up to get through the gravel, and parts of the beach are becoming so deeply gouged and degraded that it is difficult for pedestrians to walk over it in parts.

### Location of Signs

While it is true that track signs to Fisherman's Bay have been vandalised in the past, the council reserve sign and Cook Strait cable are within sight of residents homes and haven't been vandalised. The placement of signs seems important. The council reserve sign is about 3 m by 2 m, so larger signs can be erected and survive.

Residents want the signs to be in visible places on the beach itself, not on the residential street leading down to the beach. They want them in places less likely to be vandalised, and suggest the seaward wall of the garage at 1091 Makara Road, the seaward wall of the toilet block, and by the rubbish bin at the northern end of the reserve.

### Bogging

A sign, showing the location of the deep gravel, and the safe and unsafe areas for two wheel vehicles, could help address this problem. Residents do not want the car park paved – it won't solve the problem and will be quickly undercut by relentless sea and wind action. The gravel pits, sea wrack berms, and steep storm beach are a natural, necessary element in the draining of beach and land, the health of the beach, and protection for estuary, salt marches and river system behind it. The human impact is, however, a more manageable element.

### Recommendation

I recommend the Makara/Ohariu Community Board write to the Wellington City Council, the Rural Fire Authority, and Ministry of Fisheries setting out the problem(s), the suggested solutions, and request timely action prior to the summer holiday period. Also, that they liaise with a Makara member of the Board, to ensure the signs are erected in the best possible locations, and least visual pollution for permanent residents.

Margie Scotts