

**Under the Resource Management Act 1991**

**And**

**In the matter of Proposed Plan Change 2 to the Rotorua District Plan**

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**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF JEAN-PAUL GASTON**  
**Date 21 August 2020**

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**TOMPKINS | WAKE**

Westpac House  
430 Victoria Street  
PO Box 258  
DX GP 20031  
Hamilton 3240  
New Zealand  
Ph: (07) 839 4771  
Fax: (07) 839 4913  
[tompkinswake.co.nz](http://tompkinswake.co.nz)

1. My name is Jean-Paul Gaston. I am the Manahautū Rautaki - Group Manager: Strategy at Rotorua Lakes Council (**RLC**). I have held this role at RLC for 13 years. Prior to my current role, I have held strategy and manager roles at Taupo District Council, Wellington City Council and Durham County Council in the UK.
2. I am authorised to give this evidence on behalf of RLC as a territorial authority with statutory duties under the Local Government Act 2002 (**LGA**) and the Resource Management Act 1991 (**RMA**) to provide for the wellbeing of its communities. RLC performs these duties through, for instance, the provision of essential infrastructure (the so-called 'Three Waters' infrastructure, roads, household waste and recycling collections, green spaces) and enabling the use and development of land within Rotorua to meet the needs and aspirations of both its urban and rural communities.
3. I am providing this statement of evidence to the Plan Change 2 (**PC2**) Hearings Panel in order to help clarify the wider context of RLC's planning for housing development and, in particular, the stormwater management considerations that are an essential component of integrated land use and infrastructure planning for urban areas.
4. In my role as Group Manager: Strategy, I am responsible for leading RLC's long term planning under the LGA, as well as strategy development and district-wide spatial/urban planning under both the LGA and RMA. The zone change proposed in PC2 represents RLC giving effect to the intent of the National Policy Statement on Urban Development (**NPS-UD**).
5. I have provided ongoing supervision of the development of a plan change for the Pukehangi Heights Development Area since 2017. In response to population growth and further projected growth evident from 2013, RLC undertook a wide community engagement process to develop a Spatial Plan, which identified areas for future green field land development in Rotorua, including Pukehangi Heights. Stormwater management considerations and related infrastructure capacity was seen as a major challenge for all development in the Rotorua urban area and in zone change areas. In this respect, Pukehangi Heights is no exception.

6. Holistic stormwater management remained a key focus in the subsequent development of the PC2 process due to the technically challenging aspects of Rotorua's geospatial location and caldera characteristics.
7. Aside from developing regulatory planning requirements in PC2, RLC has invested significant energy and resources in understanding the infrastructural needs of the Rotorua District in light of anticipated urban growth. I can confirm that RLC is committed to addressing areas subject to high flood hazard. Stormwater master planning work is underway with the objective of identifying interventions within proposed land development areas, on available community space for public stormwater storage and upstream of the catchment to achieve a collectively effective and efficient outcome.
8. These interventions will be included in the Infrastructure Capital Programme of Works that will form part of the draft 2021/2031 RLC Long Term Plan. Commitment to proceed with the proposed intervention will be requested through the adoption of the 2021/2031 RLC Long Term Plan by Council.
9. RLC will continue to support this initiative to the point of adoption and implementation of a Catchment Management Master Plan and securing comprehensive discharge consents for urban stormwater that will enable housing development to occur. This initiative aligns closely with the intent of the NPS-UD, which seeks to improve the responsiveness and competitiveness of land development markets; and will open up development capacity, so more homes can be built to improve our communities' wellbeing.
10. The reason for RLC's proactive stance in this space is that the provision of affordable housing in Rotorua (in the context of a finite land resource suitable for housing in the caldera) is a priority issue. RLC has been working closely with central government in developing a strategy to address a chronic housing supply shortage in Rotorua compounded by both a tight land supply and comparatively low incomes for a significant proportion of our communities.

11. In preparation for this hearing, I have become aware of several challenges surrounding the management of stormwater in the proposed development area. I am aware that there is a divergence in views between experts advising Bay of Plenty Regional Council (**Regional Council**) and RLC on the appropriate modelling assumptions for the design of stormwater management systems to provide a reasonable level of flood risk management for existing developed urban areas in the catchment. I understand that evidence-based processes are in place to try and resolve this divergence ahead of the hearing.
12. There is concern from the RLC infrastructure networks managers I have spoken to that modelling assumptions adopted by the Regional Council are unduly conservative and are not premised on verified or recognised standards or practices. A more significant concern for RLC, from the perspective of its territorial authority duties, is that reliance on such modelling assumptions produces modelled predictions which threaten the fundamental objectives of PC2; to enable housing development to provide for our community's wellbeing.
13. To illustrate this point, I understand that the modelling assumptions adopted by the Regional Council have produced modelled predictions which indicate a potentially significant increase in the scale of stormwater assets required for the Pukehangi Heights Development Area. Not only does this increase the costs of development, it also significantly reduces the area available for development, detracts from the quality of the urban space provided, and imposes disproportionate and significant maintenance costs across the ratepayer base; and all of this is premised on a prediction which appears to lack a robust evidential basis. This is, in my view, contrary to the intent of the NPS-UD.
14. It is RLC's view that these stormwater management systems should be provided, first and foremost, in areas that can improve management of stormwater flows while allowing the community access to a finite land resource within the caldera that is suitable for housing. Wider network issues and solutions are being investigated as part of RLC's Catchment Management Master Plan initiative incorporating total catchment stormwater management design work in conjunction with other asset-

controlling authorities such as the Regional Council. Recent experience at Ngongotaha has demonstrated the very real impact on communities where insufficient attention is paid to comprehensive catchment management. The response to that event clearly demonstrates that effective solutions must involve co-ordinated actions between both the Regional Council and RLC, including in the main watercourse/stream channel to improve capacity to targeted levels, on-going stream maintenance to maintain capacity and upstream attenuation works to control flows and placement of stormwater management systems in areas that can improve management of stormwater flows.

15. RLC is concerned that the decision on PC2 may yet result in unsuitable assumptions being adopted and locked into future planning and design processes; it is therefore critical that decisions made in PC2 are based on robust evidence in order to avoid creating an undesirable precedent for future decisions on other zone change and development proposals in the urban area.
  
16. RLC is fully committed to working collaboratively with the BOPRC and landowners to complete catchment planning and to provide a stormwater management for the Pukehangi Heights Development area that takes an appropriately precautionary approach to avoiding an increase in downstream flooding risk. The urgency in reaching a conclusion on this work is well recognised. The Plan Change provisions provide an avenue to achieve this outcome. Development cannot occur until this is done.



Jean-Paul Gaston  
Group Manager: Strategy  
Rotorua Lakes Council