15 April 2013

RE: Health Risk Assessment (HRA) reveals very low health risk at Moanataiari

In 2011 and 2012 the soil at Moanataiari was tested for contamination.

The testing occurred because of the subdivisions known history as reclaimed land using locally-sourced rock and unprocessed mine tailings.

Testing has found elevated levels of naturally occurring arsenic and lead on some properties.

A Health Risk Assessment has determined the following additional risk* (at surface level):

- Blocks 5 and 6, no additional risk
- Block 7 additional risk is 0.00032%
- Block 8 additional risk is 0.00082%
- Block 4 additional risk is 0.00116%
- Block 1 additional risk is 0.00208%
- Block 3 additional risk is 0.00252%
- Block 2 additional risk is 0.00398%

Please refer to the map over the page to identify the location of the block numbers.

After considering the Health Risk Assessment and other sources of information, the Council has decided not to undertake physical remediation at Moanataiari because of the very low risk to human health presented at the subdivision.

The Council has also acknowledged that the natural geo-diversity represented at Moanataiari was thought to be the same as many parts of the wider region.

The Council has decided that the appropriate response given the low level of risk is to make available health advice from the Ministry of Health.

You can find out more about the project and the health advice at www.tcdc.govt.nz/moanataiari or feel free to contact us on ph 07-868-0200.

* This is the risk additional to the government policy on acceptable increased risk of 1 in 100,000
Moanataiari Blocks
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Moanataiari LIM entry approved

08 April 2013

Council staff have approved the final entry on Moanataiari property LIMs (Land Information Memorandum).

At the Council meeting last week, elected members asked staff to do some more work on the LIM statement after concerns were raised by community representative Shane Bromley and Deputy Mayor Peter French that the proposed statement didn't go far enough to convey the small risks presented at Moanataiari.

The statements below include the current statement (now replaced), the proposed statement and the final LIM entry, for your information.

_______________________________

Replaced Statement

This property appears on Waikato Regional Councils register (called the Selected Land Use Register or SLUR) of properties known to be contaminated on the basis of chemical measurements or on the basis of past land use. Its classification is currently “Verified HAIL E7” because the area has been identified as being reclaimed land built up with various materials including mine tailings. Council holds a number of reports that are relevant to the property; these are available on request.

_______________________________

Proposed Statement from 3 April Council Meeting

This property appears on Waikato Regional Councils register (called the Selected Land Use Register or SLUR) of properties known to be contaminated on the basis of chemical measurements or on the basis of past land use.

Its classification is currently “Verified HAIL E7” because the area has been identified as being reclaimed land built up with various materials including mine tailings. As part of a project looking at the potential contamination Council has undertaken soil testing and other assessments, it has formulated a position on the contamination.
Council holds a number of reports that are relevant to the property, these are available on request.

Final Statement - Added to all LIMs from 8 April 2013

This property appears on the Waikato Regional Council's register (called the Selected Land Use Register) because of potential contamination due to activities or industries that may have been undertaken on the property.

As part of a project looking at potential contamination, soil testing and other assessments were undertaken, copies of those reports specific to the property and any other project information are available on request.

Council, at its meeting of 3 April 2013, resolved not to undertake any further action but to support the provision of advice by health agencies and provide property and other information, including the Ministry of Health’s pamphlet.

Regional council's classification on SLUR challenged

Council staff have written to the regional council to ask for the Selected Land Use Register (SLUR) classification for Moanataiari to be reviewed.

We don't believe that classification "Verified HAIL E7" is accurate:

*Mining and extractive industries and mineral processing - including chemically or physically extracting metalliferous ores, exposure of faces or release of groundwater containing hazardous contaminants and storing hazardous wastes, including waste dumps and tailings dams*. We don't think that this is the correct description as our studies have shown this activity did not take place on the Moanataiari.

We'll let you know what the outcome is of our enquiry is.

Read our letter to the regional council here.

To find out more about the SLUR please contact the regional council on 0800 800 401.

To find out more about the regional council’s HAIL list please contact them on 0800 800 401.

Community Forums come to an end

We held our last Community Forum last week.

A big thank you to the Moanataiari School for hosting us over the past year and also a thank you to the residents and community representatives who fronted with us to ask the hard questions!

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Council decides on a sensible outcome for Moanataiari

03 April 2013

The Council has decided not to undertake physical remediation at the Moanataiari subdivision because of the very low risk to human health.

Staff recommend option A: Council agrees

OPTION A: "Support the provision of advice by health agencies and provide property information and other information"

A report was considered at today's Council meeting about the next steps for the Moanataiari project.

The report outlined several options for the Council to consider.

Council staff recommended option A because of the very small risk to human health that has been identified from natural minerals, which also reflects the greater Thames-Coromandel geo-diversity.

Council have decided that SIMPLE AND PRACTICAL HEALTH ADVICE is the best method for residents on the Coromandel, who live on mineralised soils, to reduce potential health risks.

The project is now effectively completed. The only outstanding piece of work is an updated LIM statement.

Council have asked for a proactive LIM statement which adequately reflects today's decision not to undertake any physical work because of the very low risk on the subdivision.

Staff will send this statement out to residents in May.

"To the residents and ratepayers of Moanataiari, thank you for your patience and your feedback over the last year, we know it has been an unsettling time for you" said Mayor Glenn Leach.

"We hope today's decision, based on the best science available, will help life return to normal, because the health advice that applies to Moanataiari is just common-sense".

"For the keen gardeners, don't miss another season. FOLLOW THE HEALTH ADVICE and grow your vegetables and fruit and enjoy. Just wash your spuds and follow normal health and hygiene practices" said the Mayor.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact us.

READ THE COUNCIL REPORT HERE.

READ THE HEALTH AND GARDENING ADVICE HERE.

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Council's experience with the Moanataiari project raises serious concerns over the N.E.S.

22 January 2013

Major concerns with the National Environmental Standards (NES)

The Thames-Coromandel District Council (TCDC) has uncovered serious flaws in the recently introduced National Environmental Standards (for soil) and the way in which the Ministry for the Environment and the Waikato Regional Council are applying them, after experiencing first-hand the NES during the Moanataiari soil investigation project.

Mayor Glenn Leach has written to Minister for the Environment Amy Adams, before Christmas outlining the Council's concerns about the NES.

"This policy will be causing chaos across the country and is an issue Local Government New Zealand needs to pick up on. I can't imagine what affect its having on the rebuild in Christchurch after experiencing such a ridiculously conservative and ill-conceived policy here during the Moanataiari project" said Mayor Leach.

"After some excellent analysis and investigation by our staff, TCDC has found major policy disconnects within the NES and through experience we know it can't be easily applied to areas high in natural mineralisation".

"We are calling for an urgent review of the policy and I know other local government agencies are struggling with it too" said Mayor Leach.

By way of example, a disconnect between drinking water and soil standards means that children drinking from the Hamilton City water supply could be receiving a dose around twenty times more arsenic (naturally occurring) than is obtainable from the remediation target at Moanataiari under the government's soil standards.

"Remediate the Hamilton City water supply before telling us to spend millions of dollars remediating soils high in natural mineralisation here on the Coromandel" said Mayor Leach

"The health advice for living in areas with natural mineralisation; don't consume soil, which I think is good advice wherever you live. It's not so easy to stop drinking water from a municipal supply though".

No reply has been received from the Minister.

Recent correspondence

Read the letters we have received from MfE and WRC and our replies here (located on the left hand side of the page).

We have not received replies to our letters yet.

Our concerns

Our experience with the Moanataiari project has raised for us some serious concerns over the NES.

These concerns include the following:

**Standards are overly conservative and can't easily be applied to areas high in natural mineralisation:** The Moanataiari project has illustrated the madness in applying overly conservative standards to areas high in mineralisation. The cost-benefit of spending millions of dollars remediating nature doesn't add up.

If we were to apply government policy at Moanataiari we'd have to spend 10-6 million dollars remediating nature to reduce an additional health risk of 0.00136%.

**Policy disconnect:** There is a significant disconnect between Government policy and the NES. New Zealand Government policy sets the acceptable level of increased risk at 1-in-100,000. But the NES soil contaminant standard for arsenic does not correlate with this government policy.

**Disparity with drinking water standard:** There is an as yet unreconciled but vast disparity between the drinking water and soil standards for arsenic, the impact of which manifests in our very region. Assuming a 2L-per-day consumption, naturally occurring arsenic in the Hamilton City water supply delivers more than seven times the daily dose of arsenic to Hamilton adults than is obtainable from the remediation target insisted upon by Ministry for the Environment Officials for Moanataiari. But the situation is more concerning than this for children; for children, the arsenic dose from just 1L-per-day of Hamilton water is around twenty times that which is obtainable from the remediation target at Moanataiari. It appears to us that, with regard to arsenic, the threshold for soil is around 33 times more onerous than it is for water. This circumstance will cause avoidable stress and cost to communities up and down the country, beyond Moanataiari, as Ministry for the Environment Officials continue to hold their line with impractical zeal. We believe that that discrepancy must be urgently addressed by the Ministries.

**Lack of international peer review:** It is not correct that the NES has been internationally peer reviewed, as is commonly understood to be the case. Toxicological draft reports that underpin only one of two NES foundation documents were peer reviewed by two leading international toxicologists. However, the same policy robustness was not extended to the other key document. This inconsistency is not openly discussed and has not been satisfactorily explained.
Lack of coordination between teams: During its development, there were two teams respectively working on the technical and policy aspects of the NES. There is concern that there was insufficient coordination between teams that, for example, may have led to the policy disconnect described above. Enquires to the Ministry for the Environment confirm that there exists no minutes or similar documentation that would document adequate coordination between the teams.

The NES is based on science that should have been better: TCDC staff attended a meeting on 15 December 2011 that included Ministry for the Environment Officials and their technical advisor. When challenged in the meeting over the NES assumption of 100% bioavailability, the response was "we know it's wrong, but we don't have better science". It is not that the Ministry for the Environment did not have available to it better science. Rather, in the development of the NES, it appears that the Ministry chose not to spend time and money sourcing the better science it needed. As early as May 2009, through a letter from leading international toxicologists, the Ministry was advised that better science was needed in relation to oral bioavailability. Better science did indeed exist, and it was needed; this is evident by the unfortunate fact that this Moanaataiari project ended up having to commission and pay for it. But I wonder whether the sponsoring Minister at the time of the NES' development was told "we know it's wrong, but we don't have better science".

Cost benefit: Ministry for the Environment Officials made quite an effort to discredit the cost benefit analysis that was presented to the 5 December Moanaataiari Governance Group meeting; yet they had the temerity to not present to the meeting any alternative analysis. This is despite the fact that Cabinet papers refer to (but do not include) a detailed cost benefit analysis prepared by independent consultants at the time of the NES' development. Our reading of the advice given to Cabinet is that the nationwide and potential site-specific costs and impacts were estimated to be less than $1 million. This would be at odds with one scenario for Moanaataiari alone which put the cost between $3 million and $10 million. We have asked Officials for comment on our reading of the advice given to Cabinet.

National priority list of contaminated sites: Our request of October 2012 to the Ministry for the Environment for the national priority list of contaminated sites was denied in order to protect free and frank expressions of opinions between Officials and Ministers. What we have requested is simply a list. We do not imagine that such a list would hold a record of free and frank discussions between you. And even if it is, we would gladly receive an appropriately blacked-out copy. In any case we believe that the information release is in the public interest and we agree with MP Catherine Delahunty's reported statement of 24 May 2011 that "The public has an absolute right to know, in straight-forward language, where these sites are and how polluted they are."

We have referred the Ministry's decision to withhold the list to the Office of the Ombudsman.

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Moanataiari estimated increase in risk very small

22 November 2012

Thames Coromandel Mayor Glenn Leach said that the Moanataiari Health Risk Assessment (HRA) published today shows that the potential risk to human health in Moanataiari is very small.

"In the areas with the highest levels of naturally occurring arsenic, the increased potential risk of people developing cancer is estimated at 0.005%, and the good news is there is no additional risk in the western side of the subdivision".

"Government policy states that the acceptable level of increased risk is 0.001%, which relates to the 20 parts per million (ppm) arsenic standard everyone’s been talking about” said Mayor Leach.

"My personal opinion is that this policy may be a good one for remediating high risk orphan sites like old timber treatment plants, but not very useful for places where people already live and where the contamination is largely naturally occurring and not readily absorbed by the body if soil is consumed”.

"The extra good news for Moanataiari is that because the arsenic is naturally occurring with low bioavailability, which was to be expected in highly mineralised areas such as this, the 20 ppm standard can be raised to 50 ppm, which is why many of the properties in the west are now considered to present no additional risk”.

The project's Governance Group meet in early December to determine whether remediation is required at Moanataiari.

"The question we all need to wrestle with is, is spending millions of dollars to remediate nature a good thing, or can we manage these tiny risks in a smarter way? What about the other parts of Thames, Coromandel, Waihi and beyond which also sit on highly mineralised soils?

"We also understand that Hamilton's drinking water, by comparison, delivers a dose of arsenic that is seven times higher than that obtainable from Moanataiari soils at the level of the national standard of 20 ppm. That's because the source of Hamilton's water supply comes from the volcanic plateau, which contains moderate levels of naturally occurring arsenic. So this issue of exposure to naturally occurring arsenic is a NZ-wide issue, not just a Moanataiari one".

TCDC CHIEF EXECUTIVE DAVID HAMMOND has recently written to the Deputy Director of the Ministry of Health to ask for the Ministry’s advice on what they think needs to be done at Moanataiari now the potential risk to health is shown to be very small.

Find out more about the Health Risk Assessment (HRA) here.

Download the HRA document here.

Read the letter to the Ministry of Health

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