

South Rangitata Reserve Inc
Matthew Hall
Secretary
11A Carters Terrace,
Ashburton 7700

In the matter of changes to the proposed Timaru District Plan

**Verbal evidence made by Matthew Hall made on behalf of
South Rangitata Reserve Inc.**

My name is Matthew Hall, and I am a member of the New Zealand Order of Merit, having been presented with this honour for services to environmental advocacy, in the Queen's Birthday Honours in June 2018.

I have held a number of offices within New Zealand Fish and Game and was involved in submitting on both the Rakaia and Rangitata River Conservation Orders.

The Rangitata River Conservation Order recognises the outstanding National and Regional significance of the Rangitata River, as a braided river, for its ecology, and for its salmon fishing and recreational values.

The South Rangitata huts are part of the infrastructure attached to the Rangitata river, and for some of us their value is priceless, and for others perhaps has a market value between 15 and 20 million dollars. Replacement value may be nearer 40million dollars.

If someone asked me where on earth, I would want to be, the answer would be easy - at my hut at the Rangitata. It is largely where I have lived my life. I have a grandson who is a sixth generation Rangitata fisherman. Young Archie has experienced some serious health issues which have seen him spend time in Starship hospital. He says, 'Grandad the Rangitata is my happy place, it is my sort of environment'.

Between the South and the north huts there are nearly 200 huts all with their own stories and special values. In caring for the needs of people this is a wonderful resource.

The sea and the river bring with it, many attributes, adventures and experiences, and at times it is an amazing place to be, that is why it is so special. The Rangitata settlement has survived 120 years, and given a chance may survive another 120 years -no one knows. Each day at the Rangitata reserve is another day to be treasured.

The reserve status is Gazetted under the Reserves Act 1977 as a reserve for Soil Conservation, Fishing Huts and recreation and vests in the Timaru District Council.

The reserve is in a developed state

If you refer to the attached aerial photographs of the north and south end of the South Rangitata reserve the only green vacant spaces are

- I. Low lying areas not suitable for a hut.
- II. Close to the coastal erosion line
- III. In the camping ground.

Back in 2003 when preparing a Management Plan for the reserve the Timaru District Council described the reserve as follows "*The majority of South Rangitata Reserve is in a relatively developed state and meets the needs of the users.*"

In the last twenty years only one new hut has been constructed and that was to replace a derelict hut.

There is one vacant section created because of a fire. My understanding is the tenant is not able to rebuild. The section remains vacant, with a council suggestion, that it may be used as a children's playground. This use was not considered practicable by hut holders. All hut sites available for occupation are occupied.

Existing Use Rights

I understand rent is being collected by the Council for all huts, on all available sites, that appear in the photographs. The existence of each hut has been approved by the Timaru District Council, or its predecessor.

I would argue that with technology, and the mitigation measures available these days, that the risk of Natural Hazards on life and limb are far less now than when most of the huts were first constructed.

Two huts have been burnt down in the last hundred years under old building set back rules without the loss of any adjacent huts, thanks to on-site first response fire equipment. Fire is seen as the biggest risk to property and measures have been taken to minimise this risk.

What existing use rights, under Section 10 RMA, apply to huts in the photographs may be open to conjecture and may lead to the need for legal advice, if they are challenged. I would argue though in the first instance there are existing use rights.

OSZ – S 3. Building Height Restrictions

The reasons a building height level limit of four metres is being imposed in an area that has already been developed is obscure, especially where some buildings are clearly over four metres. At the time huts were built they were complying but now years later they sit in a zone where height is restricted.

If the reason for the rule is about hazard mitigation, then you would think rather than have a four-metre height limit rule, that adaptive height management would be a better approach, to cater for rising water levels, sewage disposal, and drainage. There are a few huts in the lowest lying areas that may benefit from raising floor levels, and provision for this possibility in a set of rules would seem to be helpful, rather than a blank four metre height restriction, that seems to have little relevance to the area. Surface water can make a brief appearance around a few huts, but this is rare, and normally associated with river mouth closure which is now being mitigated by the mechanically opening the river mouth.

Time provides cement around rules, and they can become intractable. This creates a headache for the owner of a non -conforming property, what can and cannot be done. Not only is there cost, there is also so much uncertainty around consenting, and the consenting process. The issue of insurance and replacement cover becomes a problem. If the council were considerate towards hut owners, flexible building height rules would be more helpful, than a hinderance.

Building set back rules

A study of the photographs would affirm the comments set out in the Objectives of the Proposed Timaru District Plan, Open Space Zone - **PREC-01**. Holiday Huts Precinct.

Point 3. An informal and ad hoc layout with buildings in some cases being located closer than within a residential area.

The reserve in the early 1900's was a paddock and prospective hut holders simply chose a site of their liking. In those days the Acclimatisation Society administered the area, and other than paying a pepper corn rent, all occupiers required, was to hold a fishing licence. My grandfather built our hut under those conditions. Fencing was frowned on, and only land the hut sat on was leased.

In the 1950's the Geraldine County Council took over the management of the reserve, and the demand for sections increased. Huts were squeezed into all open spaces, and if there was the smallest gap another hut was added. Huts were all consented. They were roughly built in rows, but planning was rudimentary. The objectives were for fishing huts, utilisation of the land, and maximising recreational benefit. Associated risks were simply accepted as inherent to holidaying by the river and the sea.

It was as families started to populate the reserve, that fencing became necessary. This resulted in sections of all sizes and shapes being created. Hut holders started to lay claim to their patch. The understanding was all huts were temporary accommodation and a 180day rule applied. This rule still applies today. A few permanent residents were permitted for security reasons.

It was in the 1980's years after much of the development had taken place, that the Council decided to survey the area, and more formally establish hut sections. In speaking with the surveyor, he confessed he found it impossible to fit all huts evenly into his survey. There were no building set-back rules, nothing was square, nothing the same, and he did the best he could. Some buildings were on or over boundaries.

We were assured by the Council at the time that the siting of huts did not matter because they were placed on the reserve before the plan and had precedence over the plan.

Now forty to sixty years later, or more, the council in their planning is much more risk adverse. There are maps where once no maps ever existed. There is the Coastal Erosion Overlay, Sea Water Inundation Overlay, High Hazard Area Overlay, Flood Assessment Area Overlay, etc all scary stuff if you are a Rangitata hut owner. Not that in reality the physical presence of risks has visibly increased.

Climate Change is acknowledged with rising sea levels, and greater flooding in Alpine rivers such as the Rangitata. Climate change is not all bad news, although it seems, only the bad news, is being mapped! To my knowledge what has not been mapped is, the thousands of tonnes of shingle that was transported down the Rangitata, and out to sea in the December 2019 flood. No one predicted the 40/60metres of additional shingle this added to the protective barrier between the huts and the sea. Again, only this week a further 900 cumecs flood occurred in the Rangitata. You could hear the shingle rattling down the river bed. I don't know how much, if anything, this will add to the shingle barrier. What I do know though is that no one else knows and it is not measured in any map!

If the sea inundated the reserve, there would be no rebuilding. If the coast eroded hut sites there would be no re-building. In those circumstances building set back rules would have no application.

What I fear is the application of rules associated with the various maps, especially if, building replacement was not because of the application of a particular hazard. For example, a fire or replacing a derelict hut. I suspect that the proposed plan with its maps has a sinister purpose, and gaining a consent to build at the South Rangitata Reserve may be made difficult under the plan through the application of these maps.

Maps aside!

You get to the issue of sorting out the building set back rules. **OSZ-S4**

1. What is a road boundary and are laneways classed as roads because they provide access. Are we only talking about legal roads here? If lane ways were considered roads some existing structures would be on the road and certainly within the 5-metre limit.
2. 5metres from all other site boundaries that adjoin any residential zone. The question is does this have any application to the holiday huts zone?
3. 10metres from all other site boundaries that adjoin any Rural Zone. The question is does this have any application to holiday huts zone. What zone is west of the reserve and does this impact on the reserve?
4. 1.5metres from all other site boundaries. The question whether this is the only set back rule that applies to the Rangitata Huts.

I am confused where there is no specific mention of the holiday huts zone, and how they fit in to the building set back rules.

Site Coverage -OSZ-S6.

Several existing sites would not meet the standard of a maximum building and impermeable surface coverage of 35% mainly because this was never contemplated when surveying the hut sites. Site definition was more about defining a tenantable site and establishing a lease. Given the size of some sections on a rebuild some hut holders would not be able to replace what they have given this rule. 35% may be an average across the reserve, but for some the coverage would be greater than 50%. Another way to handle the problem would be to reset some of the boundaries, given that they were an afterthought anyway!

The reserve is a happy place where people can fish, relax and socialise. Sites are largely developed with most owners taking pride in their property's. It would be easy to kill the enthusiasm, and the investment with a negative approach, and creating hardship with planning rules. The effect would be to the detriment of the reserve. This is why planning rules should be about finding the ways, if at all possible, to meet people's aspirations.

With all due respects trying to manage the possible effects of all hazards is like trying to predict the winning Lotto numbers. Until they are drawn no one really knows what they are? Same with hazards most are best managed when there is certainty. Risk management is a shared responsibility that does not rest solely with the council. It is the stakeholder who final decides whether to invest, or not. It comes at their cost and should be on their call, with an indemnity and no kick back on the council.

Matthew Hall





Photograph 12



Taken recently shows the extensive nature of the shingle beach between the huts & the sea. One of the most vulnerable areas is adjacent to the hut 49 & the beach ridge is 70 metres away. The debris gives an indication of wave action in severe storm conditions. An interesting point is to compare say aerial photographs taken in 1952, 1984 & the above photograph in 1994 and although not validated in anyway because of coarse sediment loading in annual flood events & the littoral drift there is a clear indication of shingle accretion rather than shingle erosion.

Photograph 13



Hut 49. The marram grass and lush vegetation clear shows that there has been no coastal erosion for many years of the bank frontage to the sea.