Wellington Botanical
Society

Wellington Botanical Society Inc. Box 10412 WELLINGTON.

Michael Gee Secretary, Whitireia Park Board C/o Wellington Conservancy Department of Conservation Box 5086 WELLINGTON.

23-11-95

RZ6 660 105 Cook.

Dear Michael,

# THE BOTANICAL/ECOLOGICAL VALUES OF WHITIREIA PARK.

Thank you for the invitation to submit material on the botanical/ecological values of Whitireia Park, for consideration at the Board meeting on 5 December.

#### BACKGROUND

The Wellington Botanical Society was founded in 1939 and has a membership of approximately 350, including professional and amateur botanists. Copies of our brochure are enclosed. We aim:

To encourage the study of Botany in all its branches and the N.Z. flora in particular;

To create an interest in and foster an appreciation of N.Z. native plants, especially in the field;

To collect and disseminate knowledge and encourage the cultivation of native plants;

To advocate the protection of scenic reserves, National Parks, sanctuaries and similar reserves in their native state:

As stated in our submission last November on the proposal to extend the Whitireia Park golf course, we consider the peninsula an important, accessible public amenity ideally suited to its present purpose as expressed in the Management Objectives.

Our members are familiar with the peninsula's ecosystems, having botanised the area over many years, the last time only three weeks ago when we looked in vain for new occurrences of the endangered clifftop daisy *Leptinella nana*. For your information, our updated species list is appended to this letter. Plants which are designated rare vulnerable or susceptible are highlighted.

#### COASTAL FOREST REMNANT

In botanising the tiny, indigenous forest remnant in Onehunga Bay, we were pleased to see considerable regeneration. Pasture grass between the trees is gradually being shaded out, and this will allow an understorey of ferns, sedges and herbs to develop. However, for the forest to be self-sustaining, we recommend the fence be extended to include the whole catchment. If this is not possible at once, perhaps it could be done in stages. Areas of vegetation under a hectare in area are subject to what is called the "edge" effect, whereby wind damage and subsequent dehydration can eventually mean the death of the plants. Considerable ecosystem decline has already occurred in this remnant. For instance we found only one specimen of the large-leaved milktree, Streblus banksii, and epiphytes, particularly some common orchids, were few. With appropriate strategies however, this remnant, already an important seed source, could become an outstandingly valuable, local example of Wellington's coastal forest.

Such an important natural resource must not be allowed deteriorate further. We believe that under the Management Act, the Board has a duty to take every feasible action to protect and conserve it for posterity. A pesteradication programme (installing and regular maintenance of bait stations) would improve the survival chances of the remaining, kohekohe trees, whose flowers and preferentially devoured by possums.

# CLIFF VEGETATION

In general, cliffs are refuges for indigenous plants, and it is still possible that some of Wellington's rare species survive undiscovered on Whitireia's cliffs. While botanising there we noted that the indigenous vegetation is in steady decline as a result of fires and the subsequent invasion of exotic species. This decline is unlikely to be reversed unless barriers are erected to prevent people from dumping car wrecks such as those which at present litter the site.

# **VEHICLES**

We see a need for a Park policy on vehicles off-road, so that indigenous vegetation in sensitive areas such as the foreshore, is given an opportunity to recover from fires, litter, and vehicle damage. Ideally there should be barriers here as well, and a requirement to use the existing carpark.

#### SUPERVISION/VANDALISM/STOCK DAMAGE

There appears to be inadequate supervision of the Park, resulting in vandalism (for instance the toilet block has been vandalised recently). Increased supervision and strategically-placed, educative notices might help to raise public awareness and reduce the thoughtless and destructive behaviour which at present mars the Park's undoubted scenic and conservation values.

Stock damage to the track system has been extensive in places. This inconveniences walkers, is bad publicity for the Park, and causes siltation of the Onepoto inlet, with resultant damage to the estuarine ecosystems. Estuaries are among the most endangered ecosystems nationwide, and this estuary is one of very few left in the Wellington region. We ask that when the stocking lease comes up for renewal, the Board consider reducing the stocking levels to allow the ecosystems to recover.

#### ONEPOTO STREAM CATCHMENT

The upper reaches of the Onepoto Stream support small populations of indigenous grasses, sedges and rushes, surviving among the pasture grass. The lower reaches contain remnant coastal scrub and wetland species which should be fenced to allow for regeneration. In the True Left tributary there is a large, male Totara, (Podocarpus totara) which the Board wisely fenced some years ago. This sole survivor is a unique genetic resource. Perhaps the Board would consider planting near it, seedling totara from the nearest true-wild source, to provide the nucleus of a totara restoration programme. The resultant trees could be planted out in e.g. the Onepoto remnant, and/or in some of the already-fenced clusters of trees, eventually replacing the planted karo, which are not native to this region.

### WEEDS

Massive invasions of weed species in the Park such as boneseed and boxthorn are of concern to us, as is the pampas outside the toilet block, (probably planted in error, having been mistaken for toetoe, *Cortaderia sp.*): it should be immediately removed.

#### CONCLUSION

The Society would like to see better protection of the existing indigenous ecosystems and a vigorous programme of propagation, planting and protection of appropriately-sourced indigenous species. Park usage for casual, unstructured recreation should continue but should not be allowed to further degrade or compromise the outstanding natural values of Whitireia Park.

Yours sincerely,

Barbara Mitcalfe, Vice-pres., Wellington Botanical Society Inc.

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# Sheet1

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Sonchus	kirkii			-		
Spergularia	media	-		and the state of t		
Stellaria	parviflora	and the second	Account of the second of the s			
Stellaria	dissipiens					
Streblus	banksii		-			
Tetragonia	trigyna					
Thelymitra	longifolia	Value of the second				
Triglochin	striata	Annual Land				
Trisetum	antarcticum					
Typha	orientalis					
Wahlenbergia	colensoi					
Wahlenbergia	gracilis					
Zoysia	minima				Total Control	