

**BEFORE THE MACKENZIE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**IN THE MATTER      OF THE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ACT 1991**

**AND**

**IN THE MATTER      OF PLAN CHANGE 13 TO THE OPERATIVE  
DISTRICT PLAN**

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**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF ALLAN TIBBY  
FOR FOUNTAINBLUE LIMITED**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

1. My name is Allan Tibby. I am the majority stockholder amongst four partners who own PD Station via Fountainblue Ltd., Southern Serenity Ltd., and Pukaki Tourism Holdings Partnership and are representing them here today.
2. I am a New Zealander but have spent a considerable amount of time overseas. We purchased PD Station in June of 1999 and are now entering our 10<sup>th</sup> year in the MacKenzie Basin as land owners. Since assuming ownership of PD we have been primarily leasing the farm to sheep and cattle farmers in the area but do run a few head ourselves. We are currently preparing to intensively crop available flat lands of which we have about 350 hectares. Organic seed production is also one of the options we will be trialing.

## **CURRENT SITUATION**

3. The recent study by the Agribusiness and Economics Research Unit at Lincoln University titled "The Socio-economic Status of the South Island High Country" concludes that many high country farmers are in financial difficulty. Traditional sheep farming is not what it was. Over half of the original PD Station was returned to the Crown during the tenure review process and making money out of the remaining land is extremely challenging if we limit ourselves to traditional sheep farming.
4. We also face the tremendous and debilitating threats of rabbits, hieracium, wildings, and topsoil erosion.
5. Almost one third of our property or about 1,200 hectares, is heavily infested with wilding pines. To face the prospect of going out to cut wildings day after day, week after week, year after year and to still be fighting a losing battle is soul destroying. Best estimates are that we will need to spend over \$2.5Million over 5 years to not eradicate, but to simply bring the problem under control. Where is that money going to come from? Certainly not from traditional farming.
6. The status quo we see today for farmers is not just bleak but down right depressing, and so it is no wonder that everyone is planning for alternatives in the form of new farming practices, alternate income streams, and new business models to not just provide for a sound economic future, but to also save the very land that we farm and love. A read of the Lincoln University study should be a must for anyone seeking to intervene in any manner in the lives of High Country farmers.

## **WHY DID WE BUY PUKAKI DOWNS?**

7. In spite of all the obstacles we believe that the MacKenzie Basin is one of the most beautiful places on Earth, and as a world traveller for over 38 years, I think I am qualified to make such an observation.
8. In April of 2007 after 4 members of Council visited our property I wrote a letter to Council stating:

*"The reason we purchased our property (Pukaki Downs) some years back was precisely because we were struck with the inspirational qualities of the entire area and our property in particular."*

We have never been secretive about our desires to see the Basin and particularly Lake Pukaki-Aoraki become one of the premier eco-tourist destinations in the world.

In the same letter I further stated;

*"We would also like to clearly state that we would not want to use our property in any way which would diminish the natural qualities of what we purchased. To do this would be completely counterproductive to our purpose for having purchased it in the first place."*

9. Tourism provides one out of every ten jobs for New Zealanders and Tourism is one of the top four foreign exchange earners for the country beating wool and meat exports hands down. While we have the icon of New Zealand scenery, Aoraki, on our doorstep, the District revenues from tourism are abysmally low. The tourists who come into the area are all on their way somewhere else. The Mackenzie is not seen as a significant destination and sorely lacks the facilities to become one.
10. I will be leaving it to my team of professionals with me here today, particularly Mr. Warren Hoy, to expound on our vision in practical terms.

### **PC13**

11. For two years I have been communicating with Council and our Mayor, John O'Neill about what our plans and vision are and how we will be able to provide opportunity and positive energy for the High Country economy.
12. The Mayor and CEO insisted they were running an "enabling" Council and welcomed progress. The visit in 2007 by 4 Councillors and Graham Densem was all warm and fuzzy, and very positive, so we were shocked, dismayed and felt betrayed when PC13 was notified. Nothing like this was discussed with us or any of the farmers we talked to.
13. In a subsequent call to the Mayor by my partner Allan Ranson, which I was listening to, the Mayor stated that we would not be able to do any of the things we had talked to him about and tourist facilities should be in Mt. Cook or Twizel. Mr. Warren Hoy will be explaining to you shortly how this view is shortsighted and counter productive, and definitely out of step with Tourism New Zealand and the current trends and demands of travellers worldwide.
14. My personal opinion is that the greatest foundational flaws of PC13 are that it is simply reactive to perceived or imagined threats, extremely poorly researched, undemocratic & not vision driven. The lack of vision for what the Basin could be is perhaps the biggest single problem.
15. I also feel that the omission by both Patricia Harte and Graham Densem to specifically address the serious and legitimate queries and challenges raised by ourselves and other farmers/landowners as to the deficiencies in their attempt to have the entire Basin classified as an ONL rather dismissive and unprofessional. A number of farmers and landowners have

gone to significant time and expense to understand PC13 and to engage suitably qualified expert witnesses to prepare evidence on its shortcomings. In my view, the matter raised in the submissions based on these expert opinions have not been addressed in the officer reports. I find this surprising given the fundamental importance of the issues raised.

#### **THE LANDSCAPE STUDY**

16. The proposed plan and even the current plan fail to recognize the topographical diversity of Pukaki Downs. (Begin aerial photos showing land. Lakeside, Tarns, and valley on Eastern side, and deficiencies in LSP Zone on PD.)

#### **NO ALLOCATION OF EXISTING NODE**

17. When the PC13 was notified we saw that PD was not allocated any "existing node". In a call to Graham Densem by my partner, Allan Ranson, Graham stated he didn't think PD was an "active farm" indicating the purposeful intent in this omission. However, he did note by way of further explanation that he was pressured and rushed to finish his Landscape Report and was not happy about that.
18. A very strong complaint from us resulted in the allocation of an "existing node". When you look at an aerial photo of our property you will notice;
  - 18.1. a homestead,
  - 18.2. managers house,
  - 18.3. cottage for our second in charge and
  - 18.4. an implement shed.

But where did Mr Densem suggest the node?

19. Across the road around the shearers quarters and the woolshed! We thought "you've got to be joking!"
20. To justify his action he states that no homestead node should be visible from the state hiway or "that it would be inappropriate to designate a building node as close to Lake Pukaki as proposed in this submission."
21. Mr Densem however sees no problem when Glentanner and Ferintosh both have nodes right on the same highway, and Ferintosh Station has a node that runs all the way down to the lakes edge. (Aerial photos).
22. In his submission Mr Densem states;

"You asked if a node might also be appropriate on Pukaki Downs land east of SH80. In my opinion it would not. Notwithstanding the residential developments already there, this is not in my view the traditional centre of farm operations at Pukaki Downs."
23. This has been the center of the farm for the former owner and us for around 20 years now. Mr Densem's assessment on this matter is both unqualified ( as he is not an agricultural consultant) and incorrect. Of even greater concern, is that it results in PD being treated in a manner that is completely lacking in consistency and evenhandedness in the identification of nodes.

24. One can only ponder whether Mr Densem considers us to be the "outsiders" as he calls them, with "inappropriate aims" referred to in his Landscape Report. He also promotes in his report that "the ownership of high country wealth and responsibility for the land is retained in local control, not dispersed to interests beyond the Basin" while admitting this to be "perhaps a 'wacky' view".

## **SUBDIVISION APPLICATION**

25. We have submitted an application for subdivision in 2006 for 49 titles (ranging between 5 and 9.5 hectares in size). In Mr Densem's mind and perhaps some of the Councillors' minds as well, there is an unjustified concern as to our intention and ethics in relation to the preservation of the environment. Since Mr Densem raised these concerns in his Further Report I would like to speak briefly about this.
26. As reported in the Timaru Herald recently this is to become an eco-villa development, the first of its kind. We will be using the services of a local environmental architect, Louie Campbell, who has over 15 years of experience with Graham North – the father of environmental architecture in New Zealand and recognized internationally. If Mr Densem had asked us or checked with our Consultants (Davis Ogilvie) he would be aware that the power and communication lines coming from the state highway and running 4.5 kms to the subdivision will be all underground. So his stated concern on this matter is unwarranted.
27. The houses will be North facing and hidden from the South by earthen, tussock planted bunds. The roof of each house will also be planted with tussock and local grasses (see photos). We hope that this development, which we intend to be largely tourist focused, will be an outstanding example of environmentally sensitive design.
28. Since this application is classified as a controlled activity, his comments on its appropriateness under PC13 are uncalled for. We would also like to add that if our intention was simple to divide up our land then sell it off and run with the money, we would surely have filed a number of applications before Council. Our intention was to demonstrate by this development that we have the best intentions for the Basin so that any future applications would be viewed in this light. However the drawn out, and sometimes irrational inefficiencies associated with resource consents have made it so we are moving in slow motion and wondering if it will ever end. This is particularly disappointing to us because in many ways we believe we share the same concerns and goals as the Council. Our goal is to not only maintain but to improve the visual amenity of our land. This will cost many millions of dollars. However, the form of development we propose is entirely compatible with some of the outcomes that presumably have motivated PC13. We therefore see an opportunity to work co-operatively with Council rather than become entangled in protracted planning disputes.

## **CONCLUSION**

29. I began today talking about the problems faced by farmers and landowners in the High Country. By the end of our presentation today we hope that the panel and Council will see us as active partners who will bring to the Basin vision and solutions, that enhance the amazing beauty and preserve the iconic views of the land, as well as providing an alternative that will

bring substantial and sustainable economic and skill-employment rewards for the people of the Basin, robust and ecologically sound business models, and increased revenue for Council to enhance their community development work.

30. This can be done, not at the expense of the landscape, but to the contrary, in a way that will result in an increased capacity for stewardship and renewal of the land.
31. We for example are currently working with DoC and the countries leading wilding expert to draw up a plan the will result in the containment of the wilding spread, and its gradual elimination and replacement with native tussock.

Thank you.