

Proposed Otago Regional Policy Statement 2021 – Coastal Environment Hearing

Summary of Evidence of Edward Ellison

1. My name is Edward Ellison. My qualifications and experience are set out in my evidence. I was raised at Ōtākou in our whānau home, Te Waipounamu, on ancestral lands next to Otago Harbour. My whānau have always been closely associated with the moana. Building on what is covered in my primary evidence, I want to note that even in my lifetime this association has taken many forms, from the gathering of once-abundant mahika kai species like barracuda, blue cod and flounder from the harbour, through to the direct involvement in commercial fisheries by my father George, who was a fisherman, and my uncle Rāniera, who established Ōtākou Fisheries Ltd.

Kāi Tahu whakapapa, rakatirataka and kaitiakitaka as it relates to the coastal environment

2. In my earlier presentation during the hearings on the Mana Whenua chapter, and as explained in paragraphs [13] to [18] of my evidence, I noted how Kāi Tahu are bound by whakapapa to the land, water and all life; and the links between whakapapa and the mauri of te taiao. Coastal waters are of special significance to Kāi Tahu, the domain of the atua Takaroa who is guardian of all sea creatures. According to our traditions, Takaroa's abode is the Otago harbour island Rakiriri.
3. I discussed how whakapapa gives rise to the rights inherent in rakatirataka, and the links between rakatirataka and customary authority and kaitiakitaka, in paragraphs [21] to [26] of my evidence. At paragraphs [17] to [18], I referred to the concept of ki uta ki tai, and the direct consequence that activities on land can have for our coastal environment, and the need to manage land with this in mind. As set out in paragraph [20] and [43] of my evidence, the primary resource management principle for Kāi Tahu is the protection of mauri, with maintenance and protection of the mauri of coastal species and habitats being a critical function of kaitiakitaka.

Mahika kai

4. Kāi Tahu's cultural identity is tied to the customary gathering of food and other resources. Being able to access healthy mahika kai resources is critical for putting kai on the table, for showing manaakitaka at the marae and in other settings, and for passing on mātauraka to younger generations.
5. In paragraphs [31-32] of my evidence, I very briefly summarise the extent of the mahika kai resource that was once available to our tūpuna in the coastal environment – on land, in rivers, lagoons and estuaries and in the moana itself. Customary fishing grounds along the coast were named and included a variety of features such as reefs, currents and other parts of the marine environment.

Degradation of te taiao

6. As discussed in paragraphs [52] to [63] of my evidence, the mahika kai resource is now a shadow of what our kaumātua and tūpuna once experienced, due to land drainage, sedimentation, degradation, dredging and reclamation of our wetlands, rivers, estuaries, harbours, and coastal domains.
7. Deterioration in water quality and aquatic habitats has resulted from direct and indirect discharges of sewage, animal wastes and nutrients, stormwater and sediment. Contaminants and sediment have had a devastating effect on seabed ecosystems and spawning grounds for marine species. The upper Otago Harbour is not in a fit state to harvest kai or use water for cultural practices, due to stormwater discharges and wastewater overflows during high rainfall events.
8. Reclamation has further degraded our relationship with the harbour, particularly the upper harbour which was a highly important kōhanga habitat for mahika kai and taoka species, being shallow, tidal and estuarine. Further incremental reclamation of Otago Harbour is opposed by my rūnaka, to protect our mahika kai and taoka species.

Aspirations for restoration of te taiao

9. The failure to adopt a ki uta, ki tai approach and recognise and manage connections between the whenua, wai māori and the moana has led to the degradation of both freshwater and the coastal environment and resulted in a profound loss of mahika kai resources and damaged our relationship to our wāhi tūpuna.
10. As discussed in paragraph 87 of my evidence, the focus on Te Mana o te Wai in the proposed Otago Regional Policy Statement has resulted in a significant improvement in the recognition of the interconnectedness between land and freshwater. However, this approach also needs to be applied to the coastal environment to properly recognise the interconnection between freshwater and coastal environments, and between land and coastal waters. For mana whenua, protection of mahika kai and taoka species and the restoration of habitat requires a whole of system approach that recognises the importance of this interconnection between land, water, the coast and other parts of te taiao.

Edward Ellison