

Summary of Evidence - Edward Ellison on behalf of Te Rūnanga o Ōtākou

1. Te Rūnanga o Ōtākou is the papatipu rūnaka that represents hapū who uphold the mana of the whenua for the Taiari river and Taiari Mouth. I hold the role of Ūpoko for the rūnaka. My evidence discusses the association of Ōtākou with the Taiari River and the coastal environment of Te Tai o Āraiteuru and the concerns we have about the intrusion of visitor accommodation into this environment.
2. Our association with the Taiari and the Otago coast is longstanding. As mana whenua, we hold both rakatirataka rights in relation to the area and kaitiakitaka obligations to ensure the health and wellbeing of wai māori, wai tai, and te taiao.
3. My evidence describes some of the traditions and history of use associated with the Taiari that are reflected in traditional place names (wāhi ikoa) and the broader cultural landscape (wāhi tūpuna). Wāhi tūpuna underpin our mana whenua and mana moana status and give body to our mātauraka and tikaka. It is our duty as kaitiaki to care for them and pass them on to future generations in a state that retains the central characteristics of what made them special to our people. Loss of wāhi tūpuna means loss of cultural narratives and mātauraka, and of Kāi Tahu identity.
4. Our relationship to the Taiari, and to the coastal waters into which the river flows, is bound up with mahika kai. Bountiful food and resources were historically gathered from the river and its catchment and from the coastal area. Mahika kai is integral to our cultural identity as whānau and hapū, but the impacts of land alienation and land development have resulted in disconnection and severe resource depletion.
5. Although provisions in the Ngāi Tahu Claims Settlement Act have reintroduced a small part of the footprint of Kāi Tahu in the Taiari catchment, development pressures on wāhi tūpuna and on mahika kai resources make it increasingly difficult for whānau to reconnect with the whenua and the wai.
6. I discuss the importance to mana whenua of protecting mauri, and the way degradation of mauri affects the ability to practise mahika kai. An environment that has been degraded by contamination or by intrusion of activities that do not belong there, including noise, artificial light and unnecessary structures, is less likely to be used for mahika kai. Activities that detract from the natural character of the Taiari River and Te Tai o Āraiteuru will also have a negative impact on the wāhi tūpuna values associated with the area.

7. It is my view that the intrusion of private use into the coastal marine area will discourage whānau from engaging or re-connecting with cultural practices and mahika kai in the river mouth and estuary. This will further entrench the effects of displacement and disconnection from the landscape and inhibit the transmission of mātauraka and the exercise of our responsibilities as kaitiaki.
8. An additional concern is adoption of the name of our reserve land block “Onumia” for their development without reference to mana whenua or consideration of our views on the proposed activity.