

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to talk with you today. My name is Abby Smith and I am here representing the Otago Conservation Board, of which I am the chair.

The Otago Conservation Board, as you may know, is responsible for advising the Otago Conservancy of the Department of Conservation on matters of strategy and governance. We are currently developing the Conservation Management Strategy for Otago. We also have an obligation to advocate and submit on matters relating to conservation in Otago.

The Board has filed a written submission with you, in which we raise several points. We would like to withdraw our concern regarding onshore sediment transport of the dredge spoil plume. We have been convinced by the work of Dr. Bell and Dr. Vennell, and we understand that onshore sediment transport is expected to be unusual and short in duration.

This leaves the Board's concern about the effects of dredging in the Harbour itself. We acknowledge that Otago Harbour is a highly modified inlet, dominated by Port and Urban activities, and we understand that much of its natural environment is gone. That is why we are asking the Panel to especially ^{protect and} consider the last few seagrass beds and sand flats that remain in the lower Harbour. We would ask you to restrict dredging activities in areas where significant stands of seagrass still exist, such as off Harwood. And in particular we ask you to have regard to the exceptional conservation values at Aramoana. The sand flats and intertidal areas at Aramoana are special in a number of ways.

As you will remember, in the mid-1970s Aramoana was the focus of a successful grass-roots public outcry which prevented the construction of an aluminium smelter at the entrance to Otago Harbour. The sand flats at Aramoana are not just historic but of intrinsic conservation value. The salt marsh vegetation is an unusual sequence of habitats of national significance, according to the current Otago Conservation Management Strategy. Most people know you can get the best cockles in the harbor at Aramoana, and the area has considerable relevance to the traditional harvest of kai moana. It may be less well known that the flats act as a fish nursery and breeding area, which helps to keep fish stocks high in the wider outer harbour. During the summer months, the sand flats play host to many shorebirds. These waders, such as godwits and knots, are long-distance migrants, and their stop in New Zealand is part of a pan-Pacific tour. Even bugs love Aramoana – it is very rich in insect life, with over 60 species of moths alone. CMS

The people of Otago have acknowledged its special ecological diversity and conservation significance by delineating the Aramoana Ecological Area, an area of 359 hectares.

The Otago Conservation Board asks the Panel to ensure that this special area, and its plants, fish, bugs and birds, remain as unaffected as possible by dredging. We ask you to consider impacts of dredging on these populations and to set appropriate conditions to help protect the biodiversity at Aramoana. We would like to see the setting of acceptable thresholds of noise, disturbance, and turbidity in the Aramoana area. Then we want to see a monitoring programme to make sure those limits are not exceeded – and we want dredging to stop if they are exceeded.

based on the tolerances and responses of local wild life.

The bugs and the plants and the fish are our neighbours, they have lived here a long time, and we owe them some consideration and care. The birds are tourists, stopping by to enjoy our home, and we owe them an appropriate welcome. ^{and a friendly place to stay.} We strongly urge the Panel, the Otago Regional Council, and Port Otago to find a way to minimise impacts in this important part of Otago Harbour.

The Otago Conservation Board appreciates the opportunity to submit to the Panel, and wishes you well in the task before you.