IN THE MATTER of the Resource Management Act 1991

AND

IN THE MATTER of an application by Port Otago for resource consents to implement Project Next Generation.

STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF STEVE LITTLE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 My name is Steve Little.

1.2 I have been a commercial fisherman for 30 years. I hold a Deep Sea Mates ticket for a fishing vessel and a Master Class 4 Australian coastal ticket.

1.3 I have fished the East Otago and Southland coast for 25 years and I have also fished in Northern Territory Australia and in Scotland.

1.4 I operate large trawler which works deeper waters out of Bluff.

1.5 I am currently employed by the University of Otago to skipper their research boat to the sub-Antarctic islands as required.

1.6 I am representing the Port Chalmers Fishermen's Co-operative Society ('**Cooperative**') and I am the immediate past president.

1.7 In relation to this Proposal the Cooperative made the following key points in their submission in opposition to this application:

1. *No consideration of importance of dump site area to commercial trawling of local fishing boats. No effective research has been completed into effects the dumping will have on the importance Sole and the Elephant fishery is to the local commercial fishing vessels.*
2. *The loss of traditional fishing grounds for local inshore fishing boats (trawlers and set netters) on and around dump site and associated financial loss to affected vessels.*
3. *Detrimental effect to fish habitats in respect of feeding and breeding ground around proposed dump site.*
4. *Detrimental effect on marine habitats from suspended fine materials, moving north and inshore effecting water turbidity and the 'blanket effect' on kelp beds.*
5. *The serious consequences of potential degradation of kelp beds which support many marine species, which have adverse effects on the valuable Rock Lobster and Paua fishery.*

1.8 While my evidence will discuss a number of the points raised by the Cooperative, a number of the points will be expanded upon in the planning and marine ecology evidence of Mr Nigel Bryce and Dr Brian Stewart.

2.0 SCOPE AND STRUCTURE OF EVIDENCE

2.1 My evidence will provide you with a general overview of the local fishery industry, the manner in which Cooperative members operate within Otago's waters, and the importance of Blueskin Bay as a local and regionally important fishing ground for local fishers.

2.2 I will first provide a bit of context to the Cooperative and the fishing industry.

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 The Cooperative was founded in 1909 and celebrated its centennial in 2009. At that time 30 local fishermen got together to form a "Union of Fishermen." Today we have 47 members of which 33 are actively fishing. Trawling, set netting, crayfishing, cod potting, paua diving are carried out within 10 nautical miles of Taiaroa Heads.

3.2 As in all industries, there has been an evolution of effort through technology and the way in which the industry has been regulated. Today every fishing boat has a Global Positioning System that shows where the boat is within a meter, and modern sounders that identify sea bottom type and some fish species. However, the most significant change to the fishing industry occurred in 1987 when the Quota Management System ('**QMS**') was introduced to manage commercial fish stocks and to ensure sustainability.

3.3 Importantly, the introduction of the QMS created a property right to quota owners. Each commercial species was allocated a Total Allowable Catch ('**TAC**') in tonnes and the vessels who established the "catch history" were allocated quota within defined coastal areas where they had caught the fish.

3.4 Soon after the QMS was introduced many fishermen opted for retirement and sold boat and quota to large fishing companies who were able to see the strategic importance of quota ownership. Consequently, 90% of the local trawler men in Otago rely on fish companies to provide quota so they can fish local grounds. Fishermen are effectively fined for over-fishing their quota allocation (they pay Deemed Values). Therefore each boat must ensure it has a portfolio of different species. This is especially true in a multi species fishery like the Otago coast.

3.5 Based on my own experience, in some areas I have caught up to 6 different species in a single trawl and up to 12 species over a trip. If you like, Fishermen have become harvesters as much as hunter gatherers.

3.6 Today a fisherman must know specifically where the target species lives and when it becomes abundant to be cost effective. This is particularly the case with the increased operating costs. He must catch his target species with minimum by-catch, as some quota species are particularly hard to procure if not impossible and will effectively cost him money in deem value bills.

3.7 It is important for the Panel to be aware, that some boats have to steam away from ground which holds their target fish because they cannot balance by-catch and dumping fish can result in heavy fines under the QMS.

3.8 At present fishermen and particularly trawlermen have a legal responsibility to complete 3 fishing log books. The Trawl Catch Effort Return (TCER) is a daily log, which records a boats position in Latitude and Longitude coordinates and estimation of "green weight" before knifing and gutting. The Catch Landing Return (CLR) provides a trip report detailing the number of boxes of fish landed and updated with exact weights from the processors or companies known as Licensed Fish Receivers. The fishermen must also complete a Monthly Harvest Report (MHR) of total fish caught each month so he can reconcile his quota coverage. Failure to provide the MHR within 14 days results in a $750 instant fine. Any fisherman who incurs an outstanding debt of $1000 has his fishing permit suspended which stops him fishing.

3.9 Fishermen today need to closely manage their businesses to be cost effective; this is especially the case with the significant rise in fuel prices, with operators having to pay more in diesel costs to fish. We need to keep our quota balanced and our catch reports accurate.

4.0 THE PROPOSAL

4.1 In relation to the evidence before you, especially in relation to the siting of and disposal of dredge material at disposal area AO, the evidence put to you is that dumping spoil on this site will be a "minor inconvenience". However, I can tell you that in the case of 3 small trawlers, the ground at and around site AO represents 80-100% of their livelihoods. I believe there would be more effort in this area if local boats could access more quota.

4.2 Mr Boyd on behalf of the Port acknowledges "it is difficult to quantify effects precisely "of the proposal." (paragraph 124, pg34). Mr Boyd acknowledges that sole and sand flounder make up most of the Otago flatfish catch, I am frustrated by the fact Mr Boyd has given no evidence of what species of fish are harvested or the quantities of fish which are landed from the AO site or its close proximity. Importantly, no consideration is given to the income generated to the local operators from these catches and how they may stand to loose financially if their fishery is affected in any way by this dump site.

This in my opinion is a serious omission in his evidence and the application as a whoile.

4.3 Looking at the effects of spoil dumping, the evidence that I have reviewed identifies that it **is** going to destroy the habitat that sustains feed for the Sole and the small shellfish the Elephant fish feed off. There is an admission from Port Otago that it is going to cause loss of habitat, however the extent and scale of this loss can only be estimated and I suggest that their baseline research and data is not up to scratch.

4.4 In my experience fishing these local waters and from discussions that I have had with local fishermen, there is absolutely no doubt that the existing dumping grounds inside Blueskin Bay have changed the habitat on a long terms basis and it has also changed the composition of the bottom which stops boats from working in close proximity (detail). So not only do we lose the marine animals that live there, it is also a no go zone because trawl gear can't get through there anymore. The last time POL had capital dredging undertaken in 1975 there was no monitoring system in place to evaluate the effects before or after the dumping.

4.5 The "gyre" that affects the dynamics of Blueskin Bay has a southerly set north of Karitane at Ahuriri rock to Tairoa, this is acknowledged on admiralty chart 661. This is a dynamic coastline and the dumping of sand and fine silts will potentially circulate into Blueskin Bay and will have a negative impact on the trawl fishery.

4.6 The Cooperative are not only very concerned with the effects on our Trawlermen, but also on the fine silts that may find their way inshore, and impact upon other fisheries, and their associated property rights.

4.7 The Cooperative consider that, presently there hasn't been enough research, particularly the computer modelling which, to my knowledge has not taken historical east to south-east weather patterns into account. There is a lot of local knowledge as to how tides work in Blueskin Bay, and how the local gyre works. There is a huge sweeping cycle that wheels into the bay and has created a naturally occurring boghole where small shells and sediments accumulate in the southwest corner of the bay. This area is unworkable for trawlers. Any increase of fine silts could potentially produce more of these unproductive areas. I have identified the Boghole of the Plan attached as **Appendix 1** of this statement.

4.8 In terms of concerns about lack of consultation, I can tell you here that not one of our members of the Cooperative have been asked as to what effect this proposal will have financially on the boats that work out in Blueskin Bay.

4.9 The three small trawlers which will be most affected work within 10 nautical miles of the heads and area AO encroaches directly on their trawling. The general limit of their respective operations is identified on the Plan attached as **Appendix 1.** It is a recognised area where you catch English Sole, especially in the winter months and conversely it is an area where there is a vibrant Elephant fishery during the summer months. This area is important, given that it is a year- long resource that is farmed and harvested as required. It is for this reason why this fishery is recognised as a regionally important fishing resource.

4.10 In the case of the 3 small boats, they are small one man operations. The day starts for them at 3 to 4 o'clock in the morning and they have their net in the water by daybreak and often work until dark. They can opt to either spend an extra night out by anchoring up somewhere in a sheltered bay and landing the following evening or depending on catch rates, land daily to a local fish company providing fresh fish to the local market. These small day boats are paid a premium for fresh fish as opposed to the larger trawlers who land after 4-5 day trips. This fresh fish resource is highly sought after by the local community.

4.11 Furthermore, the grounds also represent a niche fishery during the winter months for the bigger local boats. These boats come up here and in particularly bad weather can still find a corner to work in. This represents an honest month for these guys whereupon they can't fish in any other areas because of the prevailing SW weather, and there is little other fish further south as the lemon sole fishery disappears after a short summer season. Traditionally site AO also provides a bait fishery for the crayfishing boats during winter. Regionally, it is very important area to the smaller boats over the whole year and to the larger vessels during the winter. I note that the New Zealand Federation of Commercial Fishermen reiterate the regional importance of this fishery at clause f) of their submission.

5.0 CONCLUSION

5.1 Overall, the Cooperative are anxious about the long-term effects on its members especially the local trawlermen who are going to be directly affected. I would note here that these effects would likely be felt as part of the Incremental Capital Works programme (phase 1) and to a greater extent by the Major Capital Works programme (phase 2) given the greater proportion of silt and clays to be dumped at AO during this second phase. The Cooperative are also concerned about the effects of sedimentation in

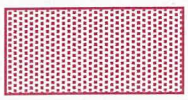
Blueskin Bay and the potentially catastrophic impact that this could have on our lobster and paua grounds and associated property rights.

5.2 In terms of issues raised by Mr Boyd about the difficulty sourcing information about local fisheries, I think better communication between the Port and the local fishing industry would have probably resulted in our concerns being better understood and appropriate mitigation provided for. Given the importance of the Port to the district and regional economies, I hope we can find some middle ground on which to resolve our concerns.

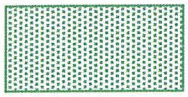
5.3 Thank you for taking the time to listen and I am happy to answer any questions.

Mr Steve Little
18th April 2011

KEY:

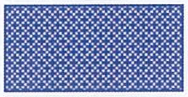


Small inshore vessel trawl ground



Larger vessels working flatfish and elephant fish with some gurnard and red cod

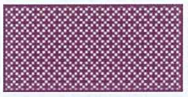
Approximate outer limit of flatfish grounds



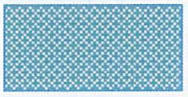
Paddle crab grounds

Crayfish and Paua

Naturally created "bog hole" due to gyre

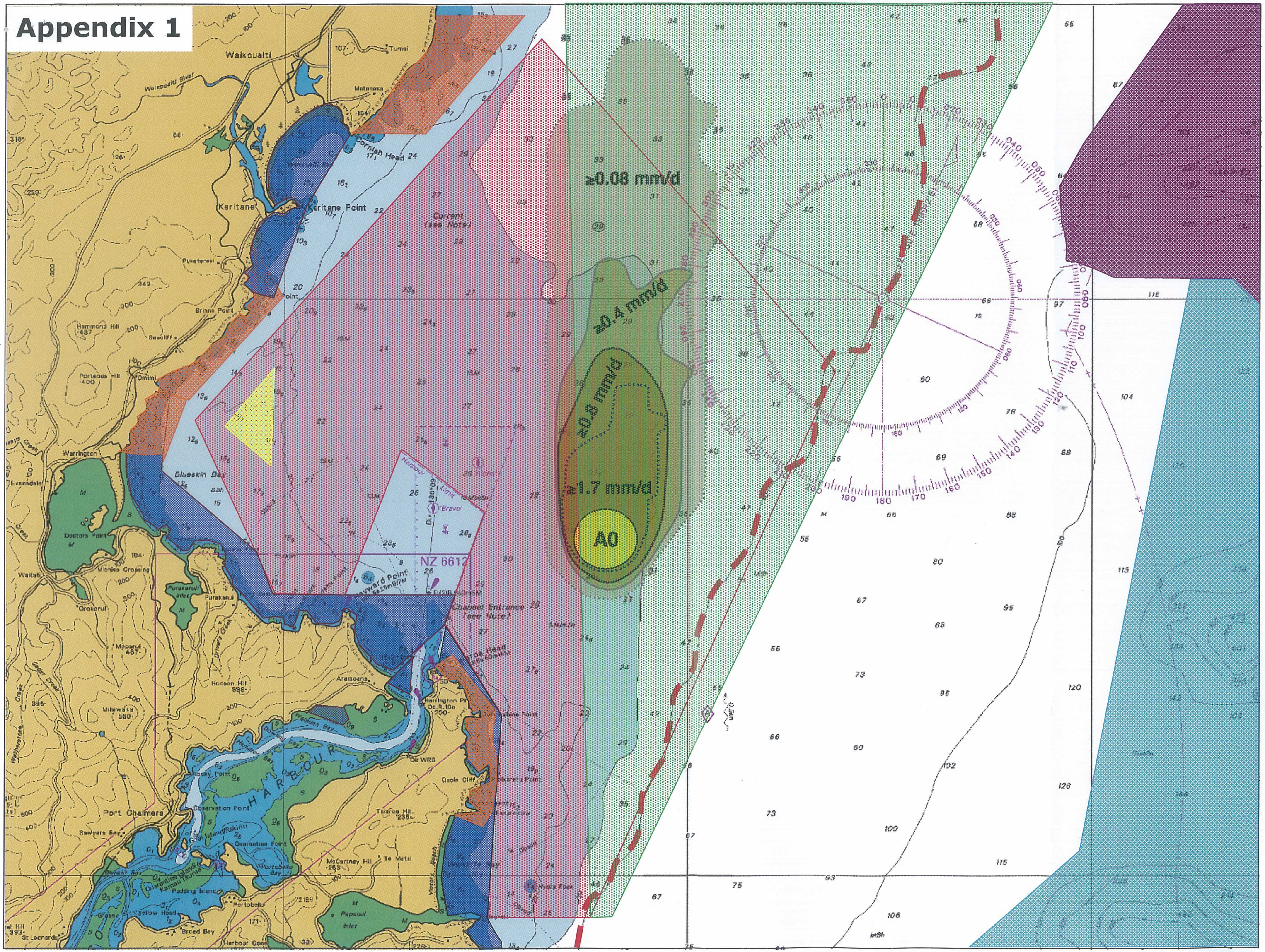


Set netting



Queen scallop grounds

Appendix 1



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Doctors Point
Port Chalmers
Aramoana
Quoin Cliff
HARBOUR