



National Council of Women of New Zealand

Te Kaunihera
Wahine O Aotearoa

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Submission to the Government Administration Select Committee on the Summit Road (Canterbury) Protection Bill

1 Description of The National Council Of Women NZ

- 1.1 The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is the principal umbrella group for women's organisations within New Zealand. It has 34 branches ranging from Mid Northland Branch to Southland. There are also 43 Nationally Organised Societies affiliated to the Council. In existence since 1896 the Council's preferred practice is to co-operate with other organisations.
- 1.2. The Christchurch Branch of NCWNZ comprises representatives from 36 affiliated local societies, Life Members and Honorary Members. On many matters the branch represents a wide spectrum of opinion.

2 The historical context in which the Christchurch Branch of NCWNZ formulated an opinion concerning the need to conserve and protect the Port Hills of Canterbury

- 2.1 On 17 October 1995 representatives endorsed the Branch's submission on *The Proposed City Plan*. Prior to the writing of that submission the Environment and Habitat Committees jointly held workshops and convened meetings to prepare the submission on behalf of the Branch. The dual thrust of our submission was the conservation of the city's Class 1 and Class 2 soils and **the protection of the Port Hills as a rural backdrop to the city.**
- 2.2 The Branch has hosted a series of speakers and seminars on these issues and members have listened to hours of argument on these matters. We are of the opinion that better environmental protection for the Port Hills is vital to the wellbeing of Christchurch residents – especially to those who live on the flat as the majority of residents do. Everybody prefers a nice view. For many people, however, such a choice is not available and the remaining "rural hills" are a treasured feature in an often otherwise unremarkable urban environment. Even if we cannot see the hills from our own property we catch glimpses as we move around the city. It is therefore important for the majority that the rural landscape and view-shafts to it are protected. We cannot see that this Bill gives such protection.

Development and its accompanying infrastructure may alter the texture of a landscape forever, making it visually unpleasant and less reflective. By reflective we mean the bare hills provide visual pleasure and nourishment for the soul. They contribute to communal mental health and a general feeling of wellbeing in their passive ability to delight and uplift the spirit. We believe that the rural hill landscape of Christchurch contributes to the mental health of residents. This Bill, because of its narrow scope, cannot adequately protect these values.
- 2.3 In 1996 Branch representatives met with staff from the Commissioner for the Environment. We reiterated to this team that "the Branch had identified the remaining openness of the Port Hills as an important aesthetic backdrop to the city and a paramount amenity".
- 2.4. The guardianship of the Port Hills has in the past been left to organisations such as the Summit Road Society, to the Port Hills Park Trust Board, to those involved in setting up the



Gama Foundation, to walking groups and to people interested in the indigenous biota there. In 1995 the Christchurch Branch of NCWNZ felt that it was important for our organisation to express the views of people who live on the flat – people who enjoy the ever-changing mood of the hills, their seasonal colours, interesting cloud shadows, sharp contours and misty connections with the weather, keeping us connected to and in rhythm with our wider environment.

- 2.5. Since 1995 when the Branch first began to give collective consideration to the future of the hills we perceive that concern for them has become stronger. The Branch believes the stark and natural slopes of the Port Hills are an asset of incalculable worth to the people of Christchurch. The ragged shelter belts on Montgomery Spur have taken on a new value recently as they help people recognise and talk about a landmark of significance.

3 The response of NCWNZ (Christchurch Branch) to Summit Road (Canterbury) Protection Bill

- 3.1 The Branch recognises that adequate protection of the Port Hills' amenity values cannot be ensured either through the *City Plan* or through *The Resource Management Act*. We also understand that protection is further thwarted by the fact that the hills lie within three local authority jurisdictions. We therefore appreciate the work that has gone into the writing of the Summit Road (Canterbury) Bill because it emphasises, if only in its limited scope, the necessity of dealing with the Port Hills as an entity.
- 3.2. The Bill in its present form however has not kept pace with developing public opinion. For years now our representatives have been aware of discussions leading up to the Christchurch City Council's decision to announce in 1999 its aspirations for a Regional park in the Port Hills. We have also listened with interest to Summit Road Society members explain their Lakes District (English) National Park type vision for the Port Hills – a scheme that would allow the natural and built environment pertaining to both public and covenanted private land to be maintained according to an agreed plan. Neither of these two options seems to have been acknowledged by the Bill.
- 3.3. Taking into consideration the current controversy about proposed commercial helicopter activity from a base on the Port Hills the fact that the Bill is not concerned with land use, seems to us a weakness.
- 3.4 That the "Bill does not protect the skyline or prominent ridgelines of the Port Hills where they are viewed from Christchurch" is a great disappointment to NCWNZ (Christchurch Branch) representatives who know that despoliation of the skyline, especially as a result of subdivision on the hills is of deep concern to both individuals and groups. The siting of the gondola is still much regretted by many Christchurch residents and the potential proliferation of telecommunication structures due to lack of co-operation between companies is a topical issue.
- 3.5 The main value of this Bill is that it stimulates people to express what the Port Hills mean to the city and how we as citizens can better protect their natural and aesthetic amenity values.
- 3.6 In our view the Bill in its present form meets neither the aspirations of our organisation nor those expressed by the wider community.

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National President

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