

Hearing 15B

Dr Maria Bright - Submitter in Opposition to FNHL Rezoning New Special Purpose - Opuia Marine Park to MUZ

Far North Holdings Limited (FNHL) requested a rezoning of all Opuia FNHL land including the Opuia Marine Business Park to Mixed-Use Zone (MUZ). The Opuia Marine Business Park is to facilitate the relocation and expansion of marine industry. Rezoning ALL the area's in Opuia to MUZ is a blunt tool that does not recognise the specific nature of the different areas.

I oppose the rezoning of the Opuia Marine Business Park to MUZ on the grounds it is culturally, socially, environmentally and (if you consider the bigger picture), economically important for it to remain as wetlands. This area has historically provided rich, biodiverse habitats and resources for humans and ecosystems, and, if left, will continue to mitigate against climate change as a carbon sink and buffer for extreme weather events.

FNHL owns a site a few hundred metres away that is already operating for light industrial use and would be much more suitable for marine industry.

I propose a positive story for FNDC and FNHL. One that highlights how council has supported the community in restoring these vital wetlands, situated alongside the popular cycle trail, heritage train and state highway, into a vibrant and healthy ecosystem. By protecting and enhancing this natural asset, they are supporting an ecosystem that helps to cleanse the Bay and offset some of the negative impacts of the marina and surrounding urbanisation. At the same time, these wetlands will provide an authentic and educational experience for both locals and visitors, showcasing how councils can work proactively with local communities.



Figure 4 – Opuia Marine Business Park

My submission below outlines specific reasons for opposing the change.

Criteria	Matters to be addresses
Strategic direction	<p>The FNHL masterplan vision for Ōpua, which forms the basis of the rezoning request, was developed through a desktop assessment by John Lonink of Christchurch in 2022. There is little evidence of meaningful consultation with local stakeholders other than FNHL and is contrary to FNDC own strategic direction.</p> <p>The PDP sets out FNDC’s commitment to climate resilience, natural hazard management, and biodiversity protection. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection and enhancement of coastal landscape values and natural character. • Provision of public open space. • Recognition of Māori relationships with land and water. • Management of natural hazard risks. <p>Recognition of Biodiversity in the PDP</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The PDP, through Section 32 analyses, recognises the Far North’s exceptionally high biodiversity values. It places particular importance on the protection of Significant Natural Areas (SNAs), including wetlands. • The council’s own flood hazard maps show it lies in a 50-year and 100-year flood zone. Building here would require major drainage, pumping, and stormwater works, shifting flood risks onto neighbouring properties. <div data-bbox="373 1196 743 1653"> <p>Figure 3-9 Current coastal flood model of the Marine Park (red square) under current flood models: present extent (darkest blue), 100-year extent (second darkest blue), 100-year + 95% (second lightest blue), 100-year + 95% (lightest blue)</p> <p>3.3.2 Vegetation & Wetlands</p> <p>The site has wetlands consisting of both mangrove and saltmarsh located outside of the property boundary along the estuary (Figure 3-10). The site experiences surface flooding on occasion and cannot drain quickly enough, although there is a local drainage system. This has led to favourable conditions for wetland development in the lower valley (Figure 3-10). The wetlands have been identified in an already granted resource consent with offsetting conditions in place to remediate the consent condition stated, (drain and place fill) within a reverted wetland. The rest of vegetation consists of open grazed pasture and no significant tree cover, the value of the overall vegetation</p> </div> <p>Ecological and Planning Conflict</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The land being referred to as the “Ōpua Marine Business Park” is a wetland ecosystem. Wetlands are critical natural buffers, providing flood protection, water purification, and resilience to climate change impacts. Wetlands act as

	<p>sponges for extreme weather events, absorbing excessive water run-off and providing much needed water in times of drought.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aotearoa NZ has already destroyed 90% of our wetlands – wetlands act as the kidneys of the planet. What lengths would you pursue to protect the remaining 10 % of your kidneys? • Rezoning the Opuia Marine Business Park will enable industry which is very likely to leach pollution and sedimentation into enter our precious harbour. • Intensive predator control in Opuia Forest has resulted in the return of endanger endemic species in this area. Wetlands and swamplands provide an important ecological link between the land and the sea. • This particular wetland has been home to an abundance of species. Bittern – a nationally threatened bird species, Spoonbills, weka, and kiwi. Kōkopu (baby Māori trout), mullet, and eels, which move with the tide through the stream running across the site. Kakariki have now been heard in this area. • Rezoning this land to MUZ is in direct conflict with: The Resource Management Act (RMA), which requires the sustainable management of natural and physical resources. <p>Allowing rezoning of the Opuia Marine Business Park would undermine not only FNDC's own strategic direction but also obligations under national-level policy.</p>
Alignment with zone outcomes	<p>The rezoning of the Opuia Marine Business Park to MUZ does not align with the objectives, policies, or intended outcomes of the zone.</p> <p>A report commissioned by FNDC, prepared by Phoebe Andrews with technical input from Stephen Brown (marine) in August 2025, noted that while the four sites were acknowledged as being different, these distinctions were overlooked in the summaries of landscape, visual, and natural character effects.</p> <p>Specific concerns for the Opuia Marine Business Park included:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Industrial character: The site's marine-industrial function is incompatible with the residential and urban mix expected in MUZ. 2. Amenity conflicts: Marine operations create reverse sensitivity issues, undermining MUZ's aim for harmonious mixed-use. 3. Environmental constraints: Presence of wetlands and coastal margins contradict MUZ objectives for resilient, suitable urban land use. 4. Infrastructure mismatch: The site lacks the services and access required for a thriving mixed-use environment. 5. Strategic misalignment: Rezoning here conflicts with the PDP's urban growth strategy by introducing mixed-use outside designated nodes. <p>https://www.fndc.govt.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/44147/Appendix-5-Technical-Memos.pdf</p>
Higher order direction	<p>Rezoning wetlands is legally non-compliant: The rezoning does not give effect to National Policy Statement and risks being ultra vires under s75(3) RMA.</p> <p>Section 75(3) states that district plans must give effect to:</p> <p>(a) any national policy statement (e.g., NPS-FM 2020, NZCPS 2010),</p> <p>(b) any New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement,</p>

	<p>(c) any regional policy statement (RPS),</p> <p>(d) must not be inconsistent with a regional plan.</p> <p>The National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management (NPS-FM 2020)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires protection of wetlands, rivers, and freshwater ecosystems and their values are protected, improved, or restored. Policies require district councils to avoid activities that result in the loss of wetlands <p>New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement (NZCPS 2010)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy 11: Avoid adverse effects on significant indigenous biodiversity, including wetlands in the coastal environment. Policy 14 & 26: Recognise the ecosystem services of wetlands, especially for natural hazard mitigation (e.g., flood attenuation, water storage). <p>Northland Regional Policy Statement (RPS)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires district plans to identify and protect significant wetlands and habitats. Objective: safeguard the life-supporting capacity of ecosystems, maintain indigenous biodiversity, and reduce risks from natural hazards. <p>Environmental inconsistency: Mixed-use zoning facilitates activities that directly or indirectly lead to the loss/degradation of wetlands are contrary to national and regional policy directions.</p>
Reasons for the request	<p>The reasons given for rezoning the Opua Marine Business Park to Mixed-Use Zone appear to rest on enabling redevelopment and relocation of the marine industry.</p> <p>Absolum expressed concern over the inconsistencies presented in the various reports. For example different names (Colens/zo) were used and inconsistent height specifications for Opua Marine Business Park.</p> <p>https://www.fndc.govt.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/44147/Appendix-5-Technical-Memos.pdf</p> <p>But most significantly, this rezoning is unnecessary. FNHL already owns land just a few hundred metres away that is far better suited to redevelopment. Intensifying development on that site could readily achieve FNHL's commercial vision without the irreversible loss of a wetland.</p>
Assessment of site suitability and potential effects of rezoning	<p>Developing this site has the potential to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> result in the loss of a rural and natural character within the valley character area; to detract from the entrance to Opua if built form is overly dominant, or presents a hard / utilitarian edge to the road (note MUZ-P04, P05 and P-08);

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> create a visually intrusive feature on the valley floor when viewed from the elevated properties to the south, west and east, including at night. (note MUZ-P04 , P05 and P-08). <p>https://www.fndc.govt.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0021/44643/Appendix-D-S-Cocker-Memo-FINAL.pdf p7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mat Collins, Associate Transportation Engineer, July 2025 stated “Marine Park site: insufficient assessment is provided to determine whether safe and efficient access can be formed onto SH11. This is a critical information gap that otherwise precludes rezoning of the site”. <p>https://www.fndc.govt.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/44147/Appendix-5-Technical-Memos.pdf</p>
Infrastructure (three waters) servicing	<p>Andrews, with technical advice from Stephen Brown (marine) August 2025, stated in regards to stormwater and wastewater.</p> <p>“My understanding is that both the Light industrial zone and Mixed Use zone require stormwater and wastewater to be connected to the reticulated network where possible. However, the proposal includes off-grid wastewater and stormwater management for the Marine Park and Commercial Estate. I question whether off-grid systems will be practical for the proposed land use, assuming that most of the area will be covered by impervious surfaces that will severely limit the space available for treatment devices and drip fields.”</p> <p>https://www.fndc.govt.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/44147/Appendix-5-Technical-Memos.pdf P2</p>
Consultation and further submissions	<p>There appears to have been little, if any, consultation with tangata whenua or the local Opuia community.</p>

In summary: The Opuia Marine Business Park land is not suitable for rezoning from Rural Lifestyle to Mixed Use. The rezoning would enable inappropriate industry in a fragile environment, conflicting with the PDP’s strategic growth directions, and generate significant adverse ecological, amenity, infrastructure, and climate-related effects.

I respectfully request that the rezoning of the area identified as Opuia Marine Park be declined and that the council instead explore opportunities for wetland restoration, enhancement, and recognition as an ecological reserve.