

Kim McPherson - Commissioner Hearing – Applicant Von Ah Contracting

Tēnā Koutou katoa

Tēnā koe Commissioner,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. Ko Kim McPherson tōku ingoa.

I am the co-owner with Shane Lang and Jacob McPherson of 22 Upper Kokatahi Road. I speak on behalf of Shane and Jacob. Jacob is the occupier, and he and his young whanau resident in the property.

I am here to raise our serious concerns about the proposed composting facility and its suitability for this location. These concerns are not hypothetical. We base our concerns on the reports submitted by Donovan Van Kekem, Johnathan Jarman, Trevor Webb and the letter from Ngāti Waewae Runanga to the Commissioner.

Our concerns relate directly to health, amenity, and environmental risks for the Kokatahi community.

First, I want to address **proximity**.

This facility is extremely close to sensitive sites. It is located only around 200 metres from residential backyards and approximately 430 metres from Kokatahi School. Within an 870-metre radius there are numerous homes, children, elderly residents, and accommodation providers.

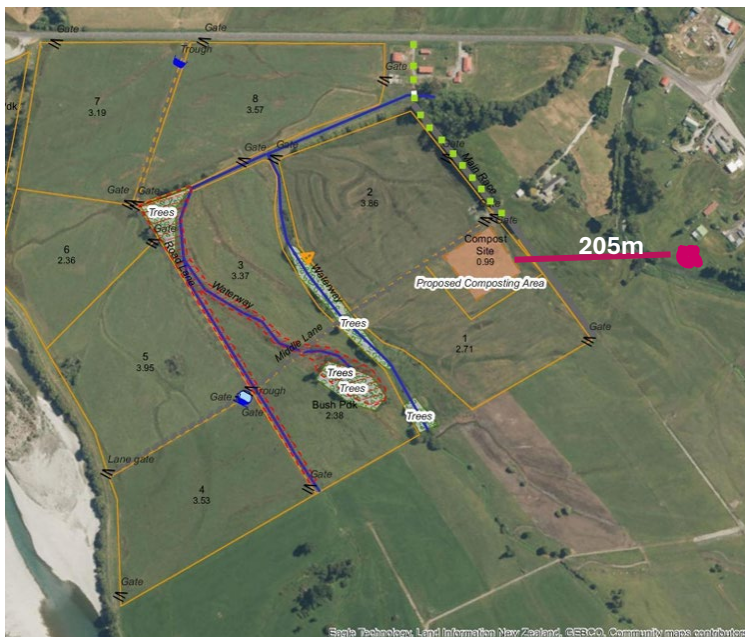
Van Kekem states that international best-practice guidelines typically recommend separation distances of between 650 and 1,000 metres from sensitive receptors such as homes and

schools. This proposal falls well short of those standards.

As a result, I believe that the community wellbeing is placed at significant risk.

Residents in this area value clean air, peace, and a rural lifestyle. These values are incompatible with a high-risk composting operation at this distance.

Our two year old grandson/son plays outdoors and his playground area is only 205m from the proposed composting site as shown in these aerials maps.



Second, **odour impacts.**

The Mote report modelling shows that odour can travel up to 870 metres from the site. This means the school, nearby homes, and visitor accommodation all fall within the affected zone. However, the Mote report modelling was based on data from the Hokitika airport and modelling done to base their findings. There no data used from the immediate area that will potentially be affected. Mr Van Kekem has used a neighbours private weather station to obtain data that shows the correct wind direction in the immediate area. His modelling clearly shows that any potential odour will drift into the homes of those in the Kokatahi Settlement.

The risk is heightened by the proposed feedstocks. Materials such as abattoir sludge and paunch grass are known to be highly odorous Mr Van Kekem advises. Even under best-practice management, these materials can produce offensive smells. In real-world conditions — particularly in this climate — the risk is greater.

This is not a minor inconvenience. Persistent odour directly affects quality of life and can lead to stress, sleep disruption, and mental health impacts as stated by Dr Jarman. I do not want this for our whanau.

Third, **community opposition.**

Dr Jarman noted that from his survey that the majority of residents are unhappy or very unhappy with this proposal, this is backed up by 23 submitting against this facility going ahead. Their concerns are consistent and reasonable: loss of clean air, loss of amenity, and potential health effects. These concerns have not been adequately addressed by the applicant.

Fourth, **health impacts.**

Exposure to composting odours has been linked to symptoms such as headaches, coughing, nausea, and depression as described by Dr Jarman. Mental wellbeing is also affected, with residents in other areas reporting stress, anxiety, and reduced quality of life.

Dr Jarman states that vulnerable groups are at greater risk. Children, the elderly, and people with asthma or chronic illness are more susceptible. In this area, more than a third of residents within the impact zone are aged 60 or older.

There is also a school which has young children aged from 5 to 11 years of age. We are extremely concerned about the potential impact on these children and would not like to see them being confined to a classroom due to unpleasant odours.

There is also relevant evidence from other composting sites in New Zealand, including Uruti and Christchurch, where odour complaints, health impacts, and regulatory intervention have occurred. In similar cases, the Environment Court has refused consent due to unacceptable health risks.

Fifth, **bioaerosols and pathogens.**

Composting activities such as turning material and irrigating leachate can release bioaerosols into the air. These may contain harmful pathogens, including Legionella.

I note in the WCRC Officer Report point 21 & 22 make mention that there “are no scheduled water supplies”. What it fails to mention is that many local residents rely on roof-collected rainwater. Airborne pathogens settling on roofs pose a contamination risk, particularly for children and vulnerable individuals. Direct inhalation of bioaerosols is also a concern.

Without a hydrologist to review waterflows in the area, in particular underground water, it is unclear if run off from the proposed facility will impact bore water supplies in the area.

Critically, there is no detailed assessment or monitoring plan for bioaerosol emissions in this proposal. Community health concerns remain unaddressed.

Sixth, **water quality and leachate risks.**

Mr Webb notes the site is subject to frequent heavy rainfall. Leachate ponds may overflow or leak, especially during extreme weather events which are becoming more common. The soils on site — both well-drained and imperfectly drained — are highly vulnerable to contaminant leaching under wet conditions.

Mr Webb also outlines there is a real risk of contaminants entering Duck Creek, as well as the Kokatahi and Hokitika Rivers. We believe this would affect aquatic ecosystems, recreational use, and potentially drinking water supplies, including groundwater and rainwater systems.

There has been no expert technical data supplied from the applicant, as had been requested by Ngāti Waewae Runanga, to enable anyone to fully assess the potential risks to the waterways.

Seventh, **site suitability.**

Mr Webb states that the annual rainfall in this area regularly exceeds 3,000 millimetres. Saturated soils, shallow water tables, and surface ponding are common. These conditions severely limit effective composting and leachate control as described by Mr Van Kekem.

Flooding further increases the likelihood of contaminants reaching waterways. These are not marginal constraints — they are fundamental site limitations

Eighth, **management and operational concerns.**

The management plan lacks detail and clarity. Key procedures for odour control, leachate management, and feedstock handling are unclear, and there are contradictions between proposal documents.

There is no demonstrated experience operating a large-scale composting facility in a climate this wet as discussed by Mr Van Kekem. Mr Van Kekem also states that Best-practice measures — such as full enclosure and advanced odour controls for high-risk materials — are not proposed.

I have been a home composter for over 20 years in the Hokitika and surrounding areas and cannot compost effectively without covering the pile to ensure water cannot enter causing the pile to become anaerobic. Anaerobic compost becomes an issue, which is often caused by poor aeration or excessive moisture, resulting in foul rotten-egg odours, methane emissions, slow decomposition, and highly acidic material. These conditions produce slimy, wet piles that

may not fully destroy pathogens or weed seeds. Therefore, ending in a product that is not fit for use.

Finally, **regulatory concerns**.

There are no robust, site-specific air or water quality assessments that reflect local conditions. Proposed consent conditions appear difficult to enforce and may not be sufficient given the high rainfall, sensitive soils, and close proximity to homes and a school.

As stated by Dr Jarman, Public health and independent technical expertise should be sought before any approval is considered.

In conclusion, we agree with Dr Jarman, Mr Van Kekem and Mr Webb that this proposal presents serious risks to health, amenity, and the environment. The combination of sensitive receptors, extreme rainfall, unsuitable soils, and insufficient controls makes this location inappropriate.

For these reasons, we respectfully submit that consent should be declined. At a minimum, the proposal would require full enclosure, significantly greater separation distances from residential properties, and a far more robust and enforceable management framework.

The health and wellbeing of the Kokatahi community should be the priority.

Thank you for your time.

Ngā mihinui