

Notice of Motion – Shirin Brown – Waiheke’s Night Skies

In accordance with Standing Order 3.11.1, the following Notice of Motion has been received from Member Shirin Brown for inclusion on the agenda for the Waiheke Local Board meeting being held on 22 February 2018:

Recommendations

That the Waiheke Local Board:

- a) reconfirms its commitment to “*Work to protect our night skies for present and future generations*” to meet the Waiheke Local Board Plan objective to “*Restore and protect our natural environment in partnership with our community*”;
- b) applies for accreditation by the *International Dark-sky Association* (IDA) which is an award-winning organisation that helps eligible locations to protect their night skies for present and future generations;
- c) accepts the assistance of the *Waiheke Dark Sky Team* (viz. Nalayini & Gareth Davies of Rocky Bay, Kim Wesley & Sarah Morrison of Oneroa, Mary Matthews of Orapiu and other specialists) which is offered on a voluntary basis to coordinate this response and work with Local Board officers on the final draft; and
- d) recommends that Auckland Council supports and assists the Waiheke Local Board to improve current lighting policies through the forthcoming District Plan Review;
- e) delegates a board member to be a point of contact with the *Waiheke Dark Sky Team*.

Background

1. The Board members and our community are familiar with this initiative. The high quality of Waiheke’s night skies has been confirmed by sky quality measurements undertaken in December 2016 by astronomer Nalayini Davies.
2. A report was presented and discussed at the Local Board meeting of 15 December 2016 which led to the Board incorporating this initiative into its Plan. The community has keenly embraced this initiative – the 2 night sky events at the *Waiheke Walking Festivals* in 2016 and 2017 were booked out with over 200 signing-up; the Astrophotography exhibition at the *Waiheke Community Art Gallery* in November 2017 was well attended; there has been positive and proactive coverage by the island’s print and radio media including an ongoing monthly Star Watching column in *Waiheke Weekender* (circulation: 25,000); the *Night Shift Waiheke Stargazing* Facebook page has built a following of more than 200 whilst still in its first year; and 84 people have registered an interest in stargazing activities. In addition, there have been a number of free public telescope viewings each of which attracted over 100 attendees and there have been two well attended school telescope viewing sessions at *Waiheke High School* at their request.
3. To support this developing interest, *Auckland Astronomical Society* now offers Waiheke residents rural membership (all the benefits but at a lower cost) and *Stardome Observatory* has supported the 2017 Walking Festival.

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4. Plans are in place to re-train *Waiheke High School* staff in the educational use of its “*Pipehenge*” installation in front of the school and to partner/supplement community groups celebrating *Matariki*.
5. Further, about 600 people attended the visit of the *Te Toki Voyaging Trust* in October 2017 at *Piritahi Marae* and the waka and following workshops on the night sky and Maori navigational techniques, remain keen to learn more about Maori celestial navigation using the night sky. 240 school children from *Waiheke Primary*, *Waiheke High* and *Te Huruhi Primary* participated in these marine and environmental science activities. A repeat visit is expected to take place in 2018.
6. Such strong community interest and support is not surprising given the deep congruence of this initiative with community values and aspirations articulated in *Essentially Waiheke* given that it:
 - facilitates reconnection with nature;
 - offers unique recreational and leisure opportunities;
 - offers learning and opportunities, intellectual stimulation and citizen science opportunities for school goers, youth, adults and community groups;
 - protects half the island’s natural environment (i.e. the sky) from light pollution;
 - conserves the cultural/spiritual heritage of Maori astronomy knowledge and practice;
 - nurtures an iconic Waiheke natural asset retaining its rural environment/character;
 - paves the way for low-impact ecotourism economic development opportunities from sharing world-class night skies;
 - provides a memorable visitor experience available after daylight hours and during the shoulder seasons (the night skies are at their best during winter months);
 - enables 24-hour enjoyment of the island’s reserves and parks;
 - minimises damage to biodiversity from any disruption to circadian rhythm through excess lighting;
 - maintains Waiheke’s attractive nightscapes and therefore its integrity and character in sharp contrast to the urban Auckland location;
 - provides the opportunity to offer unique and diverse community activities such as those undertaken during 2017; and
 - supports environmentally-responsible guardianship of a natural asset.
7. IDA accreditation provides both a solid framework for the ongoing protection of night skies and prestigious international recognition which acknowledges world-class quality. Recent discussions with IDA confirm that the sky quality of Waiheke would make it eligible for accreditation under the current IDA criteria. However, only parts of Waiheke will meet the revised sky quality guidelines that IDA intends to roll-out in early 2018 to preserve the specialness of this exclusive accreditation. IDA has advised that if the accreditation effort is undertaken within the next six months, the existing rules will still apply. In short, if Waiheke is to get IDA accreditation, the Board should move forward this initiative very quickly.
8. The three key IDA criteria to meet are: (i) evidence of sky quality (already completed); (ii) community support (already evident); and (iii) an appropriate Lighting Management Plan (to be developed). Waiheke’s Dark Sky Team has confirmed its willingness to assist the Board on a voluntary basis to achieve this initiative. Two of the members of the Waiheke Dark Sky Team played a key role in the recent IDA accreditation of Great Barrier Island

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and through this, Auckland Council planners/decision makers are also now familiar with IDA lighting management criteria. All of this makes it viable for Waiheke to meet the IDA criteria within the required timeframe.

Conclusion

9. By passing the above recommendations, the Board would be: (i) progressing its commitment to a Plan initiative; (ii) harnessing community interest and volunteers; (iii) seeking Auckland Council’s support; and (iv) working towards IDA accreditation to protect our night skies. This *Local Board Plan* conservation initiative i.e. to promote sky quality best practice to protect the forgotten half of the island’s environment with strong cultural, heritage and scientific value, is entirely in keeping with *Essentially Waiheke* and will also contribute to the initiative to “*Develop a Sustainable Tourism Strategy*”. Importantly, IDA has advised that should Waiheke achieve IDA accreditation, they would consider accrediting the entire Hauraki Gulf area as an International Dark Sky Reserve - a perfect companion strategy to complement the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park. Light pollution is the only form of pollution that is quickly and totally reversible and the current reward/effort balance favours the timely progression of this initiative before Waiheke’s level of light pollution reaches the point of no return.

Signatories



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