

Memo

17 February 2017

To: Planning Committee members
From: Great Barrier Local Board members

Subject: Aotea Great Barrier Island Dark Sky Sanctuary Accreditation

Purpose

To inform the Planning Committee that Aotea Great Barrier Island is applying for Dark Sky Sanctuary Accreditation in early 2017

Executive summary

Dark Sky Sanctuary Accreditation is an international recognition for exceptional night skies lacking in light pollution. The accreditation is awarded to locations by the International Dark Sky Association.

Dark Sky Sanctuary Accreditation is a community led initiative with the community group Awana Rural Women working alongside the local board, the planning department and ATEED to complete the comprehensive application.

The Hauraki Gulf District Plan supports Dark Sky Sanctuary outdoor lighting conditions. If the application is successful, then specific Dark Sky Sanctuary policies should be considered for Great Barrier when the Hauraki Gulf islands are incorporated into the Unitary Plan.

Comments

Dark Sky Sanctuary Accreditation is an international recognition awarded by the International Dark Sky Association for an area of public or private land possessing an exceptional or distinguished quality of starry nights. It is awarded to areas as part of the association's dark skies programme, following a formal application process.

Aotea Great Barrier Island is in a unique position in the Auckland region to be a Dark Sky Sanctuary. The island does not have reticulated electricity, street lights, and lit advertising thus enabling near perfect dark skies.

Most of the land area in Aotea Great Barrier Island (approx.70%) is held by both the Department of Conservation and Auckland Council as public reserves. This will assist the application for a Dark Sky accreditation as the land is accessible to the public with no lighting to interfere with viewing.

The local board together with an on island community group Awana Rural Women have worked with the planning department, ATEED and Auckland Astronomical Society (ASS) to put together an application to the International Dark Sky Association to achieve the Dark Sky Sanctuary Accreditation.

The Dark Sky Sanctuary application has been led by Nalayini Davies, a member of ASS. The application is supported by both ASS and Royal Astronomical Society New Zealand (RAS).

Preliminary sky brightness measurements by the ASS on Aotea Great Barrier Island indicate a high level of darkness. This result provides a favourable opportunity for the area to be awarded

Dark Sky Sanctuary status matching the higher gold standard for a Dark Sky Reserve enjoyed by Tekapo.

A successful dark sky accreditation and sanctuary status will make Aotea Great Barrier Island the only Dark Sky Sanctuary in New Zealand and the third in the world. It will also provide a huge impetus for Aotea Great Barrier Island to attract visitors to the island as well as advance its economic future, conservation and sustainable 'off the grid' development.

The existing planning framework relevant to Aotea Great Barrier Island is generally consistent with providing ongoing protection of the night sky conditions necessary to support Dark Sky Sanctuary Accreditation. The Auckland Council District Plan (Hauraki Gulf Islands section) 2013 provides a reasonable level of night sky protection under the current outdoor lighting luminance level rules.

Although Aotea Great Barrier Island is not yet incorporated into the Auckland Unitary Plan (operative in part) 2016 at the district plan level, the regional policy statement and relevant regional plan objectives and policies are also consistent with continued protection of the night sky.

If the application for Dark Sky Sanctuary Accreditation is successful, the requirements for maintaining accreditation will need to be considered and supported through the specific objectives, policies and outdoor lighting rules applicable to Aotea Great Barrier Island when the Hauraki Gulf islands are incorporated fully into the Unitary Plan.

Next Steps

The application is due to be submitted into the International Dark Sky Association's 27 March application round. Awana Rural Women and the local board are hoping to launch Aotea Great Barrier Island Dark Sky Sanctuary status to coincide with Matariki in June.