Joint Submission on the Conservation Amendment Bill

To: Environment Committee, New Zealand Parliament
From: Porirua Harbour Trust **and** Guardians of Pāuatahanui Inlet
Subject: Joint Submission on the Conservation Amendment Bill
Date: 2 July 2026

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We do not wish to make an oral submission.

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1. Introduction

1.1 This is a joint submission by the Te Awarua o Porirua Harbour and Catchments Community Trust (PHT) and the Guardians of Pāuatahanui Inlet on the Conservation Amendment Bill

1.2 Both organisations are community-based entities with long-standing mandates to protect, restore, and enhance the ecological health of Te Awarua o Porirua Harbour including the Pāuatahanui Inlet and contributing streams and catchments. Together, we represent decades of community advocacy, environmental restoration, monitoring, and partnership with mana whenua and local authorities.

1.3 Our shared objective is the restoration of harbour and Inlet health, the protection and improvement of freshwater and coastal water quality, and the safeguarding of ecological, cultural, and community values for present and future generations.

1.4 This submission sets out our overall position on the Conservation Amendment Bill and details our primary concerns with proposed changes to the main Act.

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2. Overall Position on the Bill

2.1 The Trust and GOPI oppose the provisions of the Conservation Amendment Bill.

2.2 We believe that the Conservation Act as it stands is fit for purpose and should not be tampered with in terms of skewing consideration towards greater use or disposal of conservation land for economic or commercial purposes.

3. New clause 6(ea) undermines the core purposes of the Conservation Act

3.1 The new clause 6(ea) provides that the Conservation Department recognise the economic opportunities that arise from the use and development of land and other resources managed by the Department and to enable this use and development to the greatest extent practicable under the Principal Act and other enactments. This includes tourism.

We consider that this clause, especially the highlighted provision, undermines the core purposes and functions long established under the Conservation Act. It follows that this could open the way for commercial activities that could not only conflict with but adversely affect and potentially cause irreversible damage to the important and indeed unique ecological and environmental protections and related conservation management functions of a large area of New Zealand's conservation estate.

We consider that, at the very least, further amendments are needed to ensure that any use or development on conservation land remains strictly subordinate to core conservation objectives and their related environmental protection.

3.2. We, like many others, were concerned that this Bill, as originally worded, would have made it easier to exchange or even dispose of public conservation land. We understand that these provisions will be removed and that the legislation will revert to the current, much stricter limitations, including that the land must have no, or very low, conservation value. Strict limitations on what land can be considered in this process must remain in place.

4. Conservation Board powers and centralising decisions with the Minister

4.1 We note that the Bill proposes to reduce the powers of Conservation Boards and transfer that power to one person - the Minister - who will not need to consult about the exercise of that power.

This proposal is undesirable and indeed unacceptable. It must be reversed.

5 Section 4A dishonours the Treaty of Waitangi

We note that Section 4A provides clarity around how Section 4 (to give effect to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi) is to be implemented throughout different processes provided by the Conservation Amendment Bill. However, we understand it was not developed in partnership with mana whenua and therefore does not uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Further, this amendment restricts the role of mana whenua in processes associated with conservation to consultation rather than genuine partnership.

In the catchments of Te Awarua o Porirua, Ngāti Toa Rangatira are the primary kaitiaki of the rohe and its environmental and conservation qualities and ecology. The iwi is working closely with territorial local authorities, the regional council, community groups, central government agencies and infrastructure providers in pursuit of our joint goals for improvement of the water quality and overall health of Te Awarua o Porirua harbour. Changes to the Conservation Act that invest more power in the hands of the Minister and require he or she to only "consider" Treaty issues threatens to diminish the mana of our iwi and undermine the ongoing implementation of the iwi's settlement with the Crown, and place a question mark of uncertainty on the direction of plans and initiatives to restore our awa.

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