

STAFF REPORT

TO: Community Services Committee

FROM: Reserves Manager

REFERENCE: C752

DATE: 19 June 2007

SUBJECT: NRSBU Bio-solid Application to Rough Island

PURPOSE/REASON FOR REPORT

To bring to the Committee's attention that the Nelson Regional Sewerage Business Unit (NRSBU) have applied to Tasman District Council for a Resource Consent to vary the existing Resource Consent to apply bio-solids to the forest areas on Rabbit Island.

This variation is for an increase in application rates of bio-solids to the forest areas and to apply bio-solids to the forest areas on Rough Island. Currently bio-solids are only applied to forestry areas on Rabbit Island.

BACKGROUND

The NRSBU was granted consent in 1995 to apply bio-solids from the Nelson Regional wastewater treatment plant on Bells Island to the forest areas on Rabbit Island.

The original consent application also included the forest areas on Rough Island however due to the concerns expressed by the public during the consultation period about this proposal and the effect on public use of Rough Island, NRSBU withdrew this area from the consent application.

As opposed to Rabbit Island, the forest areas on Rough Island are open to the public. This is due to the reasonably small area of forest along with the limited forestry work carried out in these areas versus the high cost of security to keep the public out.

The public make full use of the forest areas on Rough Island for walking, dog exercise, mountain bike riding, running, horse riding, picnicking etc hence the level of concern that was expressed when it was first proposed to use the forest areas for bio-solid applications.

DISCUSSION

In the conditions for the Resource Consent for the application of bio-solids to the forest areas are a number of buffer zones and exclusion zones and tree age class restrictions on where the bio-solids can be applied.

Due to the small size of Rough Island the buffer and exclusion zones for the estuary, traverse and wetland take up a significant area, reducing the possible disposal area quite significantly. There are known archaeological sites on Rough Island in the areas used for recreation but it is not certain that an in-depth assessment has been made of the forest areas on the island.

Another concern is the extended closure to the public if certain standards are not met eg:

“If bio-solids do not meet Class A standards then the buffer zones given in the conditions shall be increased to 400m in from the edge of the forest canopy and public access shall be restricted for a period of one year after application”.

The proposed buffer zones are:

- 1) Around the entire coastal edge of Rabbit and Rough Islands, a buffer zone of 15 metres in from the edge of the forest or 50 metres from the MHWS (whichever is the greater) is to be maintained.
- 2) A buffer zone of 15 meters in from the edge of the forest shall be maintained around all areas to which the public have unrestricted access.
- 3) Around the perimeter of the Rabbit Island domain the buffer zone shall be increased to 20 metres in from the edge of the forest canopy or 30 metres in from the domain perimeter, whichever is the greater.
- 4) In the months from November to March inclusive the buffer zone around the perimeter of the Rabbit Island Domain shall be increased to 100m in from the edge of the forest canopy.

There are also exclusion zones (no spray areas) for archaeological sites and sites of ecological importance.

Council's Enterprise Committee discussed and considered current research data on the impact of the proposal to increase the application rates of the bio-solids on the growth of the trees in the forest areas and the various implications this would have in regards to tree growth etc and resolved the following:

“THAT the Enterprise Committee will not oppose a resource consent application to increase the Rabbit Island bio-solids application rate up to 450 kg per hectare at tree ages 6 and 9 and then to apply bio-solids at a rate of 300 kg per hectare for application years 12, 15, 18, 21 and 24, with no further application after this age.”

The issue is now whether Council is prepared to give approval for the application from the NRSBU for the application of bio-solids to Rough Island, so that the application can be publicly notified.

While this could be seen as the easy option, it could send mixed messages to the public as to Council's long-term management of the Islands. The reasons for saying this are:

- 1) The public currently have access to the majority of Rough Island and signs on the island state "Public Access is Allowed Along Tic-Toc Road and on Forest Trails". This area is used consistently throughout the whole year.
- 2) Dogs are not permitted on Rabbit Island, therefore Rough Island is a very popular dog exercise area and most of the island has been used for this purpose for many years.
- 3) Horse riders have used Rough Island for many years as well and more recently the Equestrian Park has been established on the Island. While this has meant many organised equestrian events are held in a controlled area, there are many other casual riders who still use the other areas of Rough Island including the forestry areas. Staff have been in discussions with horse riders and the Forestry Managers about opening up more horse trails through the forestry areas. This has been as a result of horse riders wanting trails on Rabbit Island however this has proved difficult to achieve because of continuing forestry operations and the application of bio-solids.
- 4) Forestry operations are limited on Rough Island which makes it a safer environment for family access.
- 5) With the ever increasing pressure for public access for all types of recreation on both islands, Council will need to carefully consider future uses of the land and the restrictions the application of bio-solids will have. For example Council has already been approached for the establishment of a rowing centre, a motorsports area, more mountain bike tracks, orienteering courses and horse trails, as previously mentioned.
- 6) The current Consent for the bio-solids on Rabbit Island expires on 10 October 2020 and the new application requests that this date be used for any consent for Rough Island. This is an extremely long time to tie up such a valuable recreation asset. Even if the Rough Island request is declined, the use of Rabbit Island for other recreation uses maybe limited until 2020.

There are probably many other reasons that could be put forward opposing the application and at the same time there are arguments for allowing the application of bio-solids. The main one being the need for the NRSBU to find additional land to apply bio-solids as Rabbit Island cannot take all the bio-solids from the regional sewerage ponds.

Obviously if Council decline the request for the application of bio-solids on Rough Island, the NRSBU will have to find another means of disposing of the bio-solids that are surplus to the Rabbit Island applications. While this is not ideal, Council must consider the effect the application of bio-solids on Rough Island would have on the public recreation use of the area.

OPTIONS

- 1) To decline the request from the NRSBU to apply bio-solids to forestry areas on Rough Island.
- 2) To approve the application so that it can be publicly notified.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the application from the NRSBU to apply bio-solids to the forestry areas of Rough Island be declined because of the significance such a request would have on the public's historic use of the island for recreation purposes and also the possible impact it could have on future requests for other recreational uses of the area.

Beryl Wilkes
Reserves Manager