

7. GRAZING LICENCE - SCARBOROUGH FARM

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The purpose of this report is to obtain Council approval to issue a grazing licence for Scarborough Farm Park.

REASONS FOR LICENCE

The Port Hills Reserves are managed primarily for conservation, recreation and visual values. Unlike most conventional grazing arrangements, the conservation of the indigenous biodiversity, e.g. silver tussock, is regarded as more important than the financial return from the land. Normal grazing licences in the past have led to progressive deterioration of a number of reserves on the Port Hills, and a loss of indigenous vegetation. For this reason it is proposed to offer a conservation-based grazing licence to ensure further deterioration of the reserve does not occur.

It is proposed to put in place a vegetation management strategy for the grazing licence to ensure the management of Scarborough Farm Park contributes to the environment of the Port Hills. The management policy is designed to perpetuate silver tussock grassland (in appropriate areas), whilst eliminating bracken, gorse, rank grasses and noxious weed growth.

The most visible indigenous grass species on the Port Hills is silver tussock. However, there are quite a few other indigenous grasses present, an example of these being New Zealand fescue, holy grass, *Poa* species and danthonias. The appropriate grazing regime will retain inter-tussock herbaceous species that are present as well as the native grasses. Typical native herb species found amongst the grasses include New Zealand biddy bid, spaniard and harebell. There are indigenous shrubs in the areas that also need to be maintained. Some of the species found on the Port Hills Reserves include New Zealand broom, *Coprosma* species, matagouri, *Hebe* species, porcupine shrub, mahoe, New Zealand flax and prostrate kowhai. Although some browsing of shrubs within the grasslands will occur, the amount of damage will be minimised. Certain areas have already been fenced off to enable natural regeneration to occur.

GRAZING AS A MANAGEMENT TOOL

Grazing is a valuable management tool in maintaining tussock grassland on the Port Hills. The methods (timing, intensity, and type of stock) are important as either under or over-grazing can cause problems. In general terms, light grazing by sheep is usually appropriate.

The ecological benefits of grazing include:

- Maintenance of indigenous grassland flora and fauna
- Maintenance of good plant cover, which reduces erosion
- Reduced establishment of exotic shrubs
- Reduced weed cover
- Reduced fire risk
- Some indigenous shrub recruitment may be increased by grazing

Some of the potential problems associated with grazing include:

- Loss of palatable species
- Vegetation maintained as grassland (forest may be more appropriate on some sites)
- Conflict with other users (eg at lambing time)
- Pressure to increase economic returns to leases through practices such as top dressing, over-sowing, ripping etc.
- Rabbit numbers may be increased by short grass
- Increased fertility, which tends to favour exotic species.

In terms of stock type, sheep are preferred because they: -

- are more inclined not to eat silver tussock
- are less likely to damage any shrubs
- control gorse seedlings better
- cause less pugging of the ground

Nevertheless, cattle may occasionally be used for short periods, to bring rank growth under control.

Longer periods of low intensity grazing are preferred rather than short intense periods.

GRAZING POLICY

The matters covered by the grazing licence will include the following:

Access - The public will have access to the reserves, on foot or bicycle.

The reserve may be closed for short periods with the explicit permission of the Port Hills Head Ranger. This is primarily intended to allow closure for lambing.

Stock - Only sheep will be used for grazing, unless an explicit exception is made in consultation with the Port Hills Head Ranger.

Oversowing - No oversowing will be carried out.

Fertiliser - No fertiliser will be applied.

Cultivation - The licence will not allow cultivation, breaking up or cropping of any part of the land.

Vegetation - No trees or bush will be cut down and no indigenous plants will be removed. The level of grazing will be such that indigenous grass, herb, shrub and tree species, and their associations are maintained.

Retirement of Areas from Grazing - The Council will retain the ability to fence off areas for planting or to allow natural regeneration to occur. The licence fee will be reduced accordingly.

Plant Pests - The licensee will act to prevent any increase in or spread of plant pests and will comply with any requirements of the Canterbury Regional Pest Management Strategy and the Biosecurity Act,

Animal Pests - The CCC will carry out control of animal pests.

Soil - Vegetation cover will be maintained so that erosion is minimised.

Fences - The CCC will fence the area(s) to be grazed. Thereafter the licensee will be responsible for maintaining the fences in good order. No additional fences will be built without consent from the CCC.

Buildings & Structures - No additional buildings or structures are to be built without consent from the CCC.

Rubbish - The licensee will keep the land free from rubbish or other unsightly or offensive material.

Liaison - Regular contact with the Port Hills Ranger is required, at least monthly.

MONITORING

Two types of monitoring will be carried out to ensure the grazing levels are appropriate for these reserves: -

1. Council staff will carry out regular monitoring to determine the success of the current grazing regime. Any required changes to the level of grazing will be discussed with the licensee on a regular basis.
2. Long-term, detailed monitoring will enable the council to assess the success or otherwise of the grazing regimes put in place. Appropriate monitoring methods have been determined in consultation with Landcare Research.

SCARBOROUGH FARM PARK

Most of Scarborough Hill Reserve needs grazing; especially the northern faces. However, there is regeneration occurring in the gullies on the southern faces of the reserve, and these regenerating areas will not be grazed. Currently, there is a landscape/management plan being prepared for this area, and for Godley Head. The total area of the Scarborough Hill Farm Park is 216.8 ha, of which 163.4 ha will be grazed.

Plant pests found upon the reserve are as follows: -

- Total control plant pests: bur daisy
- Control plant pests: nasella
- Surveillance plant pests: *Stipa nodosa*, hawthorn, and variegated thistle
- Other plant pests; pigs ear (rampant above Evans Pass Road)

LEGAL ISSUES

Scarborough Farm Park is gazetted as a Recreational Reserve, and is held in a number of titles. The Reserves Act allows for this type of grazing to be undertaken on recreational reserves as outlined below.

Reserves Act 1977

For Recreation Reserves the Act requires that: -

"where scenic, historic, archaeological, biological, geological, or other scientific features or indigenous flora and fauna or wildlife are present on the reserve, those features or that flora or fauna or wildlife shall be managed and protected to the extent compatible with the principal or primary purpose of the reserve" 17(b).

The Reserves Act allows grazing licenses in both scenic and recreation reserves so long as certain conditions are met.

74. Licences to occupy reserves temporarily

(2) *Where in the opinion of the Minister or, as the case may be the administering body or the Commissioner, it is necessary or desirable for the management of the reserve for the purpose for which it is classified, licences to occupy any recreation, historic, scenic. Government purpose or local purpose reserve, or any part of any such reserve may be granted for the following purposes: -*

(a) *Grazing gardening or other similar purposes*

"(3) *Before granting any licence under subsection (2) of this section, the administering body.....shall give public notice in accordance with section 119 of this Act specifying the licence proposed to be granted, and shall give full consideration in accordance with section 120 for this Act to all objections and submissions in relation to the proposal received pursuant to the said section 120".*

"(4) *The duration of a licence under this section to occupy a reserve or any part thereof shall not exceed five years"*

The offering of grazing licences on the Port Hills is in conformity of the objectives and policies of the Christchurch City Plan 1996 as amplified below: -

The Port Hills are identified as a major component of the Natural Environment in the City Plan.

"Objectives 2.7 - Maintenance and enhancement of the distinctive landscape and natural characteristics of the Port Hills.

..... the Council has a long term commitment to ensuring the majority of the Port Hills are publicly administered for both recreation and conservation purposes.....

Policy 2.7.3 - To identify and protect significant areas of indigenous vegetation on the Port Hills and promote partial re-forestation of the Port Hills with indigenous forest.

*Work undertaken in recent times has indicated that there are some important indigenous grassland species present on the Port Hills which in terms of Section 6 of the Act have some importance in terms of protection. **To date there has been modification to these areas, particularly through the grazing regime that has taken place on the Port Hills over many years. The intention is to ensure that land use activities undertaken in these areas are of low impact** particularly in the upper areas of the Port Hills, to enable the versatility and residence of these areas to be maintained in the long term.*

- Recommendation:**
1. That the Council tender a grazing licence, for a maximum term of five years, in respect of approximately 163ha of Scarborough Farm Park.
 2. That the Council give public notice in accordance with section 119 of the Reserves Act 1977 specifying the licence proposed to be granted.
 3. That the Council form a subcommittee of the Parks and Recreation Committee, comprising the Property Manager and the Parks and Waterways Manager, for the purposes outlined in recommendation 4 below.
 4. That the subcommittee be delegated authority to:
 - (a) Consider any objections or submissions made pursuant to section 120 of the Reserves Act 1977; and
 - (b) If it considers it appropriate after considering objections and submissions, enter into a grazing licence upon such terms and conditions as the Legal Services Manager approves.