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**ARAWA CANOE CLUB**



**Submission regarding the Christchurch City Long Term Council Community Plan.**

**BACKGROUND**

**Introduction**

1. My name is Ken Livingston, and I am immediate past President and current Media Officer of the Arawa Canoe Club. I started kayaking in 1995, I have been racing kayaks since 1997 in multisport (culminating in a 3<sup>rd</sup> place in the Coast to Coast teams event, and 1<sup>st</sup> individual veteran, plus fastest kayak times in a team in the Mount Cook Race) and pure kayak racing events (2<sup>nd</sup> in the doubles Twizel kayak marathon three times). I joined the Arawa Canoe Club in 1997 and have been on the committee of the Arawa Canoe Club in various positions since 1998. The bulk of my training over the years has been on the Avon River and I store my kayak in the Arawa Club racks.
2. I have consulted in depth with the committee and other kayakers both within and outside the club, and have prepared this submission based on their inputs and my own experience. I have also had informal discussions with the rowers and agree that we face the same challenges with potentially the same solutions.
3. Please also refer to previous submissions (Appendix 1 and 2) in response to requests for feedback in 2007 and 2008.

**The Arawa Canoe Club**

4. The Arawa Canoe Club began in 1968, and now, with over 450 members, is the largest kayak club in New Zealand – bigger than the two biggest clubs in Auckland put together, and we are still growing at 5-10% per annum. The Club is affiliated to the New Zealand Recreational Canoeing Association and Canoe Racing New Zealand.



5. Our focus is kayak racing – on flat (sprint and marathon) and moving water (river and multisport races). Although eighty percent of our members are multisporters (which means they typically race on moving water such as the Waimakariri and Rakaia Rivers) the bulk of their training is on flat water – the Avon and Heathcote rivers. We also have a strong contingent of flat water sprint and marathon

kayakers, who represent the club at national and international level. Clearly, their training is on the Avon River and sometimes on the Estuary.

6. We have a strong junior membership (44 juniors, not counting those as part of our 83 family members – April 2008), with an increasing number of schools showing an interest in multisport and kayaking. Our club building (photo above) on Kerrs Reach, alongside the Avon, has storage for 165 boats (photo right) with a waiting list of 32 for kayak storage, and we are planning to double the storage area within the next two to three years.



## THE ISSUES

The issues we need the LTCCP to address are:

- Weed on/in the Avon River
- Water depth on Kerrs Reach
- Traffic congestion on Kerrs Reach
- Public toilets around Kerrs Reach

Following is a description of each issue, the reason why it is an problem for kayakers and the Arawa Canoe Club, and recommended remedies.

## WEED

7. Excessive weed is a problem for two reasons:
  - Firstly, floating weed catches around the noses and rudders of kayaks, which means the kayak has to be stopped and backed up to free the weed. Also, the paddle picks up floating weed and dumps it on the boat and kayaker (it's the ultimate bad-hair day).
  - Secondly, the banks of weed effectively narrow the river, particularly at low tide, which makes an already congested river (with kayakers, rowers, outriggers and dragonboats all competing for space) even more congested, and greatly increases the risk of collisions.
8. Weed caught on a kayak nose or rudder adds a noticeable drag on the boat, which means training is much less effective, and races on the river become something of a lottery rather than a true contest of paddlers.
9. Having to stop and clear weed seriously impinges on a regular training session, particularly speed sessions, and the Avon has reached the point where the Arawa members who have been serious about taking their kayaking to national, international and Olympic level have given up on Christchurch and moved to Auckland to train on clear water. We continue to lose some of our best kayakers

and cannot attract similar top-level paddlers simply because Kerrs Reach is an inadequate training ground.

10. Racing is often an uneven contest when one competitor catches weed and either has to tough it out with the drag on his boat, or stop in the water, back up to clear the weed, then continue the race. In either case they are taken out of contention and therefore races become a matter of luck rather than ability. For this reason, Arawa cannot host regional or national competitions on the Avon, even though we have some of the best off-water facilities in the country.
11. The weed harvesting machine doesn't pass through Kerrs Reach frequently enough to consider the weed to be 'under control', let alone be reduced to a satisfactory level. Our understanding is that there is only one weed harvesting machine for all the Christchurch area rivers, and it is clear that the single machine is simply unable to cope with weed growth in the whole council area.
12. Congestion on the river is already a problem (see below), but when the weed is in full flush and the tide is low, it leaves a channel about a third of the normal width of the river in places. Clearly this dramatically increases the risk of collisions and poses a major constraint on training for all river users.

#### **WATER DEPTH**

13. Kerrs Reach was originally cut and dredged around 1900 or 1910 to create a straight-ish rowing course, and has functioned well in that capacity for decades. However, it is silting up, and doing so more rapidly (and noticeably in the past few years), to the point where the section by the rowing clubs near Avonside Drive dries out at low tide.
14. Shallow water has the effect of acting as a handbrake on kayaks (called 'bottom drag') and therefore has the same training and racing outcomes as weed does (outlined above) – training is haphazard and races are a lottery. Bottom drag starts taking effect when water depth is less than 2 metres, and the recommended depth for international courses is at least 4 metres.
15. The shallow water also allows more light to penetrate, which encourages more vigorous weed growth and therefore compounds the weed problem outlined above. Large areas of weed also contribute to bottom drag on kayaks and thus render a lot of the Avon unusable for proper training.

#### **TRAFFIC CONGESTION**

16. Kerrs Reach is used by rowers, kayakers, dragonboaters and outrigger paddlers. It's a busy place, especially after school, and getting busier as all sports (particularly rowing and kayaking) become more popular, both with school pupils and recreational users.
17. For each sport, Kerrs Reach is shared by athletes at all levels – beginners, those aiming to refine their technique, or build their speed and endurance, to those training for specific club, national or international events. The serious, top level athletes are sometimes handicapped by the demands or unpredictable behaviour

of other river users and therefore cannot get in the dedicated training sessions that they need to truly perform at their full capability.

18. Reducing or eliminating weed and increasing the depth of Kerrs Reach will help ease some congestion on the Avon, but this is, at best, an interim solution. To take a lot more pressure off Kerrs Reach, there needs to be an alternative venue where the proficient and/or recreational rowers and kayakers can train without interference or interruption, while schools and other users continue to use Kerrs Reach. Ideally, the alternative venue should be sufficient to host full international events, and if so, the effect will be of significant economic benefit to Christchurch and therefore is a prime candidate for public/private investment. The proposed Lake Isaac project is a good example, and the Henderson Basin proposal may resolve the congestion problem if it is allowed to go ahead.

## **PUBLIC TOILETS**

19. An increasing number of people are asking to use the Arawa Canoe Club toilets, which poses a security risk for our member's equipment (we have about \$250,000-worth of members' and club kayaks stored in our building, plus personal gear in the changing rooms and on the kayaks.) Other people simply 'go' in the bushes around our clubrooms, which is neither seemly nor hygienic.
20. there are no public toilets in the neighbourhood – certainly none along the length of Kerrs Reach or conveniently nearby.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Weed**

21. A second weed harvesting machine needs to be commissioned as soon as possible. An alternative may be to issue a weed management contract, in which case Arawa will need to be involved in establishing the performance criteria and assessing any proposed methods.
22. Kerrs Reach needs to be dredged again, to a minimum depth of 2 metres (preferably 4 metres), for the full length of the Reach (from Avonside Drive, by the rowing clubs, to the Wainoni Road bridge, and ideally further up and downstream).
23. As noted below, Kerrs Reach needs to be dredged again, to take the riverbed down to a level where weed doesn't get enough sunlight to thrive.

### **Water depth**

24. Kerrs Reach needs to be dredged again, to a minimum depth of 2 metres (preferably 4 metres), for the full length of the Reach (from Avonside Drive by the rowing clubs, to the Wainoni Road bridge, and ideally further up and downstream). This will need to be done in the short to medium term (within the next two to three years).

### **Traffic congestion**

25. The Christchurch City Council needs to push either the Henderson Basin proposal or the Lake Isaac project to a stage where it can be used for kayak and rowing training within the next 5 to 10 years. The major components of either plan have been well worked through and priced already, but need to be included in the LTCCP now to ensure that work is started as soon as possible.

**Public toilets**

26. Public amenities need to be built somewhere along Kerrs Reach in the near future (within the next 1 to 2 years). This should be well within the capability of CCC or external contractors and the CCC budget.

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Ken Livingston

Media Officer, Arawa Canoe Club

## **APPENDIX 1**

29 May 2008

Recreation and Sports Unit  
Christchurch City Council  
P O Box 237  
Christchurch Mail Centre 8140

Dear Sir/ Madam

### **Re Draft Metropolitan Sports Facilities Plan**

I am writing on behalf of the Arawa Canoe Club and the proposed facilities that have been suggested in the Metropolitan Sports plan with reference to Kerr's Reach and a possible venue in Henderson's Basin.

We would like to note that the number one priority in the previous Metropolitan Sports Plan (2003) was for a flat water facility to relieve the pressure on Kerr's Reach and are disappointed that the flat water facility ranking has slipped in the priority list.

We are very concerned about the comments in the plan about the weed and silting of the Avon River but note that there is nothing in the plan that offers a solution. We would also advise that due to the present levels of silting and weed the river is becoming extremely congested especially at low tides and at peak times (after 3 pm in the afternoon in the summer). From a Kayaking perspective the Avon River is becoming a progressively more unsafe place to kayak. Due to the deteriorating conditions described above and increased numbers and variety of water craft.

The Club has noted an increase in the number of collisions between difference water craft ~~on the lower Avon River during the past year (that have been reported to the club this year)~~. This is an issue that we take extremely seriously and continue to liaise with a variety of clubs using this river to discuss how we can improve safety on the Avon

In terms of the silting and weed control we would advise with concern the increasing

growth of weed down the river below the Avondale Bassett Road Bridge, again restricting the amount of useable river at certain tides. Also the weed and silting above Kerr's Reach has reached a level which makes it difficult to paddle especially at lower tides. This area was a safer environment in that many of the other river users were reluctant to use this area because of the narrowness and shallowness of the river. However many kayakers are now returning to use the lower Avon River adding to the congestion.

We are also very concerned about lack of public toilets on Kerr's Reach. With the increased numbers of people using the area we are finding that we are being called upon to provide toilets for a variety of people including walkers. Our members have witnessed the public using the shrubbery around the clubhouse to relieve themselves before and after exercise.

A set of public toilets are now needed in this area to provide for this need. The nearest public toilets are situated in Avon Park, which are not convenient for the members of the public using Kerr's reach.

We note with interest the comments in the plan of the number of users of Kerr's Reach and would like to advise that our Club has over 500 members with membership increasing between 5 and 10 percent per annum. From comments made to us we are sure that the Rowing clubs have increased in numbers (especially the junior members) with the success of the New Zealand rowing team, and this doesn't take into account the Whaka community or those that Dragon boat.

Yours faithfully

Bruce Johnston  
**ARAWA CANOE CLUB**

APPENDIX 2 – DATED JUNE 2007

<b>Surface Water Strategy Response Template: Phase One Report</b>	
<b>Name</b>	Bruce Johnston
<b>Organisation</b>	Arawa Canoe Club Inc
<b>Position</b>	Secretary
<b>Section of the report to which your comments relate</b>	Recreation
<b>Comments on factual information contained in the report</b>	
<b>Comments on gaps or omissions in the report</b>	This section of the report tends to emphasis the recreational use of the river bank space as opposed to the actual use of the water by water based sports such as canoeing and rowing There is no mention of a flatwater facility that was proposed in the 2003 Metropolitan Sports Plan to relieve the pressure on Kerr's Reach.
<b>Comments on the issues identified in the report (Have all of the relevant issues been identified?)</b>	From a canoeing perspective the issues we have are 1 Continued access to the rivers that we primarily use (The Waimakariri, Avon, and Heathcote and the Estuary) 2 The overcrowding that occurs on the Avon around Kerr's reach, 3 The Quality of the water in the rivers and estuary that we primarily use. We also have concerns about the CPW scheme to harvest water from the Waimakariri and Rakaia from a safety and waterflow perspective.
<b>Additional comments or concerns</b>	We would also advise that with the present levels of silting and weed the river is becoming extremely congested especially at low tides and at peak times (after 3 pm in the afternoon in the summer). We would also like to advise that from a Kayaking perspective that the river can be an unsafe place to paddle in the above conditions as you have a multitude of craft on the river all of different sizes and all travelling at different speeds. The Club has noted an increase in the number of collisions that have been reported to the club this year.
<b>If the Christchurch City Council held a forum concerning the Surface Water</b>	A member of our committee would most likely be involved depending on work commitments

**Strategy, would you  
like to be involved?**