

AGENDA ITEM 7.1 (F) ATTACHMENT



3rd of June 2021

Dear Justin and Members of the George Town Council,

I am writing to provide some clarity and respond to the representations made opposing Hillwood Berries development application DA 2021/36. This DA has been delayed several times as supplying external reports which are crucial for the application such as Traffic Management Plans have taken months longer than promised due to the demand on the consultants as a result of the current construction boom.

Firstly, I will address the concerns around adherence to Hillwood Berries Forest Practice and the execution of the clearing in accordance with that plan. One of the representations also alludes to the native species of threatened swamp gums and melaleuca that was displayed in a LIST map search.

Hillwood Berries, prior to any clearing of bush on the parcel of land between the East Tamar Highway and Hillwood Road engaged an external consultant to compile a Forest Practice Plan (FPP) for the proposed clearing and development of this site. All concerns of native and endangered Flora and Fauna were address through this process. *See the forest practice plan attached.* This plan then underwent a Development application in 2017 and was approved by council after addressing representations to this DA. The second stage of clearing that occurred in the northern most part of this site occurred in 2020 but was still current under the businesses Forest Practice Plan. This FPP was then audited after the completion of the second stage of clearing in June 2020 by the FPA Monitoring and Assessment Program (FPA_2019-20). The notice for this assessment can be found in attached documentation, *appendix A*. Partial clearing of a 10m landscape buffer along Hillwood Road was raised as a concern and referred to the FPA Manager of Compliance. The compliance manager had raised several questions of which my official response can be read in (*Appendix B*). The results of their findings found that "progressing the matter was not warranted" (email trail and responses can be found in *appendix C*). Ultimately Hillwood Berries have been externally audited over the execution and concerns of disputed clearing have been raised and managed prior to the submission of DA 2021/36. Hillwood Berries feels any more concerns raised around the clearing and management of this parcel land have already been addressed by the appropriate authorities.

In terms of the screen along Hillwood Road. It has been something that has been discussed already internally at Hillwood Berries after the audit of the FPP and as the concerns has been raised again by a representation, we are not opposed to planting an appropriate screen along Hillwood Road that will not impose an adverse effect on the berries grown on the proposed site. Hillwood Berries have already had discussions with a nearby neighbour that we thought would have the most adverse effect to their properties. A mutual private agreement was reached to provide a buffer zone and a planation screen to their dwelling.



In terms of the water requirement of the Farm. Hillwood Berries is a customer of TasWater and we purchase water off them. We pay \$280,000.00 per year for water, if they had concerns with their supplying the farm having an adverse effect on their supply availability, they have the data from our readings to limit our supply. Hillwood Berries have submitted our expression of interest for Tasmanian Irrigation's Tamar Scheme planned for the Tamar Valley. We are members of the Steering and advisory committee to help facilitate the development of this scheme.

In terms of the concerns raised around high usage of agricultural chemicals associated with strawberry production. The most important purpose of the Poly Tunnels is to help mitigate against disease pressure in the crop caused by rain events, ultimately allowing Hillwood to use far less fungicides for Botrytis. The Poly Tunnels also assist in limiting any potential spray drift due to their enclosed nature.

Regarding insecticide usage, the single greatest pests to Hillwood's strawberry and raspberry crops are Two spotted Mites and in Strawberries Western Flower Thrips. These pests luckily, have natural predator insects called Persimilis and Orius (*Fact sheets from our Supplier attached*) that the farm releases into the crops to fight in controlling these pest populations. The predator insects or commonly known as beneficial insects cost the business \$175,000 a year, but they are the greatest defence against these pests. This approach requires a calculated Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program that also utilises cultural practices, like picking off all waste fruit and rotten fruit as well as selective chemical usage that are not harmful to the beneficial population. Hillwood Berries uses external consultants that walk the crops to assist with management of these beneficial populations and gives advice on appropriate chemical applications. This IPM approach limits the farms pesticides use; as many registered chemicals for strawberry production simply cannot be used as they have an adverse effect on our beneficial population. Last year we spent almost the same amount on Beneficial insects, as we did on total chemicals.

To respond to the concerns around applications of agricultural chemicals. Our crops are all grown hydroponically, above the soil and all chemical applications use low volume spray techniques to minimise any chemical run off or spray drift. Part of our annual Freshcare audit requires MRL testing of our fruit to ensure no unregistered chemicals are utilized on the crop and that all registered chemicals are used in accordance with label requirements. This audit is a requirement to supply the major supermarkets. The audit report and certificate have both been provided in the appendix documentation.

In response to the nutrient run off concerns our Irrigation management under hydroponic uses minimises the water requirements of our crop. We can control the amount of water applied to the crop to only what the plant requires. Our irrigation system uses technology



Hillwood
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to monitor the intensity of the sun, and only waters the crop as required. The sun's energy can change through the day with variances in cloud cover and day length so the water demands of the plant will change in accordance with this.

In summary, Hillwood Berries currently have 45 full time staff with a further 35 seasonal workers on standby to start construction of this project. Many of these seasonal workers have now been away from their families for two years, as they are unable to return to their home countries. As a business we have taken on the responsibility to ensure that we continue to provide work all our employees, both seasonal and permanent, currently at 300 FTE's, so that they can all still provide for their families during this pandemic.

At no point during this pandemic has Hillwood Berries received any wage subsidy funding through programs like job keeper. This past season Hillwood Berries have offered as many local job seekers job opportunities as possible with our business and we have had several success stories from this employment push. The farm pays around \$640,000.00 in payroll tax annually with that expected to rise to \$750,000.00 as a result of the proposed project. We hope to employ a further 6-8 full time staff and create 75 more seasonal positions as well through this expansion. Delaying this project will mean that we are going to have to stand workers down that have families who are heavily reliant on this income. Delays in planting dates will also have yield implications which will have a flow on affect for harvest work opportunities next season.

I understand an opportunity has been made for myself and my Father Robin to present to the Councillors next Tuesday. I really appreciated yourselves allowing this opportunity and am willing to answer any questions or concerns that members of the council may have.

Kind regards

Simon Dornauf
General Manager
Hillwood Berries Pty Ltd