

Dr Colan Balkwill

s7(2)(a)

02 October 2025

To whom it may concern

Statement on Remnant Swamp Forest Habitat near Dry Creek, Belmont Regional Park

Tēnā koutou katoa

I am writing to provide a statement on the remnant swamp forest habitat near Dry Creek in Belmont Regional Park, with specific reference to the proposed land swap with Winstone Aggregates.

I am both an academic researcher and concerned member of the public. The body of my work has dealt with locating and conserving the nationally critically threatened tree swamp maire (*Syzygium maire*)^{1,2,3}. I have visited and assessed many habitats and remnant patches across Aotearoa, and thus have the expertise to identify high quality habitat for the species.

At the request of Friends of Belmont Regional Park, I visited the proposed land swap site on the 25th of September 2025. I observed healthy swamp maire trees of various ages, at least two of which were likely original and seeded prior to land clearance. These trees are therefore not only of historical value, but also harbour a snapshot of the ancestral genetic diversity of the region prior to deforestation. They therefore represent living fossils, and any seed they produce is of high value. The habitat as a whole is well suited to swamp maire and other swamp forest plants.

Of specific note is the site's relative isolation from other swamp maire remnants, and its ease of access, both which are important components of protecting these trees from myrtle rust⁴. Isolation means reinfection is less likely, and accessibility allows monitoring and control to be more easily carried out by members of the public.

Greater Wellington has lost over 95% of its swampland habitat^{5,6}. Any remaining swamps, and the plants they contain, should therefore be considered irreplaceable, and it is hard to envisage how the proposed swap could provide land that is as ecologically valuable as the park land considered for exchange.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



Dr Colan Balkwill

References:

- 1 Balkwill, C.G., Koot, E., Ritchie, P., Chagné, D. and Deslippe, J.R, (accepted September 2025). Adaptive potential of *Syzygium maire*, a critically threatened habitat specialist tree species in Aotearoa New Zealand. Evolutionary Applications.

- 2 Balkwill, C.G., Deslippe, J.R., Horton, P., David, C., Wu, C., Koot, E., Ritchie, P., Blissett, W. and Chagné, D., 2024. De-novo assembly of a reference genome for a critically threatened Aotearoa New Zealand tree species, *Syzygium maire* (Myrtaceae). *Tree Genetics & Genomes*, 20(5), p.24.
- 3 Balkwill C.G., *Conservation and restoration genomics of Syzygium maire, a nationally critically threatened tree species of Aotearoa New Zealand* (Doctoral dissertation, Open Access Te Herenga Waka-Victoria University of Wellington).
- 4 Herbert, S.M., Tomscha, S.A., Lai, H.R., Benavidez, R., Balkwill, C.G., Ruston, P.R., Jackson, B. and Deslippe, J.R., 2025. Identifying potentially suitable and accessible refugia to mitigate impacts of an emerging disease on a rare tree. *Conservation Biology*, p.e70088.
- 5 Ausseil, A.-G., P. Gerbeaux, W. L. Chadderton, T. Stephens, D. Brown, and J. Leathwick. 2008. Wetland ecosystems of national importance for biodiversity: criteria, methods and candidate list of nationally important inland wetlands. Landcare Research Contract Report LC0708/158.
- 6 Singers, N., P. Crisp, and O. Spearpoint. 2018. Forest ecosystems of the Wellington Region. Greater Wellington Regional Council.