

# AUCKLAND UNITARY PLAN INDEPENDENT HEARINGS PANEL

*Te Paepae Kaiwawao Motuhake o te Mahere Kotahitanga o Tāmaki Makaurau*

## FACT SHEET

### Fact Sheet 3 – Expert conferences

Date: 17 February 2015

**This fact sheet has been developed to assist those participating in the hearings process for the Proposed Auckland Unitary Plan (the Plan). Please note that it is only a summary of the information contained in the Auckland Unitary Plan Hearing Procedures document. Please refer to the Procedures document at [www.aupihp.govt.nz](http://www.aupihp.govt.nz) for more detail.**

**The hearings process is a requirement of the Local Government (Auckland Transitional Provisions) Act 2010 (LGATPA) and will be carried out by an independent hearings panel that has been appointed by the Minister for the Environment and the Minister of Conservation.**

The use of pre-hearing meetings, expert conferences and mediation is an important feature of the Unitary Plan process. The aim is to clarify or work through issues in a more collaborative and less formal way than is possible in a hearing. This is expected to result in better solutions and to reduce the amount of time required in formal hearings.

This fact sheet provides information on **expert conferences**.

#### What is an expert conference?

Some hearing topics will have an expert conference scheduled.

An expert conference is a meeting for the expert witnesses who have been engaged (by you or other submitters) to clearly identify the facts and relevant expert opinions and whether or not they can be agreed upon.

An expert conference involves experts providing independent technical advice in a meeting that does not involve other parties or the public. In these meetings the experts do not represent the views of any parties. However the experts can report back to the parties who have engaged them.

The outcomes of an expert conference can help the Independent Hearings Panel (the Panel) to understand the issues to be heard. The Panel makes its decisions after any hearing - the decisions do not get made at an expert conference.

#### Who is an expert?

Experts are people who are recognised in their field for having expertise either through qualifications or experience.

The Panel will decide who can appear as an expert. The experts will be confirmed in the Parties and Issues report after the pre-hearing meeting.

Please note that the Panel will only accept “expert evidence” from someone qualified to be an expert and who is also independent. This means that if you are a submitter on the Plan your evidence will not be considered "expert" because you will not be seen as independent.

Please note that submitters do not need to have an expert witness to take part in the hearings.

#### **When will expert conferences occur?**

Expert conferences will usually take place before the formal hearing session. However the Panel could direct an expert conference to resolve a specific issue that comes up during the hearing. The Parties and Issues report will show if an expert conference has been proposed as a step in the hearing process. The panel office will contact the experts to let them know the date, time and location of the expert conference.

You will need to provide the panel office with the details of your expert witnesses using the form on the website. The pre-hearing notices will tell you how to do this.

It is important that you provide this information by the due date or your experts may not be included in the expert conference.

#### **Who will attend an expert conference?**

Only the registered experts will attend an expert conference. A facilitator will be appointed by the Panel to run the conference. Panel members and staff do not attend expert conferences.

An expert conference is a confidential meeting and will not be open to the public (including media) to attend. This is so that matters can be talked about openly by the people involved and, if needed, that information can be shared that the parties would only share in confidence.

#### **How will an expert conference be run?**

Before the expert conference the facilitator will ask each expert to prepare a summary of what they will be presenting as evidence at the hearing. The summary briefly states their opinion on the matters for discussion at the expert conference and how they arrived at that opinion – the key facts, methods and standards used.

The facilitator will run the conference in a fair and professional manner, keeping to time frames and allowing all parties the chance to have their say.

#### **What happens after an expert conference?**

At the completion of each conference a joint statement of agreed outcomes will be reported to the Panel. See the Revised Hearings Procedures document on the our process page of our website for more information about a joint statement.

The joint statement from the expert conference will be made available on the hearings page of our website.

Before the hearing the Parties and issues report will be updated to show the outcome of the expert conference.