of the Edens and Chapman families' farm, including sand dunes, wetlands, nine known Maori archaeological sites and productive farmland. Should their prospecting bear fruit, Barrack Mining are likely to apply for an open cast mine, rendering much of the area virtually unsuitable for farming and for wildlife.

Skipper Chapman is becoming a bit of a celebrity these days, although he would prefer to be out of the limelight. The mid-60s cow cockie and his wife Joyce have spent 40 years working on the formerly abandoned 450 ha farm. Today it supports them, their daughter Sue Edens, son-in-law Murray Edens and grandchildren Ross and Kim Edens.

Ever since Barrack and their New Zealand agent Applied Geology Associates descended onto the Opito Bay farm in 1988, the families' lives have been overturned. Skipper's rugged profile now adorns full page newspaper advertisements describing the threat to the area. The family have boned up on mining law to find out what their rights are and the young children are worried about what might happen to the fishing and their way to life.

When Barrack decided to apply for a prospecting application, the Chapmans and Edens responded immediately, mailing to the 200 ratepayers in the area to arrange a meeting. An overwhelming 140 of the ratepayers backed the family and filed objections to Barrack's prospecting application. The Planning Tribunal was due to hear the case in March this year.

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Sue and Murray Edens are Forest and Bird members. Sue in particular has a strong interest in the natural world, having spent nearly all her life on the farm. Skipper has over the years created a number of artificial wetlands on the farm that are now sanctuaries for wildfowl.

From left, Sue Edens with Kim (4), Joyce Chapman, Murray Edens, Skipper Chapman.

Opposite top: Isolated Opito Bay on the Coromandel Peninsula, eyed by Barrack Mining for potential gold. The dunes, where the threatened New Zealand dotterel breeds, are in the company's prospecting licence application.

Opposite bottom: One of the ponds created by Skipper Chapman. Brown teal nest here.

