

Battle over banning noise complaints against military gun range goes to court



Maxine Jacobs | THE PRESS

August 9, 2024

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The Defence Force and Selwyn District Council are going the Environment Court over a bid by the military to ban noise complaints. (File photo)

JOHN KIRK-ANDERSON / THE PRESS

Military bosses are taking a council to court over its refusal to ban people living near a firing range from making complaints about its noise.

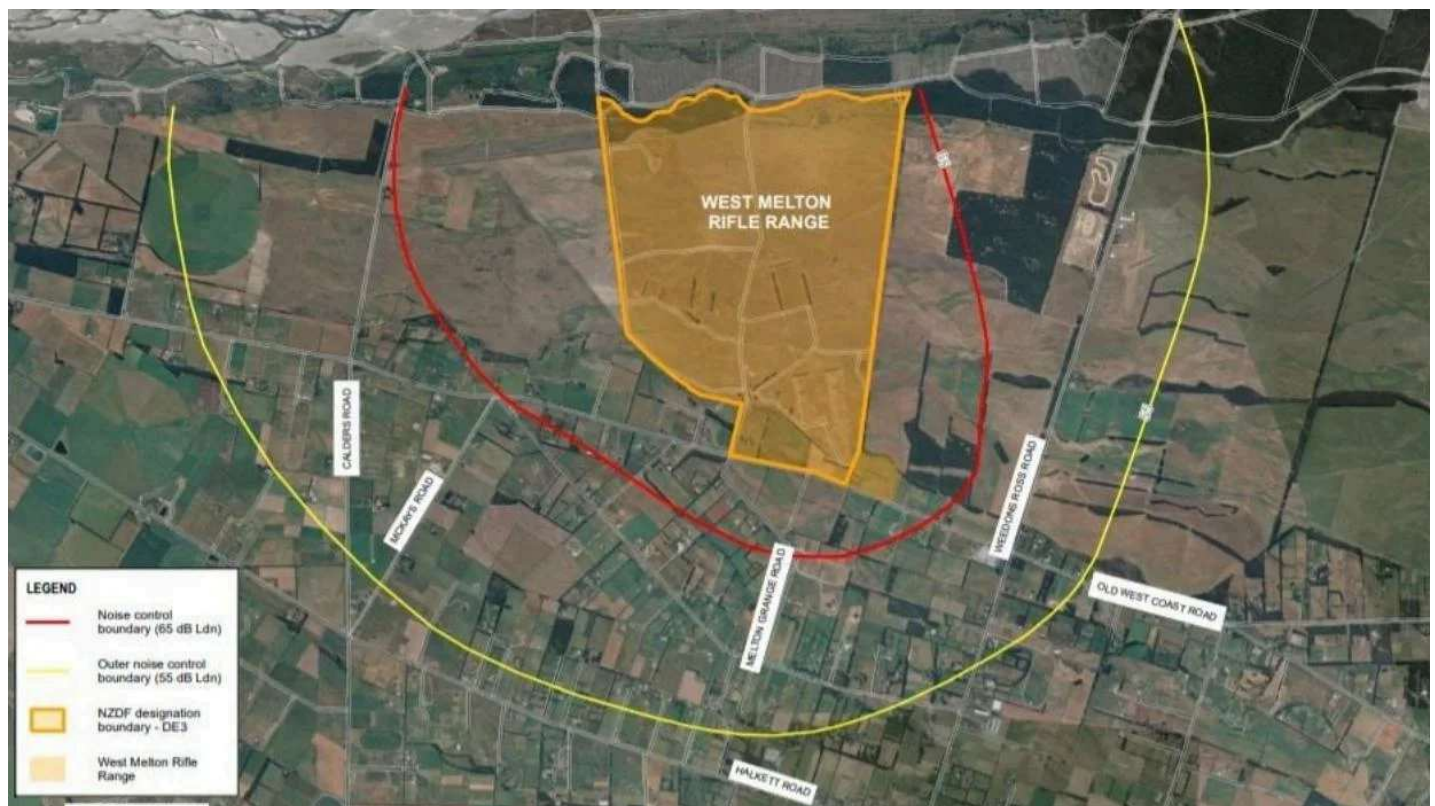
The battle between the Defence Force and Selwyn District Council will start early next year in the Environment Court after the council declined to include the request for the ban in its

district plan.

The military has tried to convince the council to ban complaints about noise from neighbours of the West Melton Rifle Range since 2021.

The range is a training area that has been used since the 1940, and is the only place military personnel can practise long-range shooting in the South Island.

Due to Selwyn's population growth, the Defence Force proposed a "non-complaints covenant" for all new properties and developments that may be built in the area, to protect itself from residents raising issues about noise coming from the range.



Noise boundaries proposed by the NZDF and a proposed "no complaints covenant" near its West Melton rifle range are concerning local residents. (File photo)

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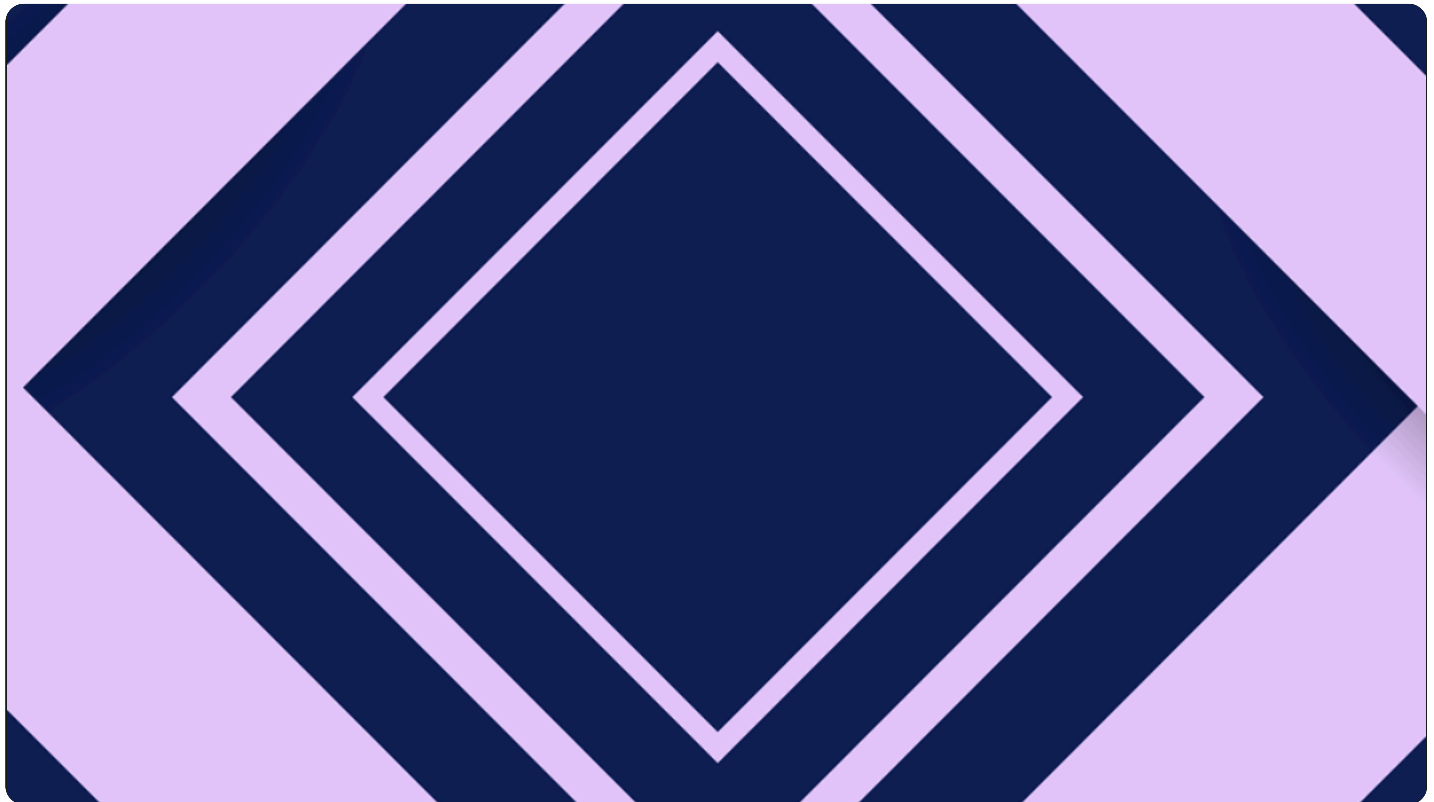
The ban would not apply to existing properties or outdoor areas, the Defence Force said in its submissions to the council's district plan in 2022.

More than 270 locals fought against the idea of a ban. They argued there were no complaints being laid anyway, and feared noise would increase if a ban was approved.

The council sided with the residents and refused the covenant in 2022, stating that without landowners' consent it was "unlawful" to impose such a ban.

It also said responding to future noise complaints would not be an "onerous imposition" on the military, but the Defence Force appealed the decision.

Now both sides are preparing for the case to go to the Environment Court in early 2025.



Army proposes no complaints covenant
VIDEO CREDIT: JOHN KIRK-ANDERSON/STUFF

Adrian McFedries lives about a kilometre from the range. He is co-founder of local group Rein in the Range, which was created to voice neighbours' concerns. He said he believed the Defence Force was hiding plans for the future.

Anyone who moved to the area knew they were moving next to a military shooting zone, he said.

The current system of warning residents when the range was to be used was working well, McFedries said, so he questioned why the Defence Force might want to silence future complaints.

“It feels like all the cards aren’t on the table. It’s the West Melton Rifle Range, not the West Melton Artillery Range.”



The West Melton Rifle Range trains military personnel. (File photo)

KIRK HARGREAVES / THE PRESS

He said there were rumours Burnham Military Camp was ramping up operations which would see the use of the range at West Melton increased, which could lead to an increase in noise.

The defence force said the 422-hectare range is primarily used for rifle, grenade and explosives practice.

It cannot be rebuilt anywhere else, its submission in 2022 read, and as Selwyn was one of the fastest growing districts in the country it needed to protect its “nationally important training facility”.

“The absence of complaints, or the limited number of complaints from people who have lived alongside the range for a long period of time, does not provide an indication of complaints in the future.”

The Defence Force declined to comment as the case was before the court.

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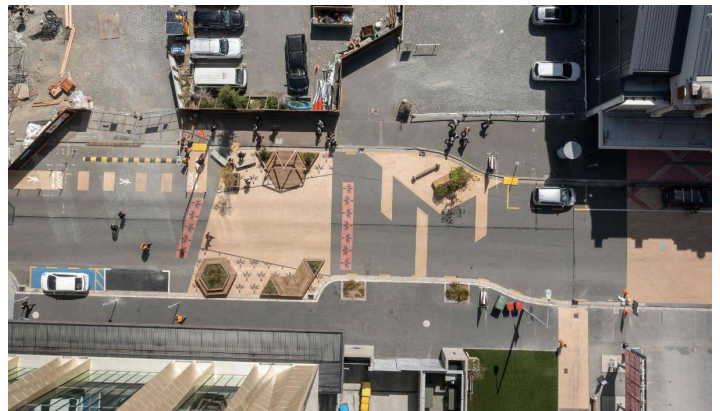


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