

**BEFORE THE PANEL CONVENER**

**IN THE MATTER** of the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 (**FTAA**)

**AND**

**IN THE MATTER** of an application by Ridgeburn Limited under section 42 of the FTAA for the Ridgeburn Project.

**APPLICATION NO.** FTAA-2603-1186

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**MEMORANDUM FROM THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF CONSERVATION  
RESPONDING TO MINUTE OF THE PANEL CONVENER**

29 June 2026

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Susan Newell Solicitor DOC Te Papa Atawhai Private Bag 4715 Christchurch 8140 Telephone: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]	Terry Calmeyer Consultant Planner Fast-track Applications DOC Te Papa Atawhai PO Box 10420 Wellington 6140 Telephone: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]
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## **Introduction**

1. This memorandum has been prepared on behalf of the Director-General of Conservation (**D-G**) by the Department of Conservation (DOC). It responds to a minute of the Panel Convener dated 24 June 2026 in respect of the Ridgeburn Project (the “Minute”).
2. The Minute refers to an upcoming conference, to gather participant views, that will inform decisions of the Convener regarding:
  - a) Appointment of panel members.
  - b) The timing of the panel decision.
3. This memorandum addresses the matters identified in Schedules 1 and 2 of the Minute, as relevant to the two decisions required of the Panel Convener set out at paragraph 2 of the Minute.
4. The memorandum focuses on the approval sought under section 42(4)(h), being a wildlife approval as defined in Clause 1 of Schedule 7.

## **Complexity**

5. DOC has reviewed the matters in Schedule 1 of the Minute and considers that the wildlife approval component of this Project is of complexity rating – relatively low. The one evidentiary/factual matter that DOC has identified is that the application did not provide a metric on the extent of lizard habitat affected for each species and the scale of effects can therefore not be ascertained. Therefore, the panel will need to obtain further information about the scale of effects, to inform decisions about a wildlife authorisation and appropriate conditions.
6. The D-G is not in a position to advise the Convener about the complexity of the resource consent component of the Project.

## **Appointment of panel members**

7. In terms of the D-G's interests, key matters to be considered in this application are effects on absolutely protected wildlife (lizards), and on conservation matters dealt with as part of the proposed resource consents (effects on lizard habitat and freshwater habitat).

8. The D-G considers it is appropriate that the Panel Convener appoints a panel that contains relevant ecological expertise, albeit recognising that the panel would be guided by reports and advice from the D-G and others.
9. The D-G considers that, in terms of the D-G's interests, appointing more than the default number of panel members is not required. The D-G recognises that matters outside of the D-G's interests may warrant appointment of additional members.

**Issue (b) – Timing of panel decision**

10. The D-G agrees that the relevant matters for setting an appropriate time frame for consideration of this Project are the scale, nature, and complexity of the approvals sought, and any other matter raised by the application.
11. The D-G considers that the default time frame would be sufficient for the wildlife approval component of this Project, as it is of low legal, evidential, and factual complexity. It is expected that specific advice around timeframes needed to decide on the resource consent elements of the Project will be provided by other attendees of the conference.
12. The D-G recommends that the timeframe accommodate any procedural steps that may be necessary, such as additional information requests by the panel under section 67 of the FTAA, particularly in respect of the scale of effects, as noted in paragraph 5 above.
13. The D-G considers that exactly what procedural steps will be necessary and appropriate will need to be determined by the panel once the key issues have crystallised but notes that it is unlikely a hearing would be required on the wildlife approval component of this Project.

**Issues**

14. DOC was engaged in pre-lodgement consultation with the applicant. The application documents state that DOC's feedback informed development of the Lizard Management Plan and overall approach to lizard salvage and relocation. DOC considers that consultation has been undertaken. However, pre-lodgement advice identified a number of information gaps, particularly in relation to lizard habitat loss, relocation site details, salvage methodology, and monitoring and management measures.

15. Matters DOC considers are not adequately addressed in the application as lodged, include:
- a) The effects on current populations at Morven Hill of releasing lizards there.
  - b) Clarity on whether southern grass skink habitat occurs on Morven Hill.
  - c) The effectiveness of plantings and pest control and the effect of herbicides on lizards.
  - d) Which lizard habitats are avoided, which cannot be avoided, why, and what actions have minimised effects.
  - e) Baseline release-site survey results are required, including habitat area/quality, expected capacity, rationale for allocation of species/numbers to each release area, and a trigger for using alternative release areas if capture numbers exceed expectations.
  - f) A monitoring programme is required, e.g. monitoring years, methods, performance measures, success criteria, and adaptive management triggers.
  - g) The LMP lacks clear contingency responses for low salvage success, high mortality, unexpected species, unsuitable weather windows, release-site failure, predator-control failure, or excessive capture numbers. A contingency table with triggers, actions, responsibilities, and reporting requirements could address this.
16. Certification of the lizard management plan for the purposes of the Wildlife Approval is unclear. Conditions have been proposed by the applicant in Volume I which refers to the resource consent and which contains a section under the heading 'Wildlife Authority'. The conditions refer to the Draft Lizard Management Plan as submitted. It is proposed that resource consent conditions require the LMP to be certified by the regional council, yet the LMP is relied on for wildlife approval for which DOC is ultimately responsible under the Wildlife Act.
17. More detail on the native plantings/enhancement proposed for wetlands and riparian margins, as well as proposed conditions addressing wetland management, including objectives, measures, targets/plantings and monitoring, is required to assess the effects on wetlands. The application should also address how the natural wetlands and areas proposed for restoration are to be protected in perpetuity.

**Conclusion**

18. The D-G's representatives will be happy to elaborate further on any of the above points at the conference set for 10am on Tuesday 30 June 2026.
19. DOC confirms willingness to engage directly with the applicant and Panel as necessary to advance the progress of the application.
20. The D-G's representatives will attend the conference.



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Susan Newell  
Counsel for the Director-General of Conservation