

**BEFORE THE FAST-TRACK APPROVALS
PANEL**

In the matter of the Fast-Track Approvals Act
2024

And

In the Matter of applications by Oceana Gold
(New Zealand) Limited for various resource
consents and other authorities relating to the Waihi
North Project (including the Wharekirauponga
Underground Mine)

Brief of evidence of Sara Smerdon

Dated: 23 August 2025

Memo to Coromandel Watchdog

Wildlife Issues – Waihi North Application

1. My name is Sara Smerdon
2. I am a Field Operations Expert for the Mahakirau Forest Estate Society Inc.

Code of Conduct

3. The data, information, facts and assumptions I have considered in forming my opinions are set out in my evidence to follow. The reasons for my opinions expressed are also set out in this evidence.
4. Unless I state otherwise, this evidence is within my sphere of experience and I have not omitted to consider material facts known to me that might alter or detract from the opinions that I express.
5. My relevant experience and basis for my expertise are as set out above.
6. I have not read the conditions.
7. I've reviewed DOC's Wildlife Approval Report and I **support** their analysis. For lizards/frogs, the key gaps are:
8. **Incidental harm:** Too loosely defined. OG should specify **activities, locations, methods, and minimisation** measures **before** any approval.
9. **Frog salvage:** Still high-risk. Require a **complete, peer-reviewed Salvage & Release Plan** up-front (Hochstetter's actions are incomplete).
10. **Northern Striped Gecko (NSG):** Reinstate **clear site-selection/avoidance criteria and exclusion zones**. NSG is the most at-risk herp here - treat as a focus species. Absence of evidence ≠ evidence of absence. FYI at Mahakirau

Sanctuary (MFS) NSG and Archey's frog (AF) share microhabitat, and
Wharekirauponga monitoring has recorded **AF encounter rates ~3× MFS**.

The fastest way to determine potential presence is with eDNA.

11. **Monitoring & metrics:** Mandate **independent statistical review**,
trigger-based escalation, and **long-term reporting** i.e., pre-agreed
thresholds that automatically trigger stronger protections or pauses (clear
decision rules = faster protection, transparency, accountability). Commit to
long-term, in-footprint monitoring of wildlife harm.
12. **Receiving sites:** Lock in **legal protection in perpetuity, longitudinal
monitoring** and intensive **sustained predator control** (including **mice and
pigs**), not short-term offsets.
13. Conclusion: DOC has identified clear deficiencies. If OGL is fast-tracked,
robust, enforceable conditions are essential to avoid unacceptable harm

Sara Smerdon
