



**BEFORE THE FAST-TRACK EXPERT PANEL**

**IN THE MATTER** of the Fast-Track Approvals Act 2025  
(FTAA)

**AND**

**IN THE MATTER** of an application by Lodestone Energy  
Limited under section 42 of the FTAA  
for the construction of a solar farm on  
Haldon Station in the Mackenzie Basin

**APPLICATION NO.** FTAA-2508-1097

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**Planning Review Comments by Nick Boyes on behalf of  
the Mackenzie District Council**

Dated: 2 February 2026

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**Introduction**

- 1 Lodestone Energy Limited (the Applicant) proposes to construct, operate, maintain and decommission a solar farm and battery energy storage system (BESS) on 320ha of land at Haldon Station in Te Manahuna/the Mackenzie Basin Outstanding Natural Landscape (ONL). The project involves the generation of approximately 180MW capacity of renewable electricity. Further details of the proposal and site are set out in the substantive application and supporting documentation<sup>1</sup>.
- 2 These comments are provided in response to the invitation to comment issued by the Panel under section 53(2) of the FTAA on 15 December 2025 (Minute 2). They set out the Mackenzie District Council's (MDC's) statutory

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fasttrack.govt.nz/projects/haldon-solar/substantive-application>.

planning assessment of the substantive application for the Haldon Solar Project made by the Applicant under the Fast-Track Approvals Act 2025 (FTAA).

- 3 My name is Nicholas (Nick) Brian Boyes and I have been engaged by the MDC to review and comment on the planning aspects of the above Fast-Track application. I am an independent planning consultant, having been self-employed for four years (Core Planning and Property Ltd). I hold a Bachelor of Science (majoring in Plant and Microbial Science and Geography) from the University of Canterbury (1997) and a Master of Science (Resource Management) (Hons) from Lincoln University (1999).
- 4 I have 26 years' planning experience, which includes working in both local government and the private sector. My experience includes district plan development, including the preparation of plan provisions and accompanying section 32 evaluation reports, and preparing and presenting section 42A reports. I am currently assisting the MDC with their District Plan Review and was the author of Plan Changes 23 (Natural Environment Values and the General Rural Zone Topics) and Plan Change 30 (Airport Special Purpose Zone and Glentanner Special Purpose Zone). The majority of my work involves preparing and processing resource consent applications and notices of requirement for territorial authorities and private clients. I have recent experience in the processing and preparation of resource consent applications for solar farms, including within the Mackenzie and Waitaki Districts.
- 5 Although this is not an Environment Court Hearing, I have read the Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses (contained in the Environment Court Practice Note 2023) and agree to comply with it. Except where I state I rely on the technical advice of another person, I confirm that the issues addressed in these comments are within my area of expertise, and I have not omitted to consider material facts known to me that might alter or detract from my expressed opinions.
- 6 These planning comments have been prepared with guidance from Council staff and independent technical experts, which are referred to throughout, including:
  - (a) Landscape and Visual Amenity – Ben Espie (Vivian Espie Ltd): **Annexure 1**
  - (b) Traffic Engineering – Nick Fuller (Novo Group Ltd): **Annexure 2**
  - (c) Invertebrate Ecology – Dr Barbara Barratt (Bioeconomy Science Institute): **attached as Appendix 1 to Canterbury Regional Council comments**

- (d) Lizard Ecology – Dr Mandy Tocher (Lizard Expert NZ): **attached as Appendix 2 to Canterbury Regional Council comments**
- (e) Terrestrial Ecology – Dr Jean Jack (Environment Canterbury): **attached as Appendix 3 to Canterbury Regional Council comments**
- 7 I visited the site, accompanied by Ms Julie Shanks (MDC Planning Manager) on 10 December 2024. This was for the purpose of a pre-application meeting with representatives from Lodestone Energy Ltd. This involved travelling along Haldon Road to access the site, walking over the site of the proposed solar project, and viewing the proposed site from various public viewpoints.
- 8 The assessment set out below is based on the substantive application as accepted as complete pursuant to section 46 of the FTAA on 22 September 2025; as well as all Applicant’s response to the questions set out in Panel Minute 1, dated 12 December 2025.
- 9 As discussed with the Applicant during conferencing with the Panel Convener, the MDC is relying on the expertise of Environment Canterbury (ECan) in regard to all ecological aspects of the proposal. The Applicant’s additional ecological assessment (relating to further lizard and invertebrate study) was supplied on 22 January 2026. I am advised by the authors of the Technical Advice that this created some challenge in terms of expert assessment and meaningful comment by the 2 February 2026 deadline.
- 10 The Application includes a set of recommended draft conditions. These conditions have been reviewed as part of the assessment (including the supporting peer review and Technical Advice), with suggested changes or additions to these conditions being recommended where appropriate. The Council continues to work with the Applicant to compile a full suite of land use conditions. Ideally a tracked change document outlining the MDC suggested additions/changes would be provided to the Panel, but there has not been sufficient time to compile such a document for inclusion in these comments. Consequently, MDC would welcome further opportunity to participate in the process of refinement of any conditions that Council may ultimately be required to administer should approval be granted.
- 11 These comments are structured into the following sections:

  - (a) Statutory Requirements
  - (b) National and Regional Benefits
  - (c) Effects Assessment (Adverse Impacts Consideration)
  - (d) Mackenzie District Plan Assessment

- (e) Canterbury Regional Policy Statement Assessment
- (f) Assessment of Other Higher Order Documents:
  - (i) National Policy Statement for Renewable Electricity Generation 2011 (Amended 2025)
  - (ii) National Policy Statement for Electricity Networks 2008 (Amended 2025)
  - (iii) National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020 (Amended 2025)
  - (iv) National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity 2023 (Amended 2025)
  - (v) National Policy Statement for Highly Productive Land 2022 (Amended 2025)
- (g) Summary of Key Findings

### **Statutory Requirements**

- 12 The purpose of the FTAA *“is to facilitate the delivery of infrastructure and development projects with significant regional and national benefits”* Section 3, FTAA).
- 13 On review of the FTAA, these comments have focussed on the matters set out in section 85(3) therein, which sets out that the Panel *may* decline an approval where adverse impacts are sufficiently significant to be out of proportion to the project's regional or national benefits that the Panel has considered under section 81(4), even after taking into account—
  - (i) *any conditions that the panel may set in relation to those adverse impacts; and*
  - (ii) *any conditions or modifications that the applicant may agree to or propose to avoid, remedy, mitigate, offset, or compensate for those adverse impacts.*
- 14 The comments regarding the adverse effects, or impacts of the proposal, and their proportionality relative to regional or national benefits are set out in the following section.
- 15 Section 81(3)(a) of the FTAA sets out that the matters in Clauses 17 to 22 of Schedule 5 must be applied, including the ‘criteria and other matters for assessment of a consent application’. Notably Clause 17(1) sets out that greatest weight must be given to the purpose of the FTAA, over the provisions of Part 2 of the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA); and that section 104D RMA relating to applications with a non-complying activity status does not apply to applications under the FTAA.

## **National and Regional Benefits**

- 16 As set out above, the national and regional benefits of the proposal are an important factor in assessing the proposal in terms of section 81(4) and the section 85 'proportionality' assessment.
- 17 The AEE states that the construction and operation of the Haldon Solar Project will generate a number of significant national and regional benefits, including a significant contribution to the economy and enhanced environmental outcomes through the generation of renewable electricity. These findings are not disputed. It is noted that these benefits are largely attributed to the temporary construction activity (local scale) and the on-going benefit of additional renewable electricity generation (national scale). In that regard they are not particularly site or project specific.

## **Effects Assessment (Adverse Impacts Consideration)**

- 18 The substantive application document includes an assessment of the environmental effects of the project; as well as a description of the management and monitoring of the actual and potential effects (Sections 6 and 7 respectively). That assessment is undertaken in accordance with the relevant requirements of Schedule 5 (clause 5(4), clause 6 and clause 7) of the FTAA.
- 19 For ease of reference the comments below are set out in the same order they are assessed in the substantive application AEE document<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, given the FTAA focus on adverse impacts, where there is agreement that the matter is not in contention the comments are kept brief and effectively confirm the same.

## ***Landscape, Visual Amenity and Natural Character***

- 20 The application included a Landscape Effects Assessment Report prepared by Boffa Miskell Ltd, dated 22 August 2025 (the Landscape Report). That report has been peer reviewed by Mr Ben Espie on behalf of the MDC and his review report is attached as **Annexure 1**.
- 21 The first part of the peer review relates to the relevant planning framework and the recent changes to the Mackenzie District Plan (the District Plan) arising from plan changes making up the District Plan Review. These are

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<sup>2</sup> Except where the matter is either beyond the jurisdiction of the MDC (such as groundwater/stormwater impacts and erosion, sediment and dust control); or more appropriately commented on by others (such as cultural and archaeological effects being commented on by Te Runanga o Ngai Tahu, Te Runanga o Arowhenua, Te Runanga o Moeraki, Te Runanga o Waihao).

discussed in further detail below as part of the District Plan assessment. However, for the sake of the context within which the peer review comments are made, I have discussed with and agree with Mr Espie that the Renewable Electricity Generation (REG) chapter of the District Plan is designed to be a stand-alone suite of provisions with limited ability to refer to other chapters of the District Plan (except where stated). Furthermore, I share his interpretation that the REG chapter is now more enabling of new REG within Te Manahuna/the Mackenzie Basin ONL given that there is no requirement to consider the Natural Features and Landscape (NFL) chapter of the District Plan.

- 22 The peer review confirms the approach taken in the Landscape Report is comprehensive and has appropriately been guided by Te Tangi A Te Manu, Aotearoa New Zealand Landscape Assessment Guidelines (TTatM)<sup>3</sup>.
- 23 Overall, Mr Espie finds the conclusions set out in the Landscape Report regarding 'Landscape Character and Values' to be "*generally logical, plausible and appropriate*" (paragraph 22). However, while the adverse effects on landscape values have been described by the Applicant as being "*at the low end of the assessment scale*", Mr Espie notes they will still be relevant to the consideration of cumulative effects in the future if, or when, other solar farm proposals are assessed. The matter of cumulative effects is an important consideration for solar proposals within Te Manahuna/the Mackenzie Basin ONL and is discussed further below.
- 24 In terms of the visual effects of the proposed solar project, Mr Espie has reached slightly different conclusion to the Applicant as to the extent of adverse effects.
  - (a) Views of the solar farm from the westernmost part of Haldon Arm Road (represented by Visual Simulation 1) are described in the Landscape Report as not being prominent and largely fitting within the existing scene. Mr Espie agrees that the solar project will not be visually dominant, but considers the adverse visual effects are better described as being of a 'moderate' degree, rather than 'low-moderate'.
  - (b) The Landscape Report's finding that the visual effects experienced from the surface of Lake Benmore are limited and of a 'very low to low' degree is dependent (at least in part) on lakeside vegetation (including part of the evergreen shelterbelt) that is not within Haldon

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<sup>3</sup> 'Te Tangi a te Manu: Aotearoa New Zealand Landscape Assessment Guidelines'. Tuia Pita Ora New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects, July 2022.

Station and therefore beyond the control of the Applicant. Mr Espie notes this same vegetation also influences the views from the McAughtries Road/Falston Road area. Whilst acknowledging that he has not examined this vegetated area closely in the field (otherwise relying on aerial photographs), Mr Espie considers that there are areas within Haldon Station immediately adjacent to its southwestern boundaries (and south/southwest of the project area) where new vegetation could be established to “*future-proof and bolster*” the effect of this existing lakeside vegetation. I agree with this approach and recommend an additional condition is included to require this additional planting.

- (c) Views from the vicinity of the Ohau C power station and campground (represented by Visual Simulations 2 and 3) are described in the Landscape Report as being ‘low’<sup>4</sup>. Mr Espie considers that the solar project (including the substation) will introduce a new element of modification, particularly from the more elevated level of Falston Road. Mr Espie is of the view that this additional modification will detract from visual values of the landscape; and this adverse effect is better described as being of a ‘low-moderate’ degree (rather than ‘low’).

- 25 An assessment of natural character effects is appropriate given the application site is located in close proximity of the margins of Lake Benmore and the adjacent rivers (namely the Tekapo and Ohau). It is also noted that much of the application site is identified in the District Plan as being within a Lakeside Protection Area (LPA). LPA are identified in the District Plan to recognise the landscape significance of lakes, their margins, and settings to Kāi Tahu and to recognise the special importance of Te Manahuna/the Mackenzie Basin’s lakes, their margins, and their settings in achieving NFL-O2 (see NFL-P5 ‘Lakeside Protection Areas’).
- 26 As noted by Mr Espie, the “settings” of the lakes are obviously broader in area than just their margins. Therefore, he agrees with the Landscape Report that while the proposal will involve changes within the LPA, such changes do not extend to the margins of Lake Benmore or the adjacent rivers. Notwithstanding, the Landscape Report finds that the proposal will have adverse effects of a ‘low-moderate’ degree on the natural character of the site and the immediate landscape. Mr Espie agrees with that assessment.

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<sup>4</sup> Boffa Miskell Landscape Report, Section 5.2.1, page 35.

- 27 As noted in Panel Minute 1, the cumulative effects of the development of numerous solar projects within Te Manahuna/the Mackenzie Basin is a consideration when it comes to the protection of the ONL from inappropriate use and development (as required by section 6(b) of the RMA).
- 28 The approach of the Applicant set out in their response to Minute 1 (12 December 2025) reflects the well-established understanding that cumulative effects encompass the effects of a proposal in combination with the effects of activities which already form part of the existing environment<sup>5</sup>. In that context the Haldon Solar proposal is the first application and no others form part of the existing environment, the Applicant notes that *“cumulative effects are therefore likely to be a very relevant consideration for subsequent applications in the Mackenzie Basin”*<sup>6</sup>.
- 29 Notwithstanding, the Applicant’s response notes that Boffa Miskell have been commissioned to undertake an assessment of the cumulative effects on the surrounding landscape (accounting for Haldon Solar and The Point projects). The response states that this assessment was expected to be provided at the end of January 2026. To date this has not been received; and on that basis does not form part of Mr Espie’s peer review or these planning comments.
- 30 Mr Espie makes the observation that rather than an assessment of visual effects as perceived from particular viewpoints; the more relevant resource management issue is likely to be the cumulative effects of numerous solar farms on the overall character and values associated with Te Manahuna/the Mackenzie Basin ONL, i.e. effects on the way the community perceive, characterise and value this outstanding landscape.
- 31 Mr Espie goes onto state that a relevant factor to consider in relation to the assessment and overall consideration of these issues will be the trajectory that the Te Manahuna/Mackenzie Basin ONL is on (with or without solar farms); noting that no landscape is frozen in time. As already referred to above and commented on further below, the Mackenzie District Plan (in response to the direction set out in higher order planning instruments) has adopted a more enabling approach to REG. However, there are various other environmental factors that will no doubt impact on the landscape character moving forward, including the spread of wilding conifers, other

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<sup>5</sup> Outstanding Landscape Protection Society Inc v Hastings District Council [2007] ELHNZ 114, W24/2007 at [50] – [53]; citing Queenstown Lakes District Council v Hawthorn Estate Limited (2006) 12 ELRNZ 299 at [84].

<sup>6</sup> Lodestone Energy, Applicant’s response to Panel Minute 1, 12 December 2025, page 7.

pest infestation, farming innovation/intensification and increased development pressure from tourism activity.

- 32 In summary, the number and scale of solar projects present a cumulative challenge to the landscape character of Te Manahuna/the Mackenzie Basin ONL. It is not immediately obvious as to whether the FTAA process allows adequate strategic consideration of the future environment, noting that there appears to be no ability to undertake a comparative assessment of these various future solar projects; whether in terms of their effects, or their efficiency or effectiveness at delivering national benefit in terms of increased renewable electricity generation.
- 33 As it stands, I agree with the comments of Mr Espie that the current Haldon Solar project will not combine with any existing or consented facility to create a cumulative effect. However, when the time comes to consider a number of solar farms in the Mackenzie, cumulative effects are likely to be important, including the way the community perceive and value the Te Manahuna/Mackenzie Basin ONL landscape at a broader scale.

### ***Ecology (Vegetation, Birds, Lizards and Invertebrates)***

- 34 The substantive application included an Ecological Impact Assessment (EIA) prepared by Mr Peter Espie of AgScience Ltd<sup>7</sup>. The conclusion of that report was that:

*The Ecological Impact Assessment of solar development is that it will have a **Very Low** effect on ecological values.*

*The establishment of a solar farm will not result in loss of indigenous ecological values on Haldon Station or in the Pukaki Ecological District.*

- 35 Since that time the Applicant has provided two additional assessments relating to lizards<sup>8</sup> and invertebrates<sup>9</sup>.
- 36 Those reports have subsequently been peer reviewed as listed in paragraph 3 above. In preparing these comments I have also had the

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<sup>7</sup> AgScience Ltd. 2025. Haldon Solar Project: Ecological Impact Assessment, 31 July 2025.

<sup>8</sup> Haldon Station Solar Farm: preliminary lizard assessment, 22 January 2026. Draft memo from Tony Payne, Blueprint Ecology Ltd.

<sup>9</sup> SLR Consulting New Zealand Limited. Terrestrial Invertebrate Assessment: Haldon Solar Farm. Report for Lodestone Energy Ltd.: SLR Consulting New Zealand Limited; 2026 20 Jan 2026. Contract No.: SLR Project No. 875.01640.00001.

benefit of reviewing the vegetation<sup>10</sup>, bird<sup>11</sup> and invertebrate<sup>12</sup> assessments undertaken on behalf of the Department of Conservation (DOC). No doubt copies of those assessment and further commentary will be provided to the Panel by DOC representatives.

- 37 Both the additional work undertaken by the Applicant since lodgement and the peer review assessments undertaken appear to challenge the conclusions reached in the original EIA.

**(a) Vegetation**

- 38 The AgScience EIA outlined that indigenous vegetation is limited, representing less than 0.1% of the vegetative cover. Four vascular native plants ranked in the 'At Risk' category were observed across the solar site (Desert Poa - *Poa maniototo*; Common scabweed - *Raoulia australis*; Scabweed - *Raoulia beauverdii*; and Celadon mat daisy - *Raoulia parkii*). Excluding *Poa maniototo*, all of these were stated to occur at very low frequency.
- 39 The non-vascular mosses and lichens on the site, particularly the two dominant species that contribute the majority of non-vascular cover, juniper haircap moss (*Polytrichum juniperinum*) and the lichen (*Xanthoparmelia semiviridis*), were assessed as being widespread throughout the Pūkaki and similar Ecological Districts in the Mackenzie Ecological Region. Though widespread, *Xanthoparmelia semiviridis* was noted as being considered 'At Risk', possibly due to agricultural intensification.
- 40 In contrast the Vegetation Assessment undertaken by Mr Harding on behalf of DOC, undertaken over a period of some 5 hours on 20 November 2025 recorded sixteen (16) indigenous vascular species and at least eight (8) indigenous non-vascular species (mosses & lichens). The species recorded during the site survey listed as either Threatened or At Risk are listed at the top of page 3 of Mr Harding's report, and include *Lepidium solandri*, a Threatened (Nationally Critical) species.
- 41 The outcome of Mr Harding's assessment is that the application site meets definitions of 'significant indigenous vegetation' and 'significant habitats of

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<sup>10</sup> Harding, M. 2025. Haldon Station Solar Array Site Vegetation Assessment. Report Prepared for the Department of Conservation, November 2025.

<sup>11</sup> O'Donnell, C. 2025. Proposed solar farm – Haldon Solar Project, Risks to Threatened and At-Risk bird species from construction and ongoing operation, December 2025.

<sup>12</sup> Chinn, W. 2025. Terrestrial invertebrate values present on land proposed for a solar farm by Lodestone Energy Ltd. at Haldon Station, Mackenzie Basin, 24 November 2025.

indigenous fauna', being those which meet the criteria listed in the Canterbury Regional Policy Statement (CRPS), Policy 9.3.1 and Appendix 3.

- 42 As assessed further below, CRPS Policy 9.3.1 introduces the concept of "no net loss" of indigenous biodiversity or indigenous biodiversity values as a result of land use activities.

**(b) Birds**

- 43 The AgScience EIA observed sixteen bird species during survey. Only one wide ranging native species, the Black Fronted Tern (seen flying over the area) is classified as At Risk Nationally Endangered. The application states that no native species were observed nesting, or with young, in the site.
- 44 Dr O'Connell (DOC) found the Applicant's bird assessment inadequate to appropriately identify the bird fauna that may be at risk from the proposed solar farm. Dr O'Connell considers at least 18 Threatened and At-Risk bird species have been recorded on or in the vicinity of the proposed Haldon Solar farm and are likely to use the site at some time or other. In contrast the Applicant's ecological assessment suggested that low numbers of banded dotterel, black-fronted tern, South Island pied oystercatcher, NZ pipit use the site directly.
- 45 Of particular concern to Dr O'Connell is the collision risk of birds that frequently fly over the site while moving among other habitats or during migration. Key species likely to be present are listed as:
- (i) Kakī / black stilt (Nationally Critical)
  - (ii) Black fronted tern (Nationally Endangered)
  - (iii) Matuku-hūrepo/Australasian bittern (Nationally Critical)
- 46 Overall, Dr O'Connell considers that the Applicant has not adequately assessed the relative use of the area by Threatened and At-Risk birds in order to allow the assessment of the relative use and importance of the area; and considers a precautionary approach is needed to consenting solar farms in areas with high usage by Threatened and At-Risk bird species.
- 47 Dr O'Connell refers to the lack of adequate assessment and the nature of bird-strike in relation to solar farms raising uncertainty in the assessment of this proposal. Dr O'Connell suggests that one approach to dealing with this uncertainty would be to require a rigorous carcass monitoring programme, and if carcasses are detected, to then trigger compensation focussed on reversing any impacts. As he notes, this would require

identifying adaptive management methods and/or appropriate offset/compensation activities. It also would require scientifically robust monitoring of bird populations so that over time the “no net loss” objective of bird populations is met.

- 48 In my view the conditions offered by the Applicant (namely Proposed Conditions 31 and 32) do not include the type of adaptive management measures required to adequately address the matters of concern raised as described above.
- 49 In my view additional adaptive management conditions requiring an Avian Management Plan and an Avian Collision Management Plan are required to address the matters included in Dr O’Connell’s assessment. These would include details around the likely offset and/or compensation package if monitoring finds that the project is having an adverse effect on the mortality of Threatened and At-Risk bird species in the area.

**(c) Lizards**

- 50 No herpetofauna, lizards, geckos or skinks were observed during the original survey undertaken, or captured in pitfall monitoring, or recorded on sand strips in the preparation of the EIA.
- 51 ECan, including on behalf of the MDC, requested a lizard survey be carried out earlier in the FTAA process. The draft Memo prepared by Mr Tony Payne (22 January 2026) goes some way to addressing this concern. However, at the time of writing the results of the lizard survey remain pending; and as a result, the significance of lizard habitats over the solar project footprint is not yet confirmed.
- 52 Notwithstanding, the nature of the agricultural activity undertaken on the site is such that it appears the habitat required for lizards is now absent, with Mr Payne concluding that “*Overall, the ecological value of lizard habitats on site is negligible*”. Dr Mandy Tocher (see Technical Advice attached as Appendix 2 to the CRC comments) agrees with Mr Payne’s assessment that McCann’s skink is most likely to be the only lizard species present over the solar project footprint, and in relatively low numbers over small areas of fragmented habitat. However, Dr Tocher notes the extent of habitat is unknown and contingent on the final results of the lizard survey (not yet provided).
- 53 Mr Payne concludes that it is unlikely that a regionally or locally significant lizard population (e.g., At Risk or Threatened) would occur on site. Dr Tocher notes that the presence of Southern Alps gecko and/or Southern

grass skink (both At Risk – Declining) cannot be determined until the lizard survey is complete.

- 54 The application site appears sufficient to provide alternative and potentially more suitable areas for lizard habitat if required. It is noted that the current Proposed MDC Conditions set does not require the preparation of a Lizard Management Plan, or the formation of any alternative habitat beyond the solar farm footprint. Should the final results of the lizard survey and subsequent Lizard Assessment Report to be completed after survey devices have been checked in late January require it, then in my view any adverse effects on lizards and their habitat are able to be suitably mitigated using traditional habitat restoration and relocation methods; which might include applying for a Wildlife Act Authority from the Department of Conservation (if required).

**(d) Invertebrates**

- 55 The original EIA stated that no known locally threatened species of invertebrates were observed on the site and potential invertebrate habitat will not be appreciably altered by development (as the total ground disturbance comprises around 0.4% of the total site area).
- 56 Additional assessment has now been undertaken on behalf of the Applicant by SLR Consulting New Zealand Limited, who have prepared a Terrestrial Invertebrate Assessment (TIR). In addition, Mr Warren Chinn from DOC has also undertaken an inspection on Thursday 20, November 2025 and prepared Technical Advice.
- 57 The outcome of these additional assessments is now that the construction of the proposed solar project is likely to *“result in mortality and injury of terrestrial invertebrates and damage invertebrate habitats at the site, while the solar panels will shade the ground which is likely to result in changes to the vegetation and the quality of invertebrate habitats”* (SLR, page 20).
- 58 The TIR found that the Haldon Solar Farm site provides habitat for (amongst a range of other invertebrates):
- (i) Robust grasshopper (*Brachaspis robustus*; Nationally Endangered).
  - (ii) Minute grasshopper (*Sigaus minutus*; Nationally Vulnerable).
  - (iii) Otago short-horned grasshopper (*Phaulacridium otagoense*; At Risk – Declining).
  - (iv) Tekapo ground wētā (*Hemiandrus furoviarius*; Nationally Endangered).

- 59 The TIR also noted that the New Zealand mantis (*Orthodera novaezealandiae*; At Risk – Declining) was also recorded near the solar farm site and is also likely to be present.
- 60 Robust grasshopper is listed in Schedule 7 of the Wildlife Act 1953 and is therefore absolutely protected under that Act. A Wildlife Act Authority will be required to disturb or kill this species; it is noted that this approval is not included within the suite of regulatory approvals sought under this FTAA process by Lodestone Energy.
- 61 The TIR describes various mitigation options in terms of the effects hierarchy and describes potential offset/compensation options as well as their relative advantages/disadvantages. The conclusion notes that *“it is likely that, following avoidance, minimisation, and remediation, an offsetting or compensation approach will be required to fully offset adverse effects on invertebrates”*.

**(e) Summary Ecological Effects**

- 62 The EIA provided with the substantive application appears to have understated the ecological impacts of the proposal.
- 63 The additional reports now provided (at least in terms of invertebrates and lizards) fill the information gaps otherwise identified in the ECan and DOC Technical Advice reports. Despite this, information gaps remain, particularly in terms of quantifying the adverse ecological effects and developing a strategy to implement the effects management hierarchy.
- 64 As set out in the Technical Advice from Dr Jack (see Appendix 3 of CRC comments) the proposed solar farm will alter environmental conditions of 320ha of nationally rare and ecologically significant dryland habitat. These changes will favour exotic plant species and exclude/reduce the abundance of native dryland species. Dr Jack notes that solar farms are not compatible with maintaining sensitive dryland values due to the inherent disturbance of land and the alteration of microclimates (i.e., moisture gradients) in which indigenous species persist. Solar farm development also risks adversely impacting freshwater avifauna and their habitat. Dr Jack describes that in a best-case scenario (for the Applicant) this will result in *“unavoidable residual effects for which compensation and offsets would be required”* (paragraph 9).
- 65 On the basis of the more recent assessments reviewed and outlined above, I agree that an offsetting and/or compensation approach will be required to fully address adverse effects on significant indigenous vegetation and invertebrates. This will require significant additional work by the Applicant

to fully demonstrate no net loss of significant indigenous biodiversity values. To date no details of any such offset and/or compensation package have been provided and no conditions set out a framework by which to achieve a no net loss biodiversity outcome. Therefore, to adequately assess any such proposal it is considered that further information from the Applicant is likely to be required pursuant to section 67 of the FTAA.

***Natural Hazards (Geotechnical, Flood, Fire)***

- 66 A Geotechnical Assessment for the solar project was been prepared by Beca and attached as Appendix 4 to the substantive application. This report is such that the Applicant considers the potential geotechnical hazards at the site can be appropriately managed and will not give rise to adverse environmental effects.
- 67 A Flood Risk Assessment for the solar project was also been prepared by Beca and attached as Appendix 5 to the substantive application. The Assessment sets out the development of a 2D flood model to estimate the flood risk as the site using a 100-year average recurrence interval rainfall (ARI), with an allowance for the effects of climate change. The majority of the inundated areas experience an average depth of less than 0.15m, with a maximum depth of 0.69m occurring along a main flow path. In order to manage the potential flooding effects, the Applicant states it will ensure the overland flow paths modelled are avoided where possible. No particular conditions seek to specifically address flood risk, beyond General Condition 1 stating that the project must be carried out in general accordance with the Flood Risk Assessments prepared by BECA.
- 68 In terms of fire risk, the substantive application sets out details of the consultation undertaken with Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ). Condition 35 is proposed to address fire risk and specifically requires the preparation of an Emergency Management Plan (EMP) in consultation with FENZ. Notwithstanding, in my view there are some details that could be added to the proposed condition to more effectively address the matter of fire risk at the site, including:
- (i) The size and location of all on-site firefighting water supply tanks including hard stands capable of accommodating a fire appliance and appropriate couplings in accordance with the New Zealand Fire Service Fire Fighting Water Supplies Code of Practice SNZ PAS 4509:2008;
  - (ii) A safe method of shutting down and isolating the photovoltaic system and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) (either in its entirety or partially, as determined by the risk assessment);

- (iii) Requiring all operational vehicles entering the site shall be equipped with fire extinguishers, of size and type in accordance with NZS4503;
- (iv) Requiring vegetation within the footprint site is maintained to reduce the risk of fire; and
- (v) Monitoring of faults and potential fire risk of electrical equipment, fault detection systems and any CCTV system, including automatic fire detection and alarm systems in control room/s.

69 On the basis of additional matters being incorporated into the conditions imposed on any consent granted, the effects arising from natural hazards on the application site are considered to be appropriately managed in the context of the proposed solar farm project.

70 For the sake of completeness, it is noted that none of the above natural hazards are considered to represent a significant risk in terms of section 106A of the RMA. Given the information available the proposed solar farm is not considered to accelerate, worsen, or result in material damage to land or other land and structures, or result in adverse effects on the health or safety of people.

### ***Hazardous Substances***

71 The substantive application (Section 6.9) notes that operational activities (including the substation transformers) will require the storage and use of potentially hazardous substances on the site (diesel and oil). The use and handling of these substances will be undertaken in a manner that complies with the relevant requirements of the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Act 1996 and the Health and Safety at Work (Hazardous Substances) Regulations 2017. It is noted that Proposed Condition 36 specifically requires compliance with Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Act 1996.

72 The AEE goes onto note that transformers within the substation will be banded to provide sufficient containment for the volume of oil required, plus a contingency for a further 20% of this volume. Given this, I agree with the Applicant that any potentially adverse effects associated with the storage and use of hazardous substances will be appropriately mitigated.

### ***Transportation***

73 An Integrated Transport Assessment (ITA) for the solar project has been prepared by Stantec New Zealand and was attached as Appendix 8 to the

substantive application. The ITA considered both construction-related and operational traffic.

- 74 The MDC has engaged Mr Nick Fuller of Novo Group Ltd to peer review that ITA and Mr Fuller's report and recommended changes to the traffic related conditions proposed by the Applicant are set out in **Annexure 2**.
- 75 The operational nature of the proposed solar farm is such that transport effects are predominantly confined to the construction stage. Mr Fuller largely agrees with the findings of the ITA and the overall conclusion that transport related effects can be managed through an appropriately drafted and implemented Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP). Mr Fuller notes that although a draft CTMP has been prepared and submitted with the application, in his view this lacks much of the detail regarding the off-site traffic management (described at a high-level in the ITA) that mitigates the effects on the wider network. Notwithstanding, Mr Fuller considers that the additional detail required can be provided later and he notes this is common practice. Accordingly, Mr Fuller has focussed on ensuring key matters are satisfactorily addressed through the Proposed MDC land use consent conditions. The suggested amendments are described in Mr Fuller's peer review and set out in detail in Attachment 2 to that document.
- 76 Mr Fuller refers to the proposed remedy to address the observation angle out of the eastern Haldon Road approach to SH8; noting that his preference that to also better align the western Haldon Road approach to SH8. However, it is noted that as this is an effect on the State Highway, any such concern falls under the remit of the NZ Transport Agency (NZTA). I note that the Panel will be receiving separate comment from NZTA in relation to this project.
- 77 Beyond the matters referred to in Mr Fuller's peer review, I also wish to make a brief comment on the amenity impacts of the increased construction traffic along Haldon Road. During construction, it is anticipated that there will be approximately 150 to 200 staff on-site. The application AEE states that Lodestone Energy Ltd and their construction contractor will investigate options to provide transport for staff to reduce the need for private vehicle travel. I note that the estimated personnel traffic generation of approximately 100 vehicle movements per day (50 in and 50 out) is with *"means in place to reduce private vehicle travel"*.
- 78 I note that Proposed Condition 16 c) includes:

*Identification of travel routes, site access points and staff/contractor parking, including details of any measures to enable shared transport;*

- 79 In my view this does not go so far as to require shared transport so as to achieve the 100 vehicle movements per day. This matter is important as without any such restriction being adhered to, the increase in personnel construction phase traffic along Haldon Road is likely to lead to adverse amenity effects on those living alongside the 39km length of Haldon Road traversed from SH8 in order to gain access to the site (and more particularly along the 23km that remains metalled).
- 80 The Stantec ITA refers to options including providing buses/shuttles from surrounding centres, or a barge from the Ohau C power station to the Haldon Arm camping ground to transport workers. In my view these measures are required to be specifically required as conditions of consent in order to avoid adverse amenity impacts on those living along the 23km unsealed section of Haldon Road.
- 81 That matter aside, on the basis that the recommendations to the Proposed Conditions set out in Mr Fuller's Peer Review are incorporated into any consent granted, construction and operational transport related effects of the proposal are considered to be able to be appropriately managed.

### ***Construction Effects***

- 82 Construction is expected to take place over 14-18 months. The effects of construction in terms of stormwater, earthworks and dust are the subject of provisions included in the Canterbury Land and Water Regional Plan (CLWRP) and Canterbury Air Regional Plan (CARP). It is noted that conditions relating to each of these matters are included in the Applicant's Proposed Conditions to be imposed on the regional consents required for the proposed activity. These include a Dust Management Plan (DMP) to ensure that there will be no offensive or objectionable effect beyond the boundary of the site. Therefore, the proposal is a permitted activity under the CARP. ECan are best placed to make further comment on these matters, which are not otherwise addressed in this report.
- 83 A construction related effect of some concern to MDC is the ability to efficiently accommodate workers over the construction period without disrupting the local housing market and in particular rental prices for local families.
- 84 It is the Council's experience that Twizel and Takapō/Lake Tekapo currently have accommodation shortages, particularly over peak summer tourist period. Notwithstanding, many of the residential buildings in these townships are used as holiday homes/baches and are not permanently occupied. The demand for short to medium term worker accommodation

over the construction period may encourage homeowners to consider renting currently unoccupied baches.

- 85 The concern has a cumulative aspect, and the ability to house workers will become more challenging should more than one solar project be under construction at any one time. However, it is acknowledged that should this be the case then it is likely that private enterprise will provide temporary accommodation options should demand exceed supply.
- 86 Another construction related effect could be the change in the employment market. It is understood that many of the construction roles are not highly specialised and can provide employment opportunities for those in the local area. It is acknowledged that this could result in some local businesses having difficulty recruiting staff during the construction period. However, it is acknowledged that any such impacts are likely to be off-set by the influx of additional workers (and families) coming into the area, likely generating significant economic benefit for local businesses.
- 87 In terms of any proportionality assessment, any temporary adverse effects in regard to housing and employment are considered to be minor and outweighed by the local economic benefits accruing from the employment opportunities and economic benefits arising from having additional workers in the local area.

### **Noise**

- 88 Technical acoustic advice was provided for this project by Marshall Day Acoustics (MDA) and was attached as Appendix 11 to the substantive application. That advice considers both construction related and operational noise.
- 89 The remote nature of the application site and the resultant distance from the nearest sensitive receptors is such that the modelling of potential noise from construction activities indicates compliance with the construction noise requirements of the District Plan (set out in NOISE-R6).
- 90 MDA's modelling of operation noise similarly indicates that the solar farm will readily comply with both the daytime and night-time limits in the District Plan. The MDA advice notes that whilst the solar farm may be audible at times outside a dwelling, internal noise levels are likely to be very low and bordering on inaudible, particularly where windows are closed.
- 91 The Proposed Conditions include conditions 33 and 34 which relate to operational and construction noise limits respectively. It is noted that Condition 33 could benefit from being aligned to the standards set out in

NOISE-TABLE 1 – Noise Limits included in the District Plan<sup>13</sup>; and also including a standard reference to the noise levels being measured in accordance with NZS 6801:2008 Acoustics - Measurement of Environmental Sound and assessed in accordance with NZS 6802:2008 Acoustics - Environmental Noise.

- 92 Overall, the remote nature of the application site and proposed operational aspects of a solar farm are such that the MDA assessment that no adverse effects will arise from the operation of the proposed solar farm was accepted and no technical peer review was undertaken for the purpose of these comments. The Applicant has volunteered conditions, and subject to some minor amendment they will adhere to the permitted noise standards found in the District Plan (as discussed further below).

### ***Cultural and Archaeological***

- 93 Papatipu Rūnanga can speak with authority regarding cultural effects. As separate comment is being provided to the Panel from the relevant iwi authority (Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu); as well as the local Runanga (Te Rūnanga o Arowhenua, Te Rūnanga o Moeraki and Te Rūnanga o Waihao), no additional comments are provided by the MDC.

### ***Lighting***

- 94 Te Manahuna/the Mackenzie Basin has some of the clearest night skies in the world. The application site is located within the Aoraki Mackenzie International Dark Sky Reserve, created in 2012. The Dark Sky Reserve is important to the District as it attracts local, national and international visitors. The Reserve is also the site of Mt John Observatory, operated for research in astronomy by the University of Canterbury. The maintenance of dark sky is essential for the continuation of the accreditation; as well as the associated tourism and research activities.
- 95 The Applicant has provided a suite of proposed conditions (Conditions 45 to 51) reflecting the sensitivity of the application site in terms of night sky, these include:
- (i) Restricting the hours of outdoor lighting and requiring shielding so that light shines below the horizontal;
  - (ii) Requiring security lighting to be fitted with motion sensors;
  - (iii) Ensuring that lighting is directed away from public roads and Te Ao Mārama / Lake Benmore; and

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<sup>13</sup> This matter is commented on further in regard to the assessment of the proposal with the Mackenzie District Plan.

(iv) Setting limits on colour temperature, emission type and light spill.

- 96 On the basis of the proposed conditions any adverse effects from lighting are considered to be appropriately managed.

### **Summary of Adverse Impacts**

- 97 Based on the assessment above and relying on the various technical advice received, there are minor matters of additional and/or amended conditions that are recommended in terms of landscape, fire risk, traffic and noise.
- 98 The particular concern regarding this application is the ecological effects, given that the application site is now confirmed to include significant indigenous vegetation (including *Lepidium solandri*, a Threatened (Nationally Critical) species, and nationally endangered invertebrates (including the Robust grasshopper and Tekapo ground wētā)).
- 99 Additional conditions will be required to address the presence of these species, and also the risk to birds (and possibly lizards). These will likely have to include an offset and/or compensation package to apply the effects management hierarchy in a manner that achieves a no net loss biodiversity outcome. As it stands, I do not agree with the Applicant's conclusion that "*No anticipated adverse environmental effect of the Project has been assessed to be more than minor*" (AEE, paragraph 6.14(b)).

### **Mackenzie District Plan Assessment**

- 100 The proposed activities are administered under the Mackenzie District Plan (District Plan), which is in the final stages of being reviewed.
- 101 Stages 1 and 2 (Plan Changes 20 and 21) of the District Plan Review were made operative on 28 April 2023. The Council's decisions on submissions on Stage 3 (Plan Changes 23 to 27) were notified on 5 August 2024, with appeals lodged by a number of parties. Of particular note in terms of this solar proposal is PC26, which included the provisions contained in the Renewable Electricity Generation (REG) and Infrastructure (INF) chapters.
- 102 The Applicant's substantive application AEE is dated 29 August 2025 and therefore the District Plan assessment set out therein does not account for updates since that date.
- 103 The appeals lodged in relation to Stage 3 (including PC26) have now all been resolved, with the Environment Court issuing its Determination on 7 November 2025 (Decision No. [2025] NZEnvC 364). The resolution of

those appeals now means that the provisions included within Stage 3 of the District Plan Review can be treated as operative.

- 104 The Council released its decisions on submissions in relation to Stage 4 (Plan Changes 28 to 30) on 24 July 2025. Of relevance to this proposal are PC28 (Hazards and Risks), PC29 (Noise). It is noted that while some of these Stage 4 provisions remain under appeal, they are limited in scope and do not otherwise affect this solar project. On that basis the provisions contained in PC28 and PC29 relating to the consideration of this proposal can also be treated as operative and no assessment of the previous plan rules is required.
- 105 This means that the District Plan assessment is now more straightforward than it was at the time the substantive application and AEE was prepared and lodged. More particularly, the “*somewhat unusual situation*” described therein regarding the proposal being subject to rules in the proposed plan which are not intended to apply when the proposed plan is read as a whole, no longer applies (AEE, Section 5.3.2, page 67).

### **Zoning and Overlays**

- 106 The application site is located within the General Rural Zone (GRUZ). The Introduction to the GRUZ chapter sets out that the “*purpose of the General Rural Zone is to enable a range of primary production activities, as well as other compatible activities that rely on or support the natural resources within rural areas of the District, including tourism and conservation along with those activities that have an operational need or functional need to locate in the zone*”.
- 107 The land area subject to this application (i.e., that area to be occupied by the proposed solar farm) is included within the following District Plan Overlays//Notations (either wholly or in part):
- (i) Outstanding Natural Landscape (ONL)
  - (ii) Areas of Visual Vulnerability (High and Medium);
  - (iii) Lakeside Protection Area (LPA);
  - (iv) Sites and Areas of Significance to Māori (SASM9);
  - (v) Flood Hazard Assessment Overlay;
  - (vi) Liquefaction Assessment Overlay<sup>14</sup>;

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<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that provisions relating to the Liquefaction Assessment Overlay are restricted to subdivision, and do not otherwise impact the assessment of this land use application.

- (vii) Hydro Inundation Hazard Overlay<sup>15</sup>; and
- (viii) Transmission Lines: The 220kV Benmore to Islington (“BEN-ISL-A”) National Grid transmission line traverses the site (this is the line to which the solar farm will connect)

108 The above notations/overlays as they appear in the Mackenzie District Eplan are shown in Figures 9 to 14 of the AEE accompanying the substantive application. On that basis they are not replicated here.

### **Activity Type**

109 Footnote 32 in the AEE submitted with the substantive application notes that it is not entirely clear whether the proposed substation is treated under the District Plan as part of the REG activity or as a standalone activity. The AEE then refers to the definition of renewable electricity generation activities included in the NPS-REG; and concludes:

*It is likely, therefore that the substation is part of the renewable electricity generation activity, but is assessed here under the infrastructure provisions as a precautionary measure (the end result in terms of activity class is the same).*

110 I note that the definition of renewable electricity generation contained in the NPS-REG has been updated as part of the recent amendments, to read as follows:

*renewable electricity generation (REG) activities include the full range of activities required for REG, including small-scale and community-scale REG, including:*

- (a) *the investigation, construction, operation, monitoring, maintenance, upgrade,*
- (b) *repowering, decommissioning and removal of REG assets;*
- (c) *the storage of generated electricity, whether connected to REG, the electricity network or directly to a site or community;*
- (d) *the conveyance of generated electricity to electricity networks or directly to end users;*
- (e) *all ancillary REG activities;*
- (f) *but does not include electricity network assets as defined by the National Policy Statement for Electricity Transmission 2008 and its amendments*

111 Clause (f) in the definition above raises some questions as to the status of the proposed substation as part of a REG activity. The term ‘electricity

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<sup>15</sup> The provisions relating to the Hydro-Inundation Overlay are restricted to new occupied buildings, camping grounds, community facilities and rural tourism activities that provide overnight accommodation, so do not apply to the proposed activity. Furthermore, the hydro Inundation provisions are in a separate chapter to the balance of the Natural Hazards provisions, and therefore are not included within the provisions applying to REG activity in accordance with Table 1 in the REG chapter set out below.

network assets' is defined in the recently updated National Policy Statement for Electricity Networks 2008 (2025 amendment) as:

*means the physical components of the EN and any physical components of ancillary EN activities that support operation of the EN*

112 In my view this definition is rather broad and would appear to include the proposed substation. On that basis, like the Applicant in the AEE, I have taken a precautionary approach and included below a separate assessment of the proposed substation under the Infrastructure (INF) chapter provisions.

### **Renewable Electricity Generation (REG)**

113 The provisions in the REG chapter apply district-wide. The Introduction states that beyond the provisions listed in Table 1, *“no other provisions in this plan apply to renewable electricity generation activities, except where specified within the provisions of this chapter”*. Table 1 is as set out below:

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Plan Provisions that Apply to Activities Managed in this Chapter</b>
Strategic Directions	All provisions in the ATC, MW, NE and UFD chapters
Contaminated Land	All provisions in the Contaminated Land Chapter
Natural Hazards	All provisions in the Natural Hazards Chapter
Hazardous Substances	HAZS-O1, HAZS-O2, HAZS-P1, HAZS-P2, HAZS-R1, HAZS-R2
Historic Heritage	All provisions in the Historic Heritage Chapter
Notable Trees	All provisions in the Notable Trees Chapter
Ecosystems and Indigenous Biodiversity	Section 19 – Ecosystems and Indigenous Biodiversity - Rules 2.1.1 and 2.2.1 (relating to the Waitaki Power Scheme and Opuha Scheme) and the Objective and Policies 1, 5, 7 and 8 but only insofar as they apply to the activities managed by Rules 2.1.1 and 2.2.1
Activities on the Surface of Water	All provisions in the Activities on the Surface of Water Chapter
Lighting	All provisions in the Light Chapter
Noise	All provisions in the Noise Chapter
Signs	All provisions in the Signs Chapter

114 These provisions included in Table 1 are assessed in subsequent sections.

115 Rules REG-R1 to REG-R7 set out the District Plan provisions relating to REG. The proposed activity is not otherwise covered by rules REG-R1 to REG-R6, so falls under REG-R7 *‘Any renewable electricity generation activities not otherwise listed including associated clearance of indigenous vegetation and earthworks for roads and access tracks’*.

116 As the application site is within an identified ONL and SASM, and based on the Technical Advice received (including that from DOC) also within an area of significant indigenous vegetation, the activity status is **Discretionary** (DIS).

117 The proposal is supported by REG-O1 'General Output' and REG-P1 'Benefits', which state:

**REG-O1**

*The output from renewable electricity generation activities in the District for national, regional and local use is increased to support achievement of the New Zealand Government's national target for renewable electricity generation.*

**REG-P1**

*Recognise and provide for the national, regional, and local benefits of renewable electricity generation activities and assets, including avoiding, reducing, or displacing greenhouse gas emissions.*

118 REG-O2 'Adverse Effects' seeks to ensure that *"the adverse effects of renewable electricity generation activities are appropriately managed"*. This outcome sets a higher bar in terms of effects management, but is otherwise not dissimilar to the proportionality assessment set out in the FTAA.

119 Based on the assessment set out above, it is my view that there are adverse effects on ecosystems and indigenous biodiversity that require additional assessment and potentially offset and compensation, in order that they are *"appropriately managed"*.

120 REG-P2 relates specifically to 'Te Manahuna / Mackenzie Basin ONL – Renewable Energy'. However, the text of the policy itself makes it clear that it only applies to *"development of renewable energy generation and transmission infrastructure and operations within the footprint of current operations or on land owned by infrastructure operators..."*. On that basis the applicable policy to this proposal is REG-P6, which applies to *'Other Renewable Electricity Generation Activities – Within areas of significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna, ONLs, ONFs, riparian areas and SASM or on highly productive land'*<sup>16</sup>. The application site is located both within an ONL and SASM; and otherwise contains significant indigenous vegetation.

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<sup>16</sup> REG-P3, REG-P3A, REG-P4 and REG-P5 are not applicable to the Project: REG-P3 'Lakeside Protection Areas' relates specifically to the Waitaki Power Scheme, REG-P3A relates only to the Opuha and Waitaki Schemes, REG-P4 addresses investigation activities and small-scale renewable electricity generation activities; and REG-P5 relates to 'Other' REG activities not otherwise covered by REG-P6.

121 REG-P6 is as follows:

*Provide for renewable electricity generation activities (not otherwise specified in REG-P3 and REG-P4) within areas of significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna, Outstanding Natural Landscapes, Outstanding Natural Features, Sites and Areas of Significance to Māori, riparian areas, or within area of Highly Productive Land, where:*

- 1. there is a functional need or operational need for the activity to be in that location;*
- 2. adverse effects on the values of the area are avoided as far as practicable, including through site, route or method selection, design measures and other management methods;*
- 3. adverse effects on the values of the area that cannot be avoided are remedied or mitigated, where practicable;*
- 4. other adverse effects (that do not affect the values of the area) are avoided, remedied or mitigated as far as practicable;*
- 5. regard is had to any proposed offsetting measures or environmental compensation (including considering Policy 4 in Section 19 and Appendix Z), where there are significant residual adverse effects that cannot be avoided, remedied or mitigated; and*
- 6. particular regard is had to the practical constraints associated with renewable electricity generation activities, including the:*
  - a. location and efficient use of existing electricity generation, transmission and distribution infrastructure; and*
  - b. the need to locate the renewable electricity generation activity where the renewable energy resource is located.*
- 7. following application of 1-6 above, consideration is given to whether the benefits of the activity outweigh any significant residual adverse effects on the values of the area.*

*The direction in REG-P6 does not apply in relation to managing adverse effects on the outstanding natural landscape and features of Te Manahuna/the Mackenzie Basin where REG-P2 applies.*

122 In terms of functional and operational need and the practical constraints associated with REG activities, I agree with the Applicant that a solar farm needs to be located where the solar resource is located, as well as having the ability to connect to the National Grid. The AEE notes that the project site is located within an area of high solar irradiance (Tier 1 solar resource), and the existing BEN-ISL-A 220 kV National Grid transmission line that traverses the application site provides that ability to connect to the National Grid.

123 In terms of the application of the effects management hierarchy, there remains some concern as to whether the application site and the specific solar farm layout avoid adverse effects on landscape and ecological values as far as practicable. Whilst the landscape/visual amenity concern can be

readily addressed by additional planting as suggested by Mr Espie, the ecological impacts of the proposal are not as straight forward, and I disagree with the Applicant's assessment that they are not significant and do not engage the consideration of offsetting or compensation under REG-P6(5).

### **Strategic Direction**

124 The Strategic Direction included in the District Plan contains a series of objectives under the following chapter headings:

- a. A Thriving Community (ATC)
- b. Mana Whenua (MW)
- c. Natural Environment (NE)
- d. Urban Form and Development (UFD)

125 There are no rules in these chapters. As assessment of those relevant to the consideration of this proposal (i.e., excluding those relating to UFD) is set out below.

#### **(a) A Thriving Community (ATC)**

126 The proposed solar farm is largely supported by the provisions in the ATC chapter, including ATC-O1, which seeks that *"The Mackenzie District is a desirable place to live, work, play and visit..."*. In particular ATC-O1 refers to there being a range of business activities to meet community needs; providing for appropriate economic development opportunities; and maintaining and enhancing anticipated amenity values and character of different areas.

127 ATC-O3 recognises and provides for the importance of infrastructure, particularly nationally and regionally significant infrastructure, to the District and beyond.

128 ATC-O4 is specific to renewable electricity and states:

*The local, regional and national benefits of the District's renewable electricity generation and electricity transmission activities and assets are recognised and their development, operation, maintenance and upgrade are provided for and reverse sensitivity effects on those activities and assets are avoided.*

#### **(b) Mana Whenua (MW)**

129 The strategic objectives in relation to MW include MW-O1 *"The role of mana whenua is recognised and their historic and contemporary*

*relationship with the District's land, water bodies, indigenous species and other sites and areas of significance are recognised and provided for".*

- 130 Mana Whenua involvement in resource management decision making is recognised in MW-O2, which enables active involvement in decision making that affects mana whenua values and interests, as well as exercise their kaitiakitaka responsibilities.
- 131 I understand that assessment of these provisions will be set out in the comments provided on behalf of Runanga.

**(c) Natural Environment (NE)**

- 132 The Introduction to the NE chapter recognises that the Mackenzie District contains many natural resources of importance. These include (but are not limited to): resources valued by mana whenua for mahika kai; the Aoraki Mackenzie International Dark Sky Reserve; outstanding natural features and landscapes; indigenous biodiversity; renewable energy resources and the District's wetlands, lakes and rivers and their margins.
- 133 There is a single strategic objective set out in the NE Chapter, as follows:

*The values of the natural environment, including those that make the District unique, contribute to its character, identity and well-being, or have significant or outstanding intrinsic values, are recognised and provided for, and where appropriate protected and enhanced. This includes, but is not limited to, values associated with the following important natural resources:*

1. *mahika kai resources;*
2. *night sky darkness;*
3. *outstanding natural features and landscapes;*
4. *significant indigenous biodiversity; and*
5. *water bodies and their margins.*

- 134 How these important values are managed, including how they are recognised and provided for, and which require protection and enhancement, is guided through the District Plan. In relation to the proposed REG activity, that is primarily set out in the provisions of the REG chapter introduced through PC26 (as set out above). Those provisions have been prepared to give effect to the higher order policy direction set out in the [previous] NPS-REG and recognise and provide for the matters of national importance set out in section 6 of the RMA.

**Contaminated Land (CL)**

- 135 The District Plan does not include any rules relating to contaminated land, as these are included in the Resource Management (National

Environmental Standard for Assessing and Managing Contaminants in Soil to Protect Human Health) Regulations 2011 (NES-CS).

- 136 The Applicant has more recently provided a Preliminary Site Investigation (PSI) prepared by Williamson Water & Land Advisory Limited. The PSI concludes the site is undeveloped rural land that has remained largely unchanged from its natural state, except for informal vehicle tracks, a 220kV transmission line traversing the site constructed in the 1960s and fencing along much of the site's perimeter.
- 137 No HAIL activities were identified as part of the PSI within the proposed development area. Furthermore, HAIL activities identified adjacent to the proposed solar farm site were assessed as not posing a risk to the solar farm establishment and operation. On that basis the NES-CS does not apply to the proposed activity and the provisions contained in the CL chapter are not applicable.

***Natural Hazards (NH)***

- 138 Table 1 in the REG chapter sets out that all provisions within the NH chapter apply. For the purpose of this chapter, I note that the proposed solar farm would fall under the definition of 'critical infrastructure', which includes "*National, regional and local electricity generation activities*".
- 139 NH-R4 sets out that 'New Critical Infrastructure' is a permitted activity within the Flood Hazard Assessment Overlay, where:
1. *It is located outside a High Flood Hazard Area as stated in a Flood Hazard Assessment issued in accordance with NH-S1; and*
  2. *The Flood Hazard Assessment is provided to Council.*
- 140 Flood Risk Assessments for the proposed solar array and substation were prepared by Beca and submitted with the substantive application as Appendix 5.
- 141 Based on those assessments the proposal complies with NH-R4 and is similarly considered to accord with the associated NH policy framework. I note that the substantive application AEE has assessed these policies and I agree with the conclusion reached therein that the proposal is "*in line with the direction of the Natural Hazards provisions of the operative and proposed district plans*" (AEE, Section 9.9.3, page 141).

### ***Hazardous Substances (HAZS)***

- 142 Under HAZS-R1, the 'Use and/or Storage of Hazardous Substances, Excluding a Major Hazard Facility', is permitted where located outside of a High Flood Hazard Area. It is assumed for the purpose of this assessment that the proposed solar farm and associated infrastructure (i.e., substation and associated transformers) do not fall within the definition of a 'Major Hazard Facility'. If that is not the case, the proposal would then be assessed as a discretionary activity within the GRUZ in accordance with HAZS-R2.
- 143 Notwithstanding, in accordance with HAZS-O1, HAZS-P1 (and HAZS-P2 if applicable), the application AEE states that Lodestone Energy will ensure hazardous substances on the site are stored appropriately to avoid any potential adverse effects on the environment and have appropriate systems and management plans in place in the event of accidents involving hazardous substances. As recognised in the HAZS chapter introduction any such risks are primarily managed by the HSNO Act, HSW Act, Health and Safety at Work (Major Hazard Facilities) Regulations 2016, and the Health and Safety at Work (Hazardous Substances) Regulations 2017. Condition 36 requires all hazardous substances must be identified, handled and stored in accordance with the requirements of the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Act (1996).
- 144 On that basis the proposal accords with the District Plan framework applying to HAZS.

### ***Historic Heritage and Notable Trees (HH and TREE)***

- 145 These provisions are not applicable to the assessment of this proposal.

### ***Ecosystem and Indigenous Biodiversity (ECO)***

- 146 Table 1 of the REG chapter sets out that it is only Rules 2.1.1 and 2.2.1 (relating to the Waitaki Power Scheme and Opuha Scheme) and Objective and Policies 1, 5, 7 and 8 apply, but only insofar as they apply to the activities managed by Rules 2.1.1 and 2.2.1, that are relevant. On that basis the provisions contained in the Ecosystem and Indigenous Biodiversity chapter, as introduced through PC18, are not relevant to the assessment of this proposal.

### ***Activities on the Surface of Water (ASW)***

- 147 These provisions are not applicable to the assessment of this proposal.

### **Lighting and Noise (LIGHT and NOISE)**

- 148 As noted above in the effects assessment above, the Applicant's suite of Proposed Conditions relating to lighting secures the matters included in the rules and associated standards (and any Tables referred to therein). On that basis the proposal is considered to meet all associated policy requirements; namely preservation of the values associated with the Aoraki Mackenzie International Dark Sky Reserve (LIGHT-P2).
- 149 It is noted that the noise conditions volunteered are slightly different to those included in the NOISE-TABLE 1 – Noise Limits. Proposed Condition 33 provides noise limits (expressed as  $dB_{A_{L10}}$ ) for more complex timeframes described primarily as day-time (0700-2100 hours), evening (2100-2400 hours) and weekends and public holidays (with Saturdays allowing higher noise standards between 0900-1700; and otherwise applying 1700-0900 hours).
- 150 In contrast, the operative District Plan standards set out in NOISE-TABLE 1 – Noise Limits are expressed in  $dB LA_{eq(15 \text{ min})}$  over timeframes simply described as daytime (7.00am to 10.00pm) or nighttime (10.00pm to 7.00am). The acoustic assessment accompanying the substantive application makes specific reference to the limits set out in NOISE-TABLE 1, and concludes that *“that the solar farm will readily comply with both the daytime and night-time limits in NOISE-Table 1 of Appendix 1 of the decisions report. The solar farm may be audible at times outside a dwelling. Internal noise levels are likely to be very low and bordering on inaudible, particularly where windows are closed”* (AEE, Appendix 11: Marshall Day Acoustics, Haldon Solar Farm Noise Advice, page 4).
- 151 On that basis I recommend that the proposed noise Condition 33 be updated to reflect the District Plan time format and expressed as the equivalent continuous (15 minute averaged) A-weighted sound level.

### **Signs (SIGN)**

- 152 These provisions are not applicable to the assessment of this proposal.

### **Infrastructure (INF)**

- 153 As discussed above, it is not immediate clear or obvious whether the proposed substation and associated grid connection point should be considered as part of the REG solar farm or a part of the electricity network, i.e., fall under the scope of the infrastructure (INF) chapter.

- 154 The District Plan definition of infrastructure has the same meaning as in section 2 of the RMA, and includes:
- d. *facilities for the generation of electricity, lines used or intended to be used to convey electricity, and support structures for lines used or intended to be used to convey electricity, excluding facilities, lines, and support structures if a person—*
    - a. *uses them in connection with the generation of electricity for the person's use; and*
    - b. *does not use them to generate any electricity for supply to any other person*
- 155 It is noted that the plan assessment set out in the substantive application AEE has assessed the establishment of the proposed substation as a **discretionary** activity under INF-R11 'Any Infrastructure not Otherwise Listed'.
- 156 As noted above the 220kV Benmore to Islington ("BEN-ISL-A") National Grid transmission line traverses the site. My understanding is that this transmission line forms part of the National Grid Yard, being defined as:
- a. *the area located 12m either side of the centreline of any overhead 110kV, 220kV, or 350kV National Grid transmission line on pi poles or towers (including steel monopoles where these replace steel lattice towers); and*
  - b. *the area located 12m in any direction from the outer visible edge of a National Grid support structure.*
- 157 Therefore, to connect to BEN-ISL-A, it is my understanding that INF-R18 '*Network Utility Operation, Infrastructure and Electricity Generation that Connects to the National Grid within the National Grid Yard*' is also relevant. This activity is permitted where INF-S4 can be met. INF-S4 requires:
- 1. *Any buildings or structures in the National Grid yard must comply with the New Zealand Electrical Code of Practice for Safe Electrical Distances (NZECP34:2001).*
  - 2. *Any building, structure or activity within the National Grid yard must not permanently physically impede vehicular access to a National Grid support structure.*
- 158 Compliance then becomes something of a chicken and egg situation, depending on which works are the responsibility of the Applicant versus those works undertaken by Transpower NZ Ltd (Transpower). The AEE notes that some additional ancillary works on the existing transmission line may be required to facilitate the cut-in connection, subject to its detailed design. Such works may include foundation strengthening of adjacent towers or upgrading of overhead conductors or earth-wires. These works will be completed by Transpower and may require resource consent under either NES-ETA (now NPS-EN) and/or the District Plan. The application states that any necessary resource consents for these works will be sought by Transpower following detailed design.

- 159 The AEE stated that the NES-ETA applies to existing National Grid transmission lines and does not apply to the construction of new transmission lines or to substations. The proposed substation is therefore subject instead to the rules of the district and regional plans.
- 160 Overall, a cautious approach would consider the substation to be a discretionary activity under the INF provisions of the District Plan.
- 161 The Introduction to the INF chapter, like the REG chapter, includes Table 1 setting out which other District Plan provisions apply. That Table is identical to that of the REG chapter set out above, with the exception that SASM-R5 and SASM-R6 also apply to INF activity.
- 162 SASM-R5 relates to 'Irrigation within a Māori Rock Art Protection Area' so does not apply to the proposed activity. SASM-R6 applies to the *'Establishment of New or Expansion of Existing: Landfills; Waste Disposal Facilities; Wastewater Treatment Plants; Crematoria; New Cemeteries; Hazardous Facilities; Quarrying or Mining within a SASM'*.
- 163 Therefore, the applicability of this provision depends on whether the proposed substation is a 'Hazardous Facility'. It is noted that the term 'Hazardous Facility' is not defined within the District Plan. However, a 'Major Hazard Facility' is defined, being:
- Has the same meaning as the Health and Safety at Work (Major Hazard Facilities) Regulations 2016. Means a facility that WorkSafe has designated as a lower tier major hazard facility or an upper tier major hazard facility under regulation 19 or 20.*
- 164 I note that while the Health and Safety at Work (Major Hazard Facilities) Regulations 2016 does not provide any definition of a 'Hazardous Facility', it does define a 'facility', meaning *"the whole area under the control of the same person where specified hazardous substances are present in 1 or more places, and, for the purposes of this definition, 2 or more areas under the control of the same person and separated only by a road, railway, inland waterway, pipeline, or other structure are treated as 1 whole area"*. This definition does not immediately assist. It is noted that should the substation be considered a 'Hazardous Facility' falling within the scope SASM-R6, it would become non-complying activity as the application site is within SASM9 (listed in SASM-SCHED1).
- 165 That outcome would mean the SASM policy framework would apply to the assessment of the application, including:
- a. Rakatirataka being recognised by supporting mana whenua to exercise kaitiakitaka over SASM (SASM-O1).

- b. Inappropriate subdivision, use and development within SASM is avoided (SASM-O3).
- c. Managing the adverse effects of activities within SASM so that the values associated with that SASM identified in SASM-SCHED1, are not compromised (SASM-P6).
- d. Avoiding new hazardous facilities within SASM unless they will not adversely affect the values in SASM (SASM-P6).

166 It is understood that comments regarding these matters are included in the comments being provide to the Panel from Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu as well as the local Runanga. On that basis no additional comment on such matters is provided on behalf of the MDC at this time.

### ***Mackenzie District Plan Summary***

167 The more recent resolution of the appeals relating to Stage 3 of the District Plan Review, and the narrow scope of the appeals lodged in relation to the provisions included in Stage 4, mean that the assessment of the District Plan is now more straightforward than is described in the AEE supporting the substantive application. There is now no need to refer to the previous District Plan provisions in place prior to the recent plan changes. More specifically, the resolution of the appeals on Table 1 of the REG chapter makes it clear what other District Plan provisions apply to REG activity.

168 There remain some outstanding matters of District Plan interpretation, including whether the substation forms part of the REG activity, or should more appropriately be assessed separately under the INF chapter; and what activity falls under the [undefined] term of 'Hazards Facility' included in SASM-R6. Noting the outcome of the later could potentially change the activity status of the proposal from discretionary to non-complying.

169 Those matters aside, the REG provisions introduced through PC26 provide a more standalone set of provisions and related policy that better reflect national direction and are therefore more enabling of renewable electricity development than those of the previous plan.

170 I agree with observation of the Applicant that the new REG chapter facilitates for an increase in renewable electricity generation to support achievement of national targets, but that still requires that any adverse effects of REG activities are managed in a way that recognises the full effects management hierarchy, including offsetting or environmental compensation. Following application of the above matters (as set out in REG-P6), consideration must be given to whether the benefits of the activity outweigh any significant residual adverse effects on the values of

the area. In this way the REG policy framework is similar to the proportionality assessment set out in the FTAA.

- 171 At this time the adverse ecological effects of the proposal described in the AEE appear to be understated when compared to the ECan technical advice received and that attached to the comments from DOC. It is on that basis that the matter of offsetting and/or compensation have been raised in the comments above. In the absence of any details around what might be proposed by the Applicant to address the ecological effects (namely on indigenous vegetation and invertebrates) it is difficult to make any definitive conclusion as to how the Haldon Solar proposal aligns (or otherwise) with the REG provisions set out in the Mackenzie District Plan.

### **Canterbury Regional Policy Statement Assessment**

- 172 The nature of solar farm proposal is that various chapters of the Canterbury Regional Policy Statement (CRPS) are relevant to the MDC assessment of the proposal. The key Chapters of the CRPS relevant to this solar project are Chapter 5 'Land Use and Infrastructure', Chapter 9 'Ecosystems and Indigenous Biodiversity', Chapter 12 'Landscape', Chapter 15 'Soils', and Chapter 16 'Energy'.
- 173 Each of these are assessed in the substantive application and the only aspects I wish to provide any additional comment on relate to Chapters 5, 9 and 16.
- 174 Chapter 5 – Land Use and Infrastructure, Objective 5.2.2 recognises the benefits of regionally significant infrastructure, but only where it promotes sustainable management in accordance with the RMA. The second part of the Objective seeks to ensure that *“adverse effects resulting from the development or operation of regionally significant infrastructure are avoided, remedied or mitigated as fully as practicable”* (Objective 5.2.2.2(b)). The focus on the avoidance, remedy or mitigation of adverse effects is continued in Policy 5.3.2.1 and Policy 5.3.9.3(b). Policy 5.3.9.3(c) specifically refers to sensitive environments subject of section 6 of the RMA.
- 175 In terms of Chapter 9 – Ecosystems and Indigenous Biodiversity, Objective 9.2.1 is *“Halting the decline of Canterbury’s ecosystems and indigenous biodiversity”*. Objective 9.2.3 refers to the identification of significant indigenous vegetation and habitats so that their values and functions are protected.
- 176 Policy 9.3.1 states that significance, with respect to ecosystems and indigenous biodiversity, will be determined by assessing areas and habitats

for representativeness, rarity or distinctive features, diversity and pattern, and ecological context. An area of habitat is considered to be significant if it meets one or more of the criteria in listed in Appendix 3 of the CRPS.

177 Policy 9.3.1.3 states that “*Areas identified as significant will be protected to ensure no net loss of indigenous biodiversity or indigenous biodiversity values as a result of land use activities*”. This provision supports the comment that additional measures are required to be put forward by the Applicant to achieve that outcome.

178 As a matter of completeness, I note that Chapter 16 - Energy is enabling of the proposed activity. Objective 16.2.2 seeks a reliable and resilient generation and supply of energy for the region, with particular emphasis on renewal energy, including recognition of the locational constraints in the development of renewable electricity generation activities; and...

*avoids any adverse effects on significant natural and physical resources and cultural values or where this is not practicable, remedies or mitigates;*

179 Policy 16.3.3 recognises the benefits of renewable energy generation facilities. The substantive application includes an assessment of the regional and national benefits of the proposed Haldon Solar project to meeting New Zealand’s renewable energy requirements. Notwithstanding, the other provisions referred to above support the comment that additional measures are required to better protect the indigenous biodiversity ecological values of the application site beyond what is currently set out in the Applicant’s proposed conditions.

### **National Policy Statement Assessment**

180 An assessment of National Policy Statements is specifically referred to in Clause 5 of the FTAA and therefore forms part of the decision-making process as referred in section 81(3)(a).

181 Many of the National Policy Statements, including those relevant to the assessment of this application, have recently been amended. It is noted by virtue of the timing of those amendments, the assessment set out in the substantive application refers to the previous versions.

### ***National Policy Statement for Renewable Electricity Generation 2011 (Amended 2025)***

182 The recent amendments came into force on 15 January 2026. In summary the amendments strengthen the policy direction in order to accelerate renewable energy projects.

183 The objective of the NPS-REG now includes to:

- (a) *ensure the national, regional and local benefits of REG are provided for;*
- (b) *enable REG capacity and output to significantly increase;*
- (c) *enable REG to support the social, economic and cultural wellbeing of people and communities, and for their health and safety;*
- (d) *enable REG to provide greater security of electricity supply and resilience to supply disruptions to all people and communities;*
- (e) *enable REG to support achieving New Zealand's emission reduction target and implementation of the emissions reduction plan under the Climate Change Response Act 2002; and*
- (f) *ensure REG is developed and operated in a safe, efficient and effective manner while managing the adverse effects from or on REG activities.*

184 Key changes include more directive, stronger policy language. The policy shifts from *"shall have particular regard to"*, to stronger, more directive language, requiring decision-makers to *"recognise and provide for the national significance and the national, regional and local benefits of REG activities"* (Policy A).

185 New policy recognises the *"operational need"* or *"functional need"* for REG assets and activities to be in certain locations and environments (Policy C)<sup>17</sup>.

186 The more significant changes made to the NPS-REG is the introduction of a new Policy F, which is *'Enabling and managing the effects of REF assets and activities on the environment'*:

- 1) *Decision-makers must enable REG assets and activities in all locations and environments.*
- 2) *Where REG assets and activities are proposed to locate in or are likely to have adverse effects on environments and values provided for in section 6 of the Act, the provisions of this policy must be read alongside other relevant national direction, regional policy statements and regional and district plans.*
- 3) *Where (2) does not apply, the adverse effects of REG assets and activities must be, where practicable, avoided, remedied or mitigated.*
- 4) *Decision-makers must have particular regard to the use of adaptive management measures.*

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<sup>17</sup> Operational need and Functional need having the same definitions as set out in the NZ Planning Standards 2019.

- 5) *When considering any residual adverse effects of REG assets and activities that cannot be avoided, remedied or mitigated, decision-makers shall have regard to offsetting measures or environmental compensation, including measures or compensation that benefit the local environment and community affected.*

- 187 Based on the Technical Advice received, the nature of the application site is such that section 6(c) *“the protection of areas of significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna:”* is relevant to the consideration of this application.
- 188 As outlined in the effects assessment above, many of the potential adverse effects of the project can be addressed through the use of adaptive management. In particular I refer to effects on birds and the ability to include an Avian Management Plan and Avian Collision Management Plan incorporating various adaptive management techniques as included in the recent Glorit Solar Project (NBEA Fast Track Project). I understand that similar conditions were also agreed on a recent proposal for a solar project at Naseby (in Central Otago).
- 189 The impacts on indigenous vegetation and invertebrates may be more challenging in terms of adaptive management. In that circumstance Policy F(5) above would guide decision-makers toward offsetting measures or environmental compensation as is being suggested.

***National Policy Statement for Electricity Networks 2008 (Amended 2025)***

- 190 This document replaces the previous National Policy Statement on Electricity Transmission 2008. The amendments expand the previous transmission-focused policy to include electricity distribution. It also mandates that decision-makers *“recognise and provide”* for the national significance of the EN (Policy 1); and *“recognise the benefits”* of EN to include by *“supporting new, expanded or increased renewable electricity generation”* (Policy 2(1)(e)(i)).
- 191 In this instance a minor upgrade of the existing transmission line is required to establish the grid connection. This is limited to the addition of a new tower and an overhead connection from the proposed substation. The AEE states that Lodestone Energy has been in consultation with Transpower to confirm that the Haldon site is a technically appropriate location for grid injection; and to ensure that the connection from the Haldon Solar farm can be accommodated in a manner that does not negatively impact Transpower’s wider assets in accordance with the new NPS-EN.

***National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020 (Amended 2025)***

192 For the purpose of these comments matters relating to the assessment of the NPS-FM are more appropriately left to others as freshwater management is beyond the jurisdiction of the MDC.

***National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity 2023 (Amended 2025)***

193 The recent amendments to the NPS-IB retain Clause 1.3(3), which sets out the scope of its application. On that basis I agree with the Applicant's assessment that the NPS-IB does not apply to the Haldon Solar Project.

***National Policy Statement for Highly Productive Land 2022 (Amended 2025)***

194 The NPS-HPL provides protection of highly productive land from inappropriate subdivision, use and development to ensure its availability for primary production.

195 I agree with the Applicant's assessment that the NPS-HPL does not apply to the Haldon Solar Project. The recent amendments to the NPS-HPL do not change that conclusion.

**Summary of Key Findings**

196 Effects in terms of Landscape and Visual Amenity, Traffic, Natural Hazards, Hazardous Substances, Noise and Lighting can all be appropriately managed including by way of conditions, some of which are recommended to be subject to minor amendment and/or addition.

197 There are areas within Haldon Station immediately adjacent to its southwestern boundaries (and south/southwest of the project area) where new vegetation could be established to "future-proof and bolster" the effect of this existing lakeside vegetation to address adverse visual amenity impacts.

198 Moving forward, the matter of cumulative effects will be an important consideration for solar proposals within Te Manahuna/the Mackenzie Basin ONL, including the way the community perceive and value the Te Manahuna/Mackenzie Basin ONL landscape at a broader scale.

199 Any potential adverse effects on lizards and their habitat are able to be suitably mitigated (should the final Lizard Report identify such effects) using traditional habitat restoration and relocation methods.

- 200 Effects on birds would benefit from the additional requirement to prepare an Avian Management Plan and an Avian Collision Management Plan. These would include details around the use of adaptive management and any offset and/or compensation package if monitoring finds that the project is having an adverse effect on the mortality of Threatened and At-Risk bird species in the area.
- 201 Furthermore, it is likely that, following avoidance, minimisation, and remediation, an offsetting or compensation approach will be required to fully offset adverse effects on indigenous vegetation and invertebrates.
- 202 The more recent resolution of the appeals relating to Stage 3 of the District Plan Review, and the narrow scope of the appeals lodged in relation to the provisions included in Stage 4, mean that the assessment of the District Plan is now more straightforward than is described in the AEE supporting the substantive application. The District Plan provisions introduced through recent plan changes as part of the District Plan Review are now either operative, or can be treated as such.
- 203 There remain some outstanding matters of District Plan interpretation, including whether the substation forms part of the REG activity, or should more appropriately be assessed separately under the INF chapter; and what activity falls under the [undefined] term of 'Hazards Facility' included in SASM-R6. Noting the outcome of the later potentially changes the activity status of the proposal from discretionary to non-complying.
- 204 Overall, the planning assessment as described above has not identified any fundamental issues that cannot be resolved through amendments/additions to the Proposed Conditions and additional work by the Applicant to address the loss of significant indigenous biodiversity values. To date details of any such offset and/or compensation package have not been provided; and as such the Applicant's Proposed Conditions do not currently provide a framework by which to achieve appropriate indigenous biodiversity outcomes in proportion to the national benefit from increased renewable electricity generation.

Nick Boyes

**Consultant Planner**

**On behalf of the Mackenzie District Council**

2 February 2026