Before a panel appointed under the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 **FTAA-2504-1046**

UNDER	the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 (**Act**)
IN THE MATTER	an application for approvals for the Waihi North Project (**WNP**) – a listed project described in Schedule 2 of the Act
BY	**OCEANA GOLD (NEW ZEALAND) LIMITED Applicant**

STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE BY CHRISTOPHER JAMES WEDDING ON BEHALF OF OCEANA GOLD (NEW ZEALAND) LIMITED

Terrestrial Ecology (Waihi Area)

Dated 1 September 2025

Counsel acting:
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Introduction

1. My full name is Christopher James Wedding.

2. I am currently employed as Ecology Manager at Bioresearches, a specialist Ecology brand of Babbage Consultants Limited and have held that position since 2018. My qualifications and experience, and my role in the Waihi North Project (**WNP**), are set out in my statement of evidence dated 2 February 2025 included in Part G of the substantive application document for the WNP.

3. I have been asked by OceanaGold (New Zealand) Limited to provide a response to specific matters within my area of expertise contained in written comments on the WNP application by Forest & Bird in relation to:

   a. compensation versus avoidance with regard to 'high-value' lizard species;

   b. tailings storage;

   c. Policy 3 of the National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity (**NPS-IB**);

   d. the protection of Significant Natural Areas (**SNA**); and

   e. the principles of biodiversity offsetting.

4. I have prepared this statement within the limited time available to me. Consequently, it is necessarily at a high level. I am able to provide a more fulsome response to the issues covered in this statement if the Panel requires further assistance from me.

Code of conduct

5. I confirm that I have read the code of conduct for expert witnesses contained in section 9 of the Environment Court Practice Note 2023 and have complied with it in preparing this evidence. I confirm that the issues

addressed in this evidence are within my area of expertise, and I have not omitted material facts known to me that might alter or detract from my evidence.

Habitat loss - lizards

6. At paragraph 111 of its comment, Forest & Bird consider that compensation is inappropriate and inadequate when it comes to these 'high-value' endangered lizard species, and that the applicant should instead be required to avoid significant residual adverse effects. This comment largely concerns the effect of the proposal on the copper skink (Oligosoma aeneum), where significant residual effects are anticipated from the loss of 6.5 ha of predominantly planted habitat at the Gladstone pit, after mitigation measures such as capture and relocation to protected, pest-controlled habitats. In response, a compensation package is proposed, comprising 11.2 ha of restoration planting contiguous with known, retained copper skink habitat, together with 4.45 ha of their existing habitat. I consider that that these actions will adequately compensate for the permanent loss of their habitat, and result in an overall net gain in suitable habitat for the species.

7. The conservation status of the copper skink is 'At Risk – Declining'. However, under the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, its status is 'Least Concern – Stable'. In my view, the copper skink is not an endangered species, and has not been assessed by any New Zealand lizard experts as such.

8. In my view, the compensation provided for the predominantly planted habitat of this species within the Project is appropriate, and I note that this is a view shared by other experts, including for the Hauraki District Council,[1] and the Department of Conservation.[2] I have applied a high level of confidence to the compensation model, because the species is well known to readily colonise rough grass habitats, including restoration plantings

1 Namely, Alliance Ecology and Blue Wattle Ecology.
2 Found in Appendix D - Wildlife Approval Report of the Department of Conservation's s 51 report dated 11 August 2025, at [89].

(such as those within which they occur that would be impacted) as well as weedy hedgerows and roadside margins (and see point 15.e, below).

Tailings storage

9. Forest & Bird discuss effects associated with the tailings storage at 146 and 147. Forest & Bird say the environmental effects of the tailings storage are significant. Forest & Bird go on to say at paragraphs 149 and 150 that the application is contrary to Part 2 of the RMA, including the purpose of sustainable management and the need to safeguard the life-supporting capacity of water and ecosystems.

10. These comments should be read against the presence of species already at the current mine site. The existing tailings storage have become important habitats for a range of aquatic vegetation and birdlife- including At Risk and Threatened species.

11. In that regard, I refer to Bioresearches' report B.36 (Bioresearches' Terrestrial Impact Assessment) dated 24 January 2025 (**report B.36**), at section 4.2.3,[3] which discusses naturalised aquatic vegetation and birdlife present on existing tailings facilities. In particular:

    a. breeding NZ dotterel (Threatened, nationally increasing) that inhabit the tailings edges;

    b. NZ pipit (At Risk, declining) that inhabit the tailings edges; and

    c. a diversity of indigenous birdlife that rely on the naturalised aquatic environment, including (but not limited to):

        i. a flock of 171 pāpango / scaup (*Aythya novaseelandiea*), Poaka / pied stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*); Australian coot (At Risk- naturally uncommon), Māpunga / black shag (*Phalacrocorax carbo,* At Risk- relict); and

3 Report B.36, at page 40.

ii. ten pairs of weweia / dabchicks (*Poliocephalus rufopectus,* Threatened- nationally increasing), which include chicks.

12. Aquatic reeds, sedges and raupō (*Typha orientalis*) fringe the shallow margins of Tailing Storage Facility 2 (**TSF2**) and are most extensive at the northern end. All of these are understood to have naturally colonised.

13. This function of tailings storages facilities is part of the broader context for these facilities.

NPS-IB Policy 3

14. Forest & Bird discuss state at paragraph 196 that as precautionary approach has not been adopted with reference to Policy 3 of the National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity (**NPS IB**). Forest & Bird say some relevant effects are left uncertain with no effective measures for mitigation of the effects.

15. In my view, a precautionary approach has been applied throughout the effects management analyses and recommendations. Examples include:

a. Overall assessment of the southern fragment of SNA 166[4] as 'moderate value' - noting that its value, as a whole, is assessed as being greater than its key habitat components, being predominantly low to negligible value native scrub and pine;

b. Provision of lizard management (trapping, capture-relocation) across the project area, including locations where survey has not detected them;

c. Provision of bat tree-felling protocols across the project area, including locations where survey has not detected them;

[4] Report B.36, Table 8, p64

d. Provision of kauri dieback soil sampling and associated hygiene protocols;

e. Precautionary 10-year finite end point applied to the compensation model (Table 9, Residual Effects Plan[5]), at which copper skinks are predicted to be occupying planted habitats (they are known to colonise rough grass habitats well in advance of this);

f. Provision of offset of planted vegetation that has no formal protection and could otherwise be removed as a permitted baseline.

The protection of SNAs

16. Forest & Bird say at paragraphs 197 - 203 that the application does not meet the exceptions of clause 3.10(2) of the NPS IB, whereby certain effects must be avoided, including a reduction in the population size or occupancy of a Threatened or At Risk (declining) species, that uses an significant natural area (**SNA**) for any part of their lifecycle.

17. First, I note that the impact of the proposal avoids the main key elements of the SNA, including a kauri stand and identified moko skink habitat (where it was identified from a single. The impact would represent a minor shift away from current conditions given that all of these key elements occur elsewhere in SNA 166. (see Table 14 in the Terrestrial Ecological Impact Assessment, Report B.36,[6] regarding the significance assessment of SNA 166).

18. An assessment of the management hierarchy as applied to SNA 166 is described in section 8.2 of Report B.36.[7] Further survey work has not recorded moko skink within the impact area at SNA 166, however moko skinks are identified as a unique species within the landscape and the project as been intentionally designed to avoid their habitats (i.e where they

5 H.02. *Waihi Area Ecology and Landscape Management Plan*, Part C Residual Effects Offset Plan.

6 Report B.36, *Terrestrial Ecological Impact Assessment*, at page 101.

7 Report B.36, at page 96,

occur between the northern and southern fragments of SNA 166. Further, the proposed offset is designed to enhance their populations. This is important because moko skinks a particularly unique feature in the Waihi landscape, in that populations of this species are almost entirely confined to islands off the north-east coast of the North Island. Therefore, populations on the mainland, within their natural range, are rare.

19. Consequently, I expect that the populations of At-Risk moko skink and At-Risk copper skink, will expand as a result of restoration actions that would be undertaken to offset the effects of the Waihi North project.

20. I further note that previous options for WNP proposed impacts beyond SNA 166, but were ultimately relocated to avoid moko skinks where they were identified beyond SNA 166.

The principles of biodiversity offsetting

21. Forest & Bird say at paragraph 205 that the principles of biodiversity offsetting are not adhered to. Specifically, that the effects of the proposal on indigenous biodiversity are uncertain or little understood, but the potential effects are significantly adverse or irreplaceable.

22. I firmly disagree with this statement. Table 4 demonstrates that the biodiversity values in question comprise relatively young, planted, exotic, or regenerating vegetation and ecosystems. These are entirely suitable for offsetting because, as early successional vegetation, they are structurally simple and consist of regenerating habitats that can be readily recreated and enhanced. The areas have been surveyed using standardized methodologies, including detailed vegetation plots, and repeatedly over the course of more than a decade.

23. The results show low species richness, and in some cases, planted compositions that are inappropriate for their environment (such as kauri and rimu within the Favona Wetland area). The findings of the extensive

investigations further confirm that these sites do not represent irreplaceable ecological values.

24. The biodiversity values are well understood and have been robustly assessed to inform both the effects assessment and the design of management and offsetting measures. They have been described, measured and quantified, and the proposed offset actions are well-established restoration techniques that provide a high degree of certainty regarding predicted outcomes. In this context, it is clear that the principles of biodiversity offsetting are adhered to and that the proposal will achieve appropriate, reliable, and positive ecological outcomes.

Dated: 1 September 2025

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Christopher James Wedding