Date	23 February 2026
To	Jon Bright, Project Director – Waitaha Hydro Scheme Westpower Ltd
From	James Bentley
Project advice provided for	*Waitaha Hydro Scheme*
Documents referred to	*Further Statement: Waitaha Hydro Prepared by Jeremy Head (19 February 2026).*
Signature	

1. This memorandum is in response to Minute #10 from the Waitaha Hydro Expert Panel and a further statement provided by Jeremy Head[1], consultant landscape architect to the Department of Conservation.

2. On 13 February 2026, an empanelment hearing took place. I did not attend that hearing, however, I understand that Mr Head did, as an observer.

3. Following the hearing, Mr Head has produced a further statement highlighting specific concerns around the landscape and natural character effects of the instream and bank maintenance works that will require the use of a 12-20 tonne excavator after large floods during the scheme's operation. Mr Head is also concerned about the issue discussed by Dr Tunnicliffe and Dr Clunie of whether a berm (bund) would be created in the river to guide the water to the intake channel.

4. This memorandum specifically addresses the landscape and natural character effects of the use and operation of the excavator and the effects this will have on those values that underpin the landscape and natural character of the area.

5. At paragraph 4, Mr. Head states in his 19 February 2026 statement that

> *'…the operational effects – that is, when instream flow path and/or gravel bank intervention is required via a mechanical digger, the effects will be potentially greater than what has been assessed by Mr Bentley'.*

[1] Dated 19 February 2026

6. Particularly, this is due to the general level of uncertainty around when gravel and boulders will need to be cleared from the intake area.

7. Within Attachment #7, to Memorandum #7, I noted that

> *'…residual natural character effects will be generally moderate-high and the digger will form part of those effects, when required. The moderate-high natural character effects will be in those locations and during the time where in-river modification is required, and is expected to decrease slightly, to moderate, when the digger is not in operation'.*

8. My assessment considers Westpower's engineering design evidence, hydrology, sediment transport and Mr Jacksons's evidence about the management of effects confirming that Westpower must minimise the need for channel maintenance in the river.

9. Mr. Head notes this in his 19 February 2026 statement:

> *'As I set out at page 4 of my earlier statement, in my opinion, a 12-20 tonne digger moving about in the stream, when observed by the public will have a 'High', if not 'Very high' (both of which equate to a "significant") effect on landscape and visual amenity values at the localised level due to the acute (albeit temporary) adverse effect on landscape values in the vicinity of the headworks area. This short term, but very pronounced 'spike' in adverse landscape and amenity effects would occur when walkers hear and/or see the activity from the swing bridge and nearby sections of the adjoining track'.*
>
> *And*
>
> *'Information from Westpower and its experts during and following the hearing would suggest that it is not a remote possibility that walkers will be in the area when the digger is operating. This aligns with Ms Sidley's opinion, as set out in her further statement on recreational issues'.*

10. Primarily, I understand the key matters raised by Mr. Head to be focussed on recreational aspects as they relate to landscape and natural character values.

Response

11. I am reassured by Westpower's engineers that the design of the project can be delivered in a manner that minimises the need for channel maintenance works.

12. The design recognises, and will fully consider, the highly dynamic and volatile environment in which the project is set, and factors in managing, as best as possible, the impact of natural events (including floods over 250 cumecs) on the operation of the Scheme. Conditions have been developed that will ensure that environmental effects can be managed appropriately, and which are able to be enforced. Additional amendments have been made by Mr. Jackson,[2] confirming Westpower will undertake a review if on average, there are more than 15 occurrences of excavator use over a 5-year period.

13. Operations by the excavator are estimated using synthetic flow data that Mr Doyle has high confidence in,[3] noting the highly variable conditions that are experienced in this part of the country. In stream/river works are intended to be minimised as Mr Griffiths' 21 January 2026 statement confirms. This explains why Westpower prefers the use of a 20-tonne excavator with a long arm as opposed to a smaller excavator.[4] Estimates of longer lasting floods over 250 cumecs, coupled with those events that move sediment mean that an average of 5 - 15 excavator movements annually of a few hours per use, are estimated. There may be instances where a greater or lesser level of use by the excavator is required in some years than others given it will be the result of natural processes. I understand that, typically, the excavator will be used straight after the flooding event, as soon as it is safe to do so (from a health and safety perspective). Access to the excavator will be provided via the access tunnel (within which the excavator will be stored).

14. Recreational evidence by Rob Greenaway states that because of flood risks associated with wet weather, people wishing to recreate within Kiwi Flat close to Morgan Gorge and or the Waitaha Gorge, will typically wait longer to venture into the area after a weather event, when more immediate health and safety concerns would be reduced (i.e. higher river levels, wet tracks, greater difficulty to access the area). Mr Staples in his statement states that he expects the excavator noise will be largely masked by river noise.

[2] Response to Minute #7, Memorandum 10, Attachment 11 and 11A.
[3] Memorandum-responding-to-request-for-information.pdf
[4] Attachment-9-Statement-Rodger-Griffiths_Redacted_redacted.pdf, at para 12.

15. I accept that there may be scenarios that result in the excavator being used more than 15 times a year, however, this does not change my assessment. I accept that there are *'pronounced spikes*' in landscape and natural character effects due to the presence of the excavator in use if visitors are present at that time. However, I maintain that adverse effects are within the '**moderate high**' range when the excavator is in use reducing to 'moderate' when it is not. I agree with Mr Head that the presence of the excavator:

> *'will appear incongruous in an otherwise highly natural and remote setting'.*

16. But, during operations, the headworks themselves (and the access road / power station if accessed from the lower valley) will reflect a modified environment at the local scale at that time.

17. The adverse effects are reflected in my effects assessment. From my understanding of other experts' technical assessments and responses, the likelihood that people will be present near Morgan Gorge every time the excavator is in use, is low. I accept that on occasions people maybe present, and that has been taken into account in my assessment of **moderate-high** effects.