Hon Louise Upston

Minister for the Community and Voluntary Sector
Minister for Disability Issues
Minister for Social Development and Employment
Minister for Tourism and Hospitality
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The Expert Panel – Fast-track Approvals Act application
Environmental Protection Authority
Waterloo Quay
Wellington

To the Expert Panel

As Minister for Tourism and Hospitality, I appreciate the invitation to comment on the application by AW Holdings 2021 Limited for the Auckland Surf Park Community Stage 2 project under the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024.

I recognise that the surf park and core tourism and recreation activities were consented as part of Stage 1. The current Stage 2 application is primarily for associated development, including residential neighbourhoods, residential and commercial activities, a village centre, a work-live precinct, and expanded data-centre infrastructure. It also seeks variations to Stage 1, including an increase in accommodation adjacent to the surf lagoon. My comments therefore relate to how the current application may support the tourism, hospitality and events benefits of the overall development.

I consider the development could deliver the following positive tourism and hospitality benefits:

- *Supporting higher-value tourism growth:* The Government has set a goal of doubling the 2023 export value of tourism by 2034. As international visitor numbers recover towards pre-COVID-19 levels, achieving this goal will increasingly depend on growing the value generated from each visit. The combination of recreation, accommodation, hospitality and wellness facilities could encourage visitors to stay longer and spend across a wider range of services.

- *A distinctive North Island attraction:* While the surf park itself was consented as part of Stage 1, the associated accommodation, hospitality and commercial facilities proposed through this application could help strengthen the overall visitor offering and support a new, purpose-built, year-round experience for Auckland. Growing the North Island's visitor offering will be important to supporting more balanced tourism growth across New Zealand, particularly as parts of the South Island face constrained capacity.

- *Wellness tourism offering:* The value of the global wellness tourism market is forecast to exceed $1.7 trillion NZD in 2026[1]. New Zealand is well positioned to capture a segment of this market through our landscapes, nature-based experiences and sense of place. The project's surf, active recreation and wellness offering could complement these wider destination strengths and attract a diverse range of domestic and international visitors.

[1] Tourism Industry Aotearoa. (2026). *Tourism 2026: Making the Momentum of 2025 count.*

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- *Major events profile and leverage opportunities:* Major events such as the 2026 World Surf League Championship Tour, and its upcoming return in 2027, showcase New Zealand as an international surfing destination. The proposed development could help build on this profile by providing an accessible, year-round experience near New Zealand's main international gateway, while supporting related activity such as training, athlete development, competitions and visitor experiences.

- *Hospitality offerings:* The Village Centre includes a range of hospitality offerings, including visitor accommodation, food and beverage venues, market space, retail activity and event facilities. These elements would create a broader destination experience, encouraging longer visitor stays, increasing visitor expenditure, and expanding Auckland's range of tourism and hospitality offerings.

These potential benefits align with the Government's Tourism Policy Statement, particularly its objectives of delivering high-quality visitor experiences, supporting tourism that works for regions and communities and unlocking the value of events. These benefits would depend on the successful delivery and operation of both the consented surf park and the associated facilities proposed in the current application.

I note that the surf park may appeal primarily to a defined segment interested in surfing, active recreation and wellness. Although the application does not quantify how much international visitation is expected to be generated by the development, the surf park aims to become a sought-after destination for international and domestic visitors. Surfing New Zealand estimates that more than 300,000 New Zealanders surf, including around 70,000 who participate weekly[2].

I am overall supportive of the application from a tourism and hospitality perspective and encourage the Panel to consider these potential benefits in its assessment of the proposal.

Sincerely



Hon Louise Upston
Minister for Tourism and Hospitality

[2] Surfing New Zealand. (2025). *2024-2026 Strategic Direction*.