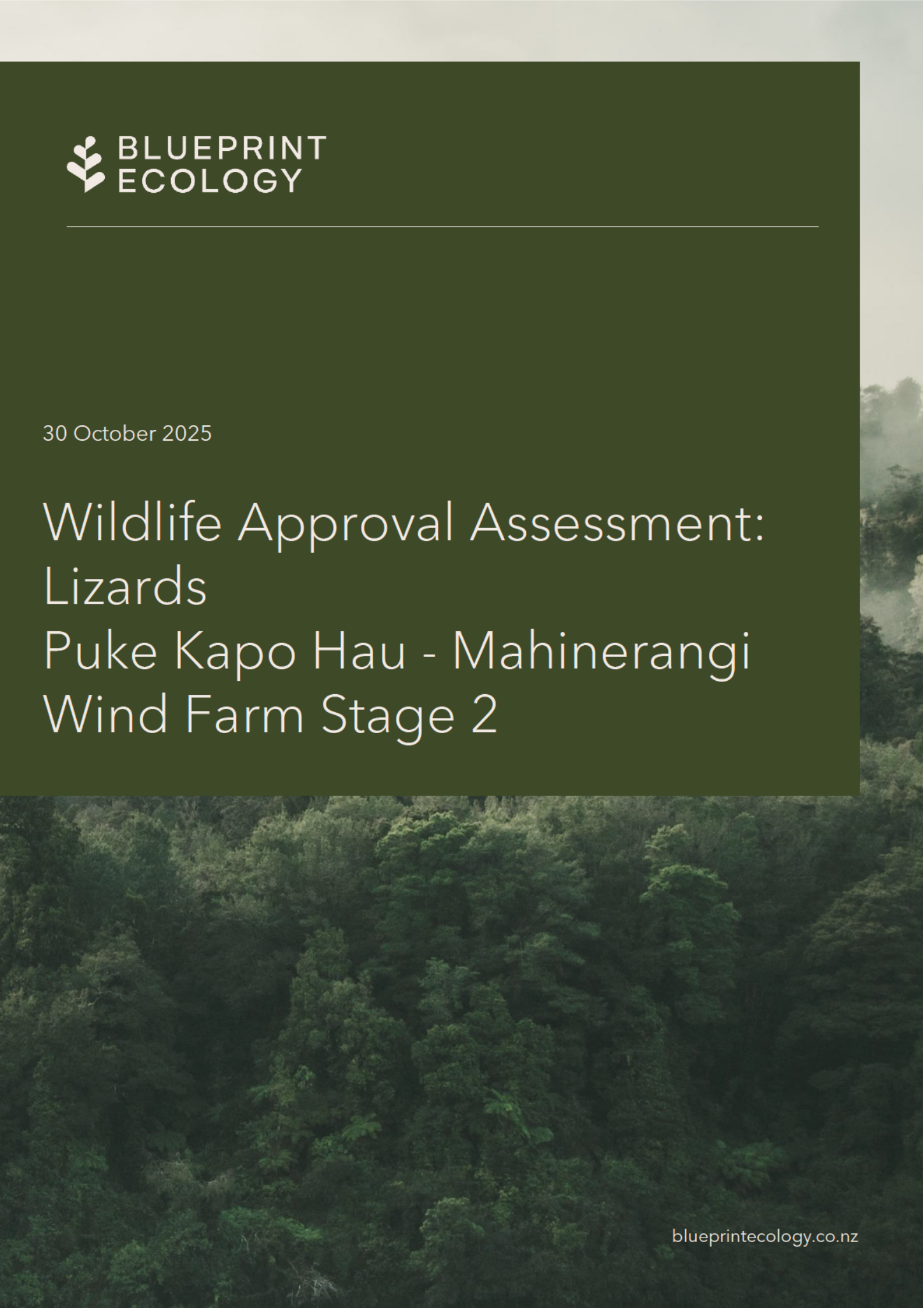
BLUEPRINT ECOLOGY

30 October 2025

Wildlife Approval Assessment: Lizards
Puke Kapo Hau - Mahinerangi Wind Farm Stage 2



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Introduction

Tararua Wind Power Limited (TWP), a fully owned subsidiary of Mercury NZ Limited, is progressing Stage 2 of the Mahinerangi Wind Farm (MWF) known as Puke Kapo Hau (**Figure 1**). The consented site area of the Mahinerangi Wind Farm Site is approximately 1,723 ha and is located on the eastern foothills of the Lammermoor Range at approximately 600m and 730 m elevation, situated approximately 5 km north of Lake Mahinerangi and approximately 50 km west of Dunedin. The west and north-western boundary of the MWF is bounded by the Te Papanui Conservation Park and Black Rock Scientific Reserve. The MWF is situated within a predominately pastoral setting that has a backdrop of lesser developed land at the Lammermoor Range.

Blueprint Ecology Ltd were engaged to provide specialist ecological advice with respect to the management of lizards to avoid, minimise or remedy and if possible and appropriate, offset or compensate more than minor residual impacts. A Lizard Assessment (Blueprint Ecology Ltd 2025) of actual and potential impacts to lizards associated with the development was prepared which includes detailed descriptions of lizard values and habitat types present within the Stage 2 Windfarm Development Area and transmission corridor. That report should be read in conjunction with this Wildlife Approval Assessment.

A survey of lizard populations across all potential habitat types within and surrounding the Stage 2 Windfarm Development Area was undertaken in March and April 2025. The survey confirmed Not threatened McCann's skink (*Oligosoma maccanni*) and At Risk tussock skink (*Oligosoma chionochloescens*) within snow tussock grassland, rough pasture, wetlands, plantation forest and rock habitats within the proposed Stage 2 Windfarm Development Area and transmission corridor.

All native lizards are protected under the Wildlife Act 1953. The Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 (FTAA) provides for Wildlife Approvals which are an authority for an act or omission that would otherwise be an offence against specified provisions of the Wildlife Act 1953 including where native lizards may be harmed or killed during the course of a site's development.

A Wildlife Approval may grant permission to relocate native lizards, and the killing or injury of lizards not caught or relocated from a site.

The purpose of this assessment is to address each Wildlife Approval matter contained in clauses 2 and 5 of Schedule 7 of the FTAA. The Wildlife Approval matters clause 2(1)(a) – (o) are presented in italics in the following sections, followed by our assessment.

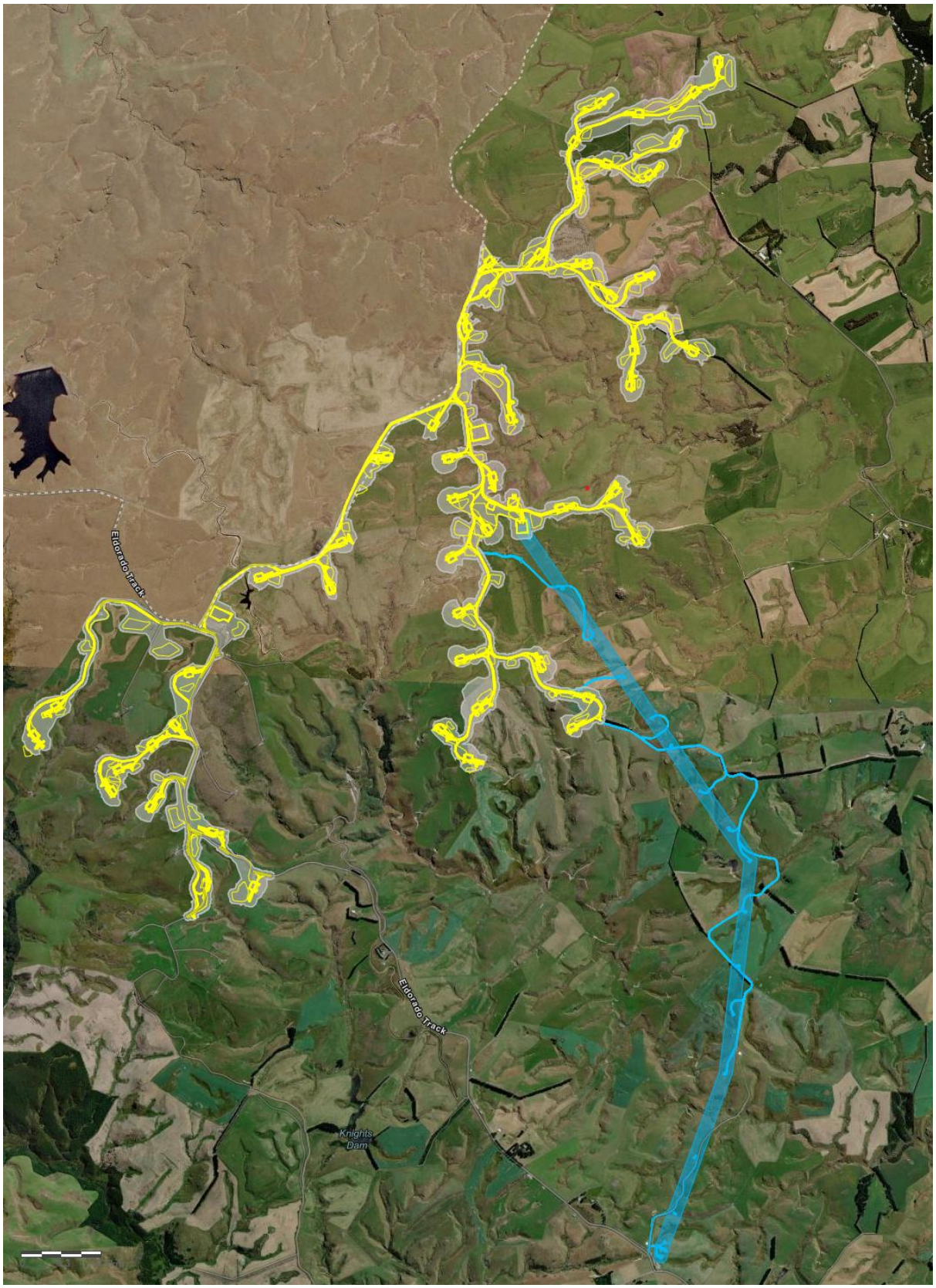

Figure 1. Mahinerangi Stage 2 layout (yellow), Windfarm Development Area (grey), Transmission Line Corridor and access tracks (blue).

Matter 1 – clause 2(1)(a)

a) specify the purpose of the proposed activity.

The purpose of the proposed activity is to protect native lizard species by avoiding and minimising the injury or death to native lizards associated with vegetation clearance and earthworks undertaken for the development of Stage 2 Mahinerangi Wind Farm.

Matter 2 – clause 2(1)(b)

(b) identify the actions the applicant wishes to carry out involving protected wildlife and where they will be carried out (whether on or off public conservation land).

TWP seeks to capture, handle and relocate native lizard species from areas of high and moderate habitat quality totalling c. 12.6 ha within the Stage 2 MWF Windfarm Development Area and Transmission Corridor layout (**Figure** 2) to a 59.2 ha area of high-quality habitat that is protected in perpetuity referred to as the "Scrappy Pines Block" QEII Covenant area (**Figure 3**). The Stage 2 Mahinerangi Wind Farm Development Area, Transmission Corridor footprint and "Scrappy Pines Block" QEII Covenant area are on private land.

TWP also seeks to kill wildlife incidentally during construction activities after all reasonable steps to avoid, minimise, and compensate adverse effects to native lizards.

Figure 2. Medium-quality lizard habitat (orange) and high-quality lizard habitat (red) and the indicative numbers of artificial cover objects (ACOs) to be used for the lizard salvage. Mahinerangi Stage 2 layout (yellow). Contingency Zone (white).

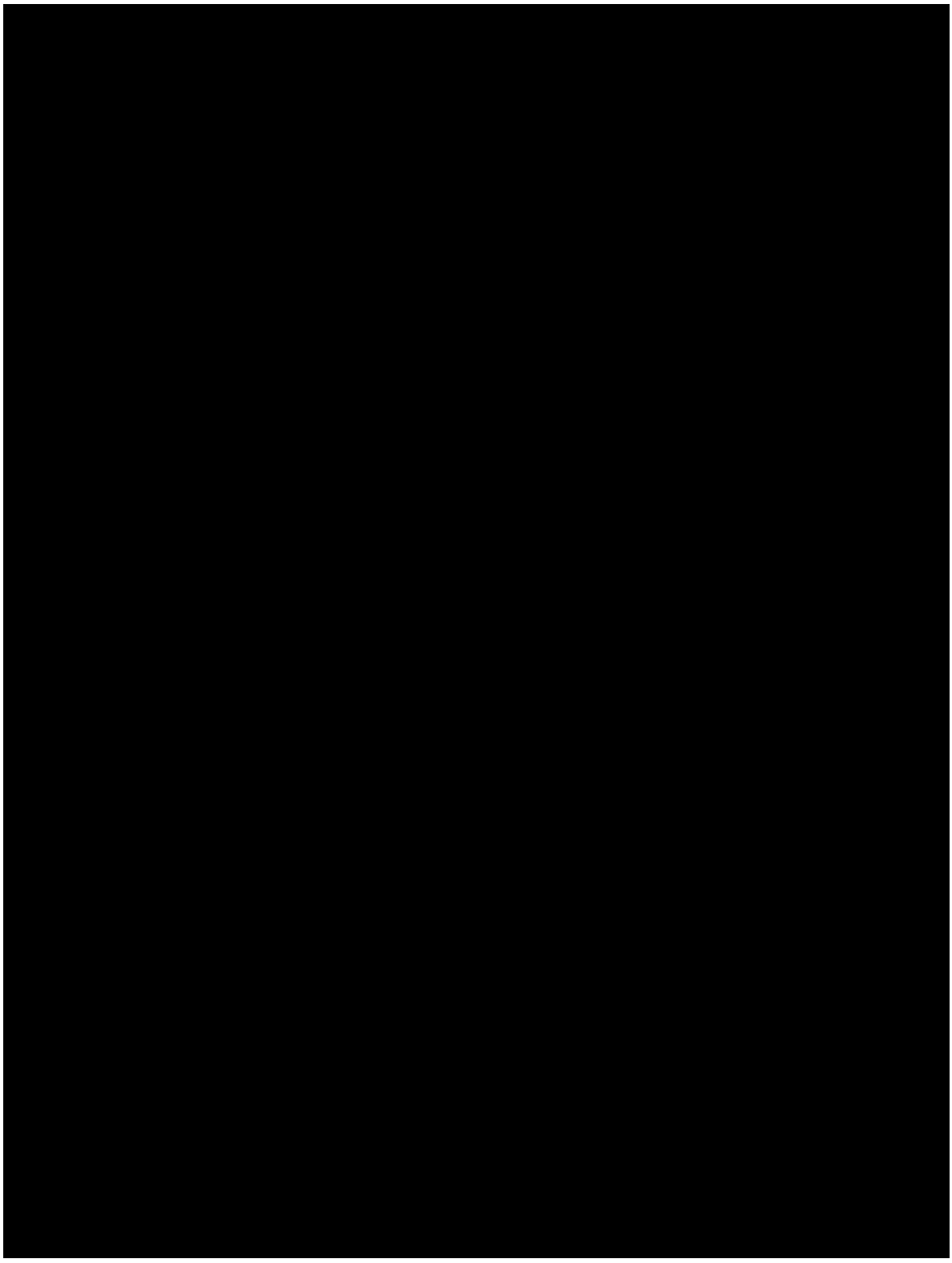

Figure 3. [redacted] (red) in 2013 showing the extent of felled wilding pines. Lizards are proposed to be released into this area.

Matter 3 – clause 2(1)(c)

(c) include an assessment of the activity and its impacts against the purpose of the Wildlife Act 1953.

The principal purpose of the Wildlife Act 1953 ("Wildlife Act") has been described by the Supreme Court as the protection of wild animals. Recent amendments to the Wildlife Act provide that a section 53 Wildlife Act authority that authorises the killing of wildlife that is incidental to carrying out an otherwise lawful activity may be granted. The authority is to be treated as consistent with the protection of wildlife if, in granting it, the Director-General is satisfied that its overall effect would be consistent with the protection of—

a) populations of wildlife; and
b) individual wildlife.

The recent amendments to the Wildlife Act, including their application to Stage 2 of the Mahinerangi Wind Farm are discussed further in the Legal Submissions on behalf of TWP.

The activities subject to the wildlife approval are consistent with the protective purpose of the Wildlife Act, as protection of lizards is achieved through:

- avoiding the majority of potential lizard habitats within the Mahinerangi Wind farm Site;
- capturing and relocating lizards prior to bulk earth working and vegetation removal activities;
- pest control at selected sites within QE II Scrappy Pines Block.

Impacts include the clearance of vegetation on site which has the potential to disturb, injure and/ or kill native lizards. Native lizards have been confirmed within c. 35 ha (c.12.6 ha of which is high and moderate habitat quality) of snow tussock grassland, rough pasture, wetlands, plantation forest and rock habitats within the Stage 2 indicative windfarm layout and wider turbine Contingency Zones.

Approximately 75% of the Stage 2 MWF layout and 98% of the Transmission Corridor layout include exotic pasture and/ or cropping areas which provide no habitat for lizards. The layout avoids the best habitats for lizards that have been consented for development, including the "Thomas Block" and "Scrappy Pines Block" QEII Covenant. TWP has advised that the current Stage 2 MWF layout and Transmission Corridor encompass all areas and values for lizards that can be avoided to the extent feasible.

After all avoidance measures have been applied, to minimise potential adverse effects to lizards during construction, a Lizard Management Plan (LMP) has been prepared following good practice guidance (DOC 2019)[1]. In summary, the LMP includes:

- Deploying a minimum of 600 artificial cover objects (ACOs) within the best habitats for lizards and checking these a minimum of five times (3,000 checks) and relocating lizards to the "Scrappy Pines Block" QEII covenant area;
- Salvaging lizards from rock outcrops;
- Outcrops impacted by works without resident lizards will be removed and reset, right way up, adjacent to the track margin, and where possible, reset in ways to provide some lizard habitat; and

[1] Department of Conservation Lizard Technical Advisory Group. 2019. Key principles for lizard salvage and transfer in New Zealand. Department of Conservation, Wellington. 19 p

- Installing lizard-proof fencing along the interfaces of development and of suitable lizard habitat, where relevant.
- Undertaking 4 ha of predator control at the release site for 3 years.

This management approach will ensure that the vast majority of lizards are relocated, and any residual effects associated with lizard injury/ death during construction of the wind farm will be Negligible.

To result in a no-net-loss in values for lizards, and in this instance a net-gain, the loss of c. 22.3 ha of low quality, c. 12.5 ha of moderate quality, and 1,285 m2 of high-quality habitat, has been redressed in advance by TWP by creating a 59.2 ha of high-quality habitat within the "Scrappy Pines Block" QEII Open Space Covenant.

Over the past 15 years, management within this area has included the clearance of hectares of wilding pines, and retirement of grazed pasture which has subsequently developed into indigenous vegetation dominated by dense snow tussock grassland (*Chionochloa rigida*) and golden Spaniard (*Aciphylla aurea*). Overall, this provides excellent habitat for lizards and offsets the effects of the loss of habitat at a 1.6:1 ratio such that there is a long-term positive effect with regards to lizard habitat values.

An additional benefit of the regeneration of indigenous vegetation and all the woody debris is that this has created many hectares of additional high-quality lizard habitat, which means that there are sufficient resources for relocated lizards and consequently the carrying capacity of the site is expected to be very high and much greater than the existing population levels. This means that there is sufficient resources for relocated lizards avoiding any potential carrying capacity issues. In addition to the increase in suitable habitat, ongoing predator control has been undertaken in this area by TWP over the past 15 years, and it has been demonstrated that a significant increase in lizard numbers can be achieved in areas subject to intensive mammalian predator control (Reardon et al., 2012; Norbury et al., 2022).

Further to the "Scrappy Pines Block", TWP is also creating a 4.6 ha compensation site to redress effects to natural wetland. This area will be protected for the life of the wind farm, and over time the c. 2.3 ha of terrestrial riparian margins will provide further high-quality habitat for lizards.

Following the implementation of the Lizard Management Plan, the actual and potential adverse effects of the activity on native lizards will be positive through an increase in extent and quality of lizard habitats that will be protected which is consistent with the purpose of the Wildlife Act 1953.

Matter 4 – clause 2(1)(d)

(d) list protected wildlife species known or predicted to be in the area and, where possible, the numbers of wildlife present and numbers likely to be impacted.

The species known and predicted to be in the c. 35 ha impact area are Not threatened McCann's skink and At Risk tussock skink.

Based on pre-development surveys measuring the relative abundance of lizards within and surrounding the Stage 2 MWF layout, it is estimated that 4,000 to 5,000 lizards are present within the Stage 2 MWF layout.

The proposed lizard salvage method includes 600 ACOs and checking these a minimum of 5 times (3,000 checks). It is estimated that between 2,000 to 4,000 lizards will be salvaged. It is estimated that the number

of McCann's skink likely to be impacted is between 500 to 1,000 animals and the number of tussock skink is 100 to 300 animals.

Given the activity has protected and enhanced 59.2 ha of lizard habitat for the past 15 years, we estimate that the local population of McCann's and tussock skink has increased such that it would greatly exceed the number of native lizards covenant as part of the activity and continue to increase over the long-term.

Matter 5 – clause 2(1)(e)

(e) outline impacts on threatened, data deficient, and at-risk wildlife species (as defined in the New Zealand Threat Classification System).

There are direct impacts to At Risk tussock skink associated with the construction activities. These impacts will be minimised and compensated as per the above sections such that there is a positive effect to this species.

The likelihood of the presence of any other native lizard species classified as At Risk or Threatened occurring within the Windfarm Development Area is very low or low.

There are no lizard species classified as data deficient applicable to this project. A detailed description of each lizard species classified as At Risk or Threatened is provided in the following sections.

Kōrero gecko

Kōrero gecko have experienced declines in Otago over the last 30-years; a once common gecko species is now becoming harder to find (M. Tocher pers. obs). Kōrero geckos were detected in the 2006 ecological assessment that informed Stage 1 of the MWF (Kingett Mitchell Ltd 2006) where they were described as "relatively common on rocky tors and outcrops." In terms of habitats, Kingett Mitchell Ltd 2006 state that "geckos were not observed within tussock or pastoral grassland areas" but do not specifically exclude them from rocky tors and outcrops in these habitats. The 2006 survey did not provide georeferenced locations of kōrero gecko, or indeed any lizard species, meaning the 'commonness' of kōrero geckos cannot be fully ascertained over the MWF site. The schist over the MWF site is "undifferentiated Caples Terrane TZIII schist"[2] which is known for its quartz veins and minimal foliation making it blocky and substandard as lizard habitat compared to other schist in Otago (e.g., around Alexandra). For this report, therefore, the likelihood of kōrero geckos being present over the MWF site has been assessed as "Low" given the lack of records nearby and the quality of rock habitats present.

Jewelled gecko

Jewelled geckos, an arboreal (tree-dwelling) gecko, are thought to be once relatively common in the vicinity of Lake Mahinerangi (Whitaker et al. 2002) and were found at Black Rock within 3 km of the site. They are

[2] https://data.gns.cri.nz/geology/

also known from Lammerlaw Stream catchment (Carter 1994) and Nardoo Scenic Reserve immediately to the west of the Stage 2 project area (Ward and Munro 1989).

No jewelled geckos were found over the MWF site during the 2006 survey that included a night search of shrubby areas north of Black Rock Scientific Reserve (Kingett Mitchell Ltd 2006). Based on habitats present and the degree of modification/removal of shrublands over the MWF site, the likelihood of jewelled geckos being present over the MWF site has been assessed as "Low".

Burgan skink

Burgan skinks have only recently been described (Chapple *et al*. 2011) and are currently considered an alpine specialist. Recent survey work has expanded their known distribution over the Otago uplands, but all records occur in areas of dense vegetation at altitudes above 700 m asl. (Wildlands 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022; M. Tocher pers. obs.). The likelihood of Burgan skinks being present over the MWF site, that takes in altitudes not known to support Burgan skinks, has been assessed as "Very low".

Herbfield skink

Herbfield skinks (Jewell 2022) were once known as cryptic skinks over large swathes of Otago including areas adjacent to the MWF site (e.g., near the Waipori dam; Tony Jewell pers. comm., May 2025). It is possible that records of both tussock skink and McCann's skink have been confused for herbfield skink by inexperienced observers as they can look very similar. Herbfield skinks usually inhabit damp, densely vegetated microsites in grassland, indigenous herb fields and open shrublands. The presence of herbfield skinks over the MWF site has not been confirmed, despite reference to cryptic skinks being recorded "locally around the MWF site" in the 2006 ecological assessment that informed Stage 1 of the MWF (Kingett Mitchell Ltd 2006). Notably, surveys by a team of experienced herpetologists failed to detect herbfield skinks over the MWF site in 1987 (Whitaker 1987) which is consistent with a description of the distribution of the species as "patchy and localised" (Whitaker 2002). Based on habitats present, herbfield skinks have been assessed as having a 'Very low' likelihood of being present over the MWF site.

Otago green skink

Otago green skinks are large-bodied skinks that require dense vegetation and rock to survive in a predator-loaded environment such as MWF site (Tocher 2006). No records for Otago green skink were found in the DOC herpetofauna database for the MWF site or nearby areas, and Otago green skinks were not detected over the 2006 lizard survey that informed Stage 1 of the MWF (Kingett Mitchell Ltd 2006) or in a 2021 survey to inform the Lake Onslow Battery Project (Konlechner et al. 2022), noting this survey concentrated effort about 700 m asl. Well outside the MWF site, a green skink was found in 2009 along the Teviot River South Branch (c. 25 km west from the centre of the MWF site; Konlechner et al. 2022). A 1987 lizard survey of the area also failed to detect green skinks south of Sutton Stream despite suitable habitat occurring elsewhere (Whitaker 1987). For this report therefore, and based on habitats present, Otago green skinks have been assessed as having a 'Very low' likelihood of being present over the MWF site.

Grand skink

The 2006 lizard survey to inform Stage 1 MWF found a mummified grand skink c. 4 km north of the Stage 2 MWF layout (Kingett Mitchell Ltd 2006). Grand skinks are known from multiple rocky sites north of the Stage 2 MWF layout but are considered locally extinct (Whitaker 1987; latest recovery plan). Indeed, mummified remains of grand skinks have been found at Macraes Flat over areas where skinks have not been seen for many decades (M. Tocher pers. obs). Moreover, the low foliation characteristics of the schist over the MWF

site is not conducive to the long-term persistence of grand skinks. In our opinion, grand skinks are locally extinct and there is no likelihood of being present over the MWF site.

Matter 6 – clause 2(1)(f)

(f) state how the methods proposed to be used to conduct the actions specified under clause 2(1)(b) will ensure that best practice standards are met

The Department of Conservation has prepared a "best practice" guidance document (DOC 2019) which describes nine principles that should be adhered to when applying for a Wildlife Act Authority for a lizard salvage and transfer resulting from a proposed development project (DOC's principles). It covers the practice of lizard salvage and transfer and addresses the entire process including:

1. Assessments of the impacts of proposed developments on lizards and exploration of alternatives (e.g. avoidance of lizard habitat).

2. Planning of salvage operations and assessment and approval of these proposals from the appropriate authorities.

3. Preparing habitat at release sites, capturing lizards at impact sites, temporary captivity (if required), data collection, transport to and release at receiving sites.

4. Post-release monitoring, contingency implementation as appropriate, and reporting to DOC (and/or other consent authorities).

A summary of the nine principles and how these matters have been addressed is provided in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Assessment of DOC's Nine Principles for Lizard Salvage.

Principle for Lizard Salvage	Summary of Assessment of Principle
1. Lizard species' values and site significance must be assessed at both the impact (development) and receiving sites.	Lizard species' values, and site significance has been assessed based on a desktop assessment of the herpetofauna database, a site survey of available habitats via manual habitat searching and visual encounter surveys, and survey devices (Artificial Cover Object (ACO), Gee's minnow traps). The significance of the habitat at the impact and receiving site for lizards has been assessed based on the size, quality, species diversity and abundance.
2. Actual and potential development-related effects and their significance must be assessed.	The actual and potential development related effects and their significance have been assessed based on the Environment Institute of Australia and New Zealand (EIANZ) Ecological Impact Assessment guidelines (Roper-Lindsay, et al. 2018) (hereinafter referred to as the EIANZ Guidelines). For lizard species and habitat, the overall ecological effect after managing effects has been applied is positive (a net increase in lizards and net increase in the size and quality of habitat of 24.2 ha).
3. Alternatives to moving lizards must be considered.	Stage 2 has reduced the consented number of turbines to 44 and avoided the principal high value lizard habitat within the consented layout being the Thomas Block and the QEII block. It is understood that the proposed layout encompasses all areas and values for lizards that can be avoided to the extent practicable.

Principle for Lizard Salvage	Summary of Assessment of Principle
	Avoidance and remediation measures cannot result in no-net-loss of lizards from the development area. Compensation is proposed to achieve a net-gain in lizard values. There are no alternatives to moving lizards.
4. Threatened lizard species require more careful consideration than less-threatened species.	No lizard species listed as Threatened (Hitchmough et al. 2021) are likely to inhabit the development footprint. No Threatened lizard species are applicable to this activity.
5. Lizard salvage, transfer and release must use the best available methodology.	The lizard salvage includes the best available methodologies. This includes an extensive grid of ACO covers at 5-10 m spacings within suitable habitats for lizards, with a total of 600 devices. The effort allocated to lizard salvage will include a minimum of five checks (3,000 device checks). The transfer of lizards will be undertaken in the most appropriate way to minimise stress on lizards (see response to Matter 7). Captured lizards will be relocated the same day as capture to a pre-identified release site and released directly into areas that provide immediate protection from predators (e.g., woody debris).
6. Receiving sites and their carrying capacities must be suitable in the long term.	The receiving site is 1.6 times larger than the impact area with higher quality habitat for the relevant species. The release site includes hectares of woody debris from clearing wilding pines, and many hectares of snow-tussock grassland that has reverted from grazed pasture. These conditions will allow for population growth and secondary spread and provide suitable habitat resources to cater for the carrying capacity in the long-term for all species of lizard proposed to be salvaged.
7. Monitoring is required to evaluate the salvage operation.	Post-release monitoring will be undertaken annually for 3 years following lizard salvage.
8. Reporting is required to communicate outcomes of salvage operations and facilitate process improvements.	Reporting of the outcomes of the lizard salvage and post-release monitoring results will be provided to DOC for 3 years.
9. Contingency actions are required when lizard salvage and transfer activities fail.	A further 2.3 ha of lizard habitat will be created and protected as part of compensating effects to natural wetlands. This provides a contingency for habitat creation, where a separate area for lizards will be established in the instance that there are unforeseen effects/ disturbance at the release site (e.g., fire). The lizard salvage and transfer follow a standard methodology, and no contingency actions are proposed nor appropriate / required for this activity. For species unlikely to occur on site, the release site includes all the necessary habitat requirements.

Matter 7 – clause 2(1)(g)

(g) describe the methods to be used to safely, efficiently, and humanely catch, hold, or kill the animals and identify relevant animal ethics processes.

The relocation will be undertaken in the most appropriate way to minimise stress on lizards. In order to ensure the welfare of animals during relocation and to maximise the chance of a successful relocation outcome; all staff will be suitably trained and experienced in the capture, handling, holding and release techniques that will be used. Lizard handling will be kept to a minimum and will only be carried out by trained and experienced staff. Handling will be limited to capture, morphometric measurement, and photography.

Captured lizards will be relocated to the identified release sites and will be released as soon as practicable into the release site (within 1-2 hours). Lizards will be released directly into enhanced habitats (e.g. log piles).

Lizards will be held in individual breathable cloth bags. Each cloth bay with have a small amount of damp grass from the capture site and a wetted sponge will be placed inside with the lizards to prevent dehydration. All lizards within cloth bags will be temporarily stored in ventilated, hard-sided terrariums (to prevent accidental crushing). Terrariums will be placed in secure, shaded locations (ideally where the internal temperature is kept below 10°C) until they can be transported to the release site.

Matter 8 – clause 2(1)(h)

(h) state the location or locations in which the activity will be carried out, including a map (and GPS co-ordinates if available).

TWP seeks to capture and handle native lizard species from areas of high and moderate quality lizard habitat (**Figure 2**) and relocate them to the "Scrappy Pines Block" QEII Covenant area (**Figure 3**). The full Stage 2 MWF layout and wider development area is shown on **Figure 1**.

Matter 9 – clause 2(1)(i)

(i) state whether authorisation is sought to temporarily hold or relocate wildlife.

An authorisation is sought to only relocate wildlife.

Matter 10 – clause 2(1)(j)

(j) list all actual and potential wildlife effects (adverse or positive) of the proposed activity, including effects on the target species, other indigenous species, and the ecosystems at the site

Actual and potential adverse effects to lizards after all avoidance measures have been considered include the injury/ death of animals during the construction of the wind farm.

Positive effects include a net-gain of protected high quality lizard habitat of 24.2 ha.

Effects on other indigenous species and ecosystems at the site include:

- Approximately 476 m2 (0.05 ha) of natural wetland will be cleared. This loss will be compensated for by rehabilitating nearby wetlands guided by a Wetland Compensation Plan such that a long-term positive effect will occur.
- Due to existing agricultural modifications, impacts on terrestrial invertebrates from the variations to the land use consent and new activities are expected to be minimal.

Matter 11 – clause 2(1)(k)

(k) where adverse effects are identified, state what methods will be used to avoid and minimise those effects, and any offsetting or compensation proposed to address unmitigated adverse effects (including steps taken before the project begins, such as surveying, salvaging, and relocating protected wildlife).

Actual and potential adverse effects to lizards after all avoidance measures have been considered include the injury/ death of animals during the construction of the wind farm which will be minimised by relocating lizards prior to clearance works commencing. Compensation for the loss of habitat includes protecting and enhancing 59.2 ha of lizard habitat (increase of 1.6:1) in advance of the effect.

The protection and enhancement of the 59.2 ha Scrappy Pines block results in a net increase in extent of lizard habitat of 21.7 ha, as well as a net-gain in the condition (structure and quality) of habitat for lizards.

There is an exchange of almost exclusively low and medium quality habitats (e.g., fragmented rough pasture) at the impact site for a large contiguous area of high-quality habitats comprising snow-tussock grassland, golden spaniard mosaics, countless woody debris piles, indigenous wetland margins, and large rocky outcrops.

93% of the potential habitat loss has been compensated 15 years in advance of the effect. Therefore, there is no effective delay between loss of, or effects on, lizard values at the impact site. It is considered that the gain or maturity of lizard values at the Scrappy Pines Block have already accrued well and beyond the loss of values at the impact site.

These gains in lizard values are above and beyond what would have occurred in the absence of the compensation.

Matter 12 – clause 2(1)(l)

(l) state whether the applicant or any company director, trustee, partner, or anyone else involved with the application has been convicted of any offence under the Wildlife Act 1953.

It is understood that neither TWP, nor director, trustee, partner, or anyone else involved with the application has been convicted of any offence under the Wildlife Act 1953.

Matter 13 – clause 2(1)(m)

(m) state whether the applicant or any company director, trustee, partner, or anyone else involved with the application has any current criminal charges under the Wildlife Act 1953 pending before a court.

No.

Matter 14 – clause 2(1)(n)

(n) provide proof and details of all consultation, including with hapū or iwi, on the application specific to wildlife impacts.

TWP has been engaging with Te Rūnanga o Ōtākou since late 2024. This engagement has included project briefing hui where project overview information has been provided, specific environmental assessment and effects briefing hui, and the provision of all technical and management plan documents for review. Engagement is ongoing.

Matter 15 – clause 2(1)(o)

(o) provide any additional written expert views, advice, or opinions the applicant has obtained concerning their proposal.

None.

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