

Fast-track Approvals Act 2024

Further Statement

Waitaha Hydro [FTAA-2505-1069]

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In response to Minute #8 of the Expert Panel

19 February 2026

Recreation Effects

This statement responds to Minute #8 of the Expert Panel (issued 2 February 2026) and addresses additional matters relating to recreation effects raised during evidence presented at the joint empanelment hearing on 13 February 2026, which I attended as an observer. I have also considered the 18 February 2026 email correspondence between Shona Bradley (Counsel for the Department of Conservation) and David Allen (Counsel for Westpower Limited) regarding questions associated with in river clearance works. The following comments reflect information that became clearer through that process.

Evidence presented at the hearing and in the email correspondence highlighted uncertainty regarding both the frequency of excavator operations within the Kiwi Flat environment and the likelihood that visitors may encounter such activity. In particular:

- Dr Tunnickliffe, in his peer review, noted that it is unclear what Westpower's stated frequency of 5–15 instances of in river maintenance works is based on.
- Dr Clunie, in responding to questions, confirmed that there could potentially be more than 15 excavator interventions per year for maintenance works in the river.
- Mr Allen's 18 February emails indicate it is reasonable to expect that in-river gravel removal will generally not be required during lower-level floods. However, as natural processes cannot be controlled, retaining flexibility to undertake channel maintenance remains necessary.

The potential for digger activity exceeding 15 instances per year, combined with limited clarity regarding the timing or triggers for these interventions, makes it difficult to assess recreation effects with confidence. Activity at this scale is likely to materially reduce naturalness through mechanical noise that travels along the valley, visible disturbance, and a diminished sense of backcountry character—particularly if extraction occurs during weekends or peak visitor periods.

At the hearing, Westpower also indicated that restricting excavator activity to outside weekend hours would not be feasible. This further heightens the likelihood that

machinery will be operating during times of highest visitor demand, increasing both the potential for direct disturbance and the severity of effects on naturalness and visitor experience.

A central concern is that visitors will be unable to reliably predict whether machinery may be operating when planning their trips. This uncertainty alone is likely to influence how people perceive the valley and whether they choose to visit. The prospect of arriving to find active excavation—without any reliable way to avoid it—constitutes an effect in its own right. In addition, the simple knowledge that digger operations may occur, potentially frequently and at short notice, risks further eroding the perception of Kiwi Flat as a wild and natural environment (being fundamental to the envisaged experience). This would compound the effects of the physical structures and changes to the riverbed caused by the scheme.

Given these issues, if the project is approved, I would recommend that conditions be imposed requiring measures that maximise public information and provide the greatest practicable advance notice of planned excavation activities. Improved forecasting, transparent scheduling, and clear communication channels will not mitigate the presence of machinery in a backcountry setting, but they would help reduce the unpredictability that would otherwise exacerbate impacts on recreation values.

Additionally, I consider the following suggested conditions raised through evidence may go some way in addressing the identified effects, and I support them being imposed:

- The recommendation by Dr Tunnicliffe (paragraph [59]) for a maintenance condition requiring annual reporting on the frequency, duration, and spatial extent of in-channel maintenance works, with provisions for consent review if maintenance frequency exceeds predicted levels.
- The conditions proposed by Mr Jackson in his response (Westpower Memorandum 10, Attachment 11):
 - Condition 23(a), requiring inclusion in the Site Operations Management Plan of monitoring of the frequency, duration, and spatial extent of in-stream sediment excavation works required above the Headworks; and
 - Condition 26, requiring that this information be included in annual reporting.

I do, however, question how effective Mr Jackson's proposed conditions would be without also linking the required reporting to the information provided by Westpower or including a corresponding requirement for action if the report recipient considers that the information raises concerns about the effects of the works. Reporting the frequency, duration, and spatial extent of instream sediment-excavation activities alone will not sufficiently address the adverse effects. For that reason, I prefer Dr Tunnicliffe's

recommended condition, notwithstanding Westpower's stated reluctance at the hearing to accept constraints on its maintenance activities.



19 February 2026