BEFORE AN EXPERT PANEL

HALDON SOLAR PROJECT

UNDER THE	Fast-Track Approvals Act 2024
IN THE MATTER OF	An application for resource consents in relation to the Haldon Solar Project
BY	Lodestone Energy Limited

STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE BY ETHAN GLOVER AND MARK HENRY (PLANNING) ON BEHALF OF LODESTONE ENERGY LIMITED

10 FEBRUARY 2026

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1. INTRODUCTION

1 Our full names are Ethan John Glover and Mark Alan Clive Henry.

2 Our evidence is given on behalf of Lodestone Energy (**Lodestone** or **the Applicant**) in respect of Lodestone Energy's proposed Haldon Solar Project (**the Project**), specifically in response to comments made under section 53 of the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 (**FTAA** or **Act**) by the following parties (**the section 53 parties**):

(a) Ministers for Treaty of Waitangi Negotiations; Climate Change; Māori Development; RMA Reform; Infrastructure; the South Island; Hunting and Fishing; the Environment; Energy;

(b) Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu;

(c) Te Rūnanga o Arowhenua;

(d) Te Rūnanga o Moeraki and Te Rūnanga o Waihao;

(e) Canterbury Regional Council (**CRC**);

(f) Mackenzie District Council (**MDC**);

(g) Department of Conservation (**DOC**);

(h) Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society (**F&B**);

(i) Environmental Defence Society (**EDS**);

(j) NZ Transport Agency;

(k) Transpower NZ Ltd; and

(l) Meridian Energy Ltd.

3 We have been involved in the Project since April 2024.

2. QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

4 Our respective qualifications and experience are set out in **Appendix A** to this evidence.

3. CODE OF CONDUCT

5 We confirm that we have read the Code of Conduct for expert witnesses contained in the Environment Court Practice Note 2023 and have complied with it in preparing this evidence. We each confirm that the issues addressed in our evidence are within our area of expertise and we have not omitted to consider material facts known to us that might alter or detract from this evidence.

4. SCOPE OF EVIDENCE

6 Our evidence addresses the following planning matters as relevant to comments made by the section 53 parties:

(a) Indigenous biodiversity values at the site, their significance and adverse effects on those;

(b) The statutory planning framework; and

(c) Management of adverse effects by conditions.

7 In preparing this evidence we have reviewed:

(a) The substantive application made for the Project by Lodestone (**the substantive application**);

(b) The comments and supporting documents received from all section 53 parties outlined in paragraph 2; and

(c) Further ecological advice and assessments commissioned by Lodestone including:

(i) *Terrestrial Invertebrate Assessment*, prepared by SLR Consulting New Zealand Limited;

(ii) *Lizard Assessment*, prepared by Blueprint Ecology Limited;

(iii) *Statistical Advice for a solar power installation at Haldon Station*, prepared by Proteus; and

(iv) The Ecological Addendum prepared by the Applicant setting out their proposed response to avoiding, minimising, mitigating, offsetting and (if necessary) compensating of effects on ecology.

5. INDIGENOUS BIODIVERSITY VALUES, SIGNIFICANCE AND ADVERSE EFFECTS

8 Comments made by F&B and EDS observed inconsistencies in the substantive application and its supporting assessments with respect to the nature and significance of the site's indigenous biodiversity values. Relying on the ecological assessment completed by AgScience Ltd, the substantive application considered the site to contain indigenous vegetation as per the prevailing Mackenzie District Plan (District Plan) definition. Because of the reported presence of a Threatened or At-Risk species, the site was also considered to qualify as an area of significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna. Although we acknowledge the AgScience assessment reached a different conclusion, based on the findings of that assessment, and observations made by DOC specialists we agree with the substantive application that the site contains indigenous vegetation and that vegetation is considered by the Canterbury Regional Policy Statement (**CRPS**) to be significant.

9 Notwithstanding, since the substantive application was lodged, we understand the site's indigenous biodiversity values have been further characterised by further survey work as outlined in Lodestone's Ecological Addendum and its attachments. That work, alongside the ecological evidence provided on behalf of the section 53 parties, which identified the

presence of further threatened species at the site, further supports the position taken in the substantive application regarding vegetation classification.

10 An updated description of the site's indigenous biodiversity values, reflecting recent survey work, is now contained in the Ecological Addendum prepared by Lodestone and its supporting assessments.

11 The site's status as an area of significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna means the Project engages with s6(c) of the Resource Management Act 1991 (**RMA**) (via Clause 17(1)(b) of the FTAA). In relation to that engagement, F&B make the following comment at their paragraph 125:

> *If the site is significant under s 6(c) RMA, then consideration must be given to offsetting and compensation for the adverse effects of the activity. If the Panel accepts the adverse effects are significant, the failure to properly address offsetting and compensation is a serious problem.*

12 We do not agree that the significance of the site under s6(c) of the RMA automatically warrants consideration of offsetting or compensation because in our experience, the role of offsetting and compensation is to respond to residual adverse effects of a proposal that require further management.[1] The significance of a site does not necessarily have a direct bearing on those residual adverse effects. Rather, the effectiveness of the measures taken to avoid, minimise or remedy the adverse effects are typically the primary determinant for residual adverse effects.

13 We would agree however that where residual adverse effects are assessed to be significant, consideration of offsetting and compensation would typically be expected, and as we discuss below, directed by the relevant planning documents. We do not however see this as a "serious problem" as

[1] After measures to avoid, minimise or remedy adverse effects have been sequentially applied where practicable.

F&B state. With or without offsetting or compensation, the Panel will be required to reach a view on the overall adverse impacts on ecology. The Panel is then required to consider whether the impacts (and any other impacts) are significant enough to outweigh the benefits of the project under s85(3). In our opinion, a failure to consider offsetting and compensation does not prevent the Panel from undertaking that proportionality assessment.

14 Notwithstanding, Lodestone has obtained expert advice on possible offsetting and compensation measures to manage potential residual adverse effects of the Project and those have been incorporated into adaptive management conditions. In our opinion, regardless of whether offsetting or compensation is proposed or deemed to be acceptable, it is the overall adverse impacts that are critical for the Panel to determine.

15 In relation to the adverse impacts, a key concern raised by several section 53 parties was adequacy of the AgScience Ltd ecological assessment and the resulting uncertainty in the substantive application's consideration of adverse ecological effects. Those comments note that the AgScience Ltd assessment considered adverse effects on ecology to be minor while recent ecological evidence provided on behalf of the section 53 parties suggests adverse effects could be significant. Therefore, considering the AgScience Ltd assessment and the evidence of the section 53 parties, those expert views lead to a degree of uncertainty in the potential adverse ecological effects of the Project.

16 As is discussed above, since the substantive application was lodged, we understand substantive further work has been carried out by Lodestone's experts to further characterise the ecological values present at the site and to understand potential adverse effects on those values. We have reviewed that work and while it is appreciated that it does not attempt to respond in full to the evidence provided by the section 53 parties, it is our assessment that this work goes some way towards resolving the uncertainty in the overall assessment of adverse effects on ecology.

17 For example, Mr Espie has provided input to the measures set out in Lodestone's Ecological Addendum and he considers those measures will ensure adverse effects on the sites floristic values are no more than minor. Mr Payne considers that the measures proposed by Lodestone will result in a significant increase in lizard habitat that greatly exceeds any temporary adverse effects associated with the disturbance and loss of lizard habitat. We note however, that those measures now being proffered by Lodestone have not yet been considered by the section 53 parties.

18 On the other hand, due to the timeframe required to respond to comments made by the section 53 parties, there has been limited opportunity for Lodestone and its experts to fully evaluate the evidence provided on behalf of the section 53 parties and consider any potential changes to the effects management measures being proffered. We therefore remain of the view that there is some remaining uncertainty regarding the adverse effects of the Project on ecology, particularly in relation to Avifauna.

19 In our experience, a level of uncertainty is not unusual in ecological effects assessments. It is quite normal for such effects to be met with monitoring and adaptive management responses. In this regard, Lodestone's experts have developed a framework of management responses and we have assisted Lodestone to capture these in proposed conditions which are discussed later in this evidence. We acknowledge that those conditions might require further refinement, in particular, if Lodestone's experts are persuaded by any of the ecological evidence provided by the section 53 parties such that their recommendations are amended. In our experience expert conferencing can be a useful tool to enable issues of conflicting views to be resolved, or at least narrowed, in a way that assists the Panel.

20 Finally, for the reasons we discuss later in this evidence, it is our opinion that there is no specific effects threshold that adverse effects need to be suppressed to ensure an application is granted. Equally, we are not aware of any specific effects threshold that would automatically cause an application for approvals to be declined. In making that observation we note

that the proportionality test outlined in section 85(3) of the FTAA *may* be relied upon by the panel to decline approval. However, the panel is not required to decline approval only because the Project fails the proportionality test.

6. PLANNING FRAMEWORK AND ASSESSMENT

21 Several section 53 parties observe changes in the planning framework that have occurred since the substantive application was lodged. This includes amendments to a number of the national direction instruments, including the National Policy Statement for Renewable Electricity Generation, and settling of appeals on Stage 3 of the Mackenzie District Plan (**MDP**) Review. We therefore provide an updated assessment of the Project against the amended provisions and our response to comments considers the changes to this planning framework.

22 Specifically of relevance to this project are the provisions relating to the development of electricity infrastructure including both Renewable Electricity Generation (**REG**) activities and electricity networks which we discuss below.

23 At the outset we note that the provisions of each relevant planning document must be read alongside those set out in other relevant planning documents. Here we note that decision makers must undertake a fair appraisal of the objectives and policies read as a whole and avoid considering the provisions in isolation in a manner that does not reasonably reflect the broad intent of the provisions. As such, relevant policies relating to Outstanding Natural Landscapes (**ONL's**) or indigenous biodiversity must be read alongside the relevant REG provisions included in the relevant national, regional and district planning documents.

24 Considering the above, we agree with F&B's comments at their paragraph 115 regarding the planning framework not providing a definitive answer as to whether approval should be granted or declined. Rather, an overall evaluation is necessary, and in our experience, that may require placing

specific emphasis or weight on certain provisions should those be of higher relevance or more directive.

6.1 Updates to National Direction Instruments

25 Several section 53 parties observe changes to relevant national direction instruments as relevant to the Project.[2] We agree these changes require consideration by the Panel and we set out our assessment of the Project against the relevant amended national direction below.

26 Ten national direction instruments were approved by the Governor-General on 15 December 2025. Each instrument was publicly notified in the New Zealand Gazette on 18 December 2025 and came into force on 15 January 2026. Three of the instruments are new and seven are amendments to existing instruments. Those of relevance to the Project are:

(a) The National Policy Statement for Renewable Electricity Generation Amendment 2025 (**NPS-REG**); and

(b) The National Policy Statement for Electricity Networks Amendment 2025 (**NPS-EN**).[3]

27 The implications of the new and amended policy instruments are highly relevant to our response to the section 53 comments received for the Project and therefore we provide an assessment of the Project against these amended provisions below and refer to these further to inform our response to other policy matters raised in the comments below.

National Policy Statement for Renewable Electricity Generation Amendment 2025

28 The NPS-REG amendment sets out to drive a consistent approach to planning for renewable electricity generation in New Zealand. It gives clear

[2] Including Hon Chris Bishop, F&B, MDC, DOC, CRC.

[3] Formerly the National Policy Statement on Electricity Transmission 2028.

government direction on the benefits of enabling renewable electricity generation and requires all councils to make provision for it in their plans.

29 We consider the amendments to the NPS-REG are highly relevant to the Project and this was also noted in a number of comments received, including from Mackenzie District Council and Environment Canterbury. As such, we have provided an updated assessment of the Project against the amended NPS-REG below.

30 The NPS-REG applies to all *renewable electricity generation activities* associated with the construction, operation, maintenance and decommissioning of the Haldon Solar Project and provides the most relevant national direction for the Project, including the management of effects of those activities. Understanding the application of the NPS-REG to the project therefore requires consideration of the definitions within the NPS-REG. Relevantly, "renewable electricity generation activities" is defined as follows (our emphasis):

> *"Renewable electricity generation (REG) activities include the full range of activities required for REG, including small-scale and community-scale REG, including:*
>
> *a) the investigation, construction, operation, monitoring, maintenance, upgrade, repowering, decommissioning and removal of REG assets;*
>
> *b) the storage of generated electricity, whether connected to REG, the electricity network or directly to a site or community;*
>
> *c) the conveyance of generated electricity to electricity networks or directly to end users;*
>
> *d) all ancillary REG activities; but*
>
> *e)* ***does not include electricity network assets as defined by the National Policy Statement for Electricity Transmission 2008 and its amendments***.

31 In addition, the amendments insert a new definition of "**Ancillary renewable electricity generation activities**" that provides:

An activity that supports and is subsidiary to a REG activity including but not limited to:

a) vegetation clearance and tree trimming;

b) earthworks and land disturbance;

c) construction, maintenance, repair and upgrading of access tracks, bridges and culverts; and

d) construction, maintenance, repair and upgrading of power supply and telecommunication cables and devices.

32 Further, the NPS-REG inserts a new definition of "**Renewable electricity generation assets**" that provides:

The physical components and structures for REG, including small-scale and community-scale REG, and includes:

a) the supporting infrastructure required for ancillary REG activities and to generate and store electricity, such as monitoring equipment, cabling, access tracks and roads; and

b) the infrastructure required to convey generated and stored electricity to electricity networks or directly to end users.

33 We discuss the definition of electricity network assets below in relation to the NPS-EN. Applying the above definitions to the Project, it is our opinion that all activities associated with the Project except the portion of the proposed substation that will be operated by Transpower (as identified in Figure 30 of the substantive application) and the associated National Grid transmission line upgrade (which are defined as "electricity network assets" [4]) are captured as **renewable electricity generation activities**.

34 The NPS-REG amendments replace the objective with the following:

"The objective of this National Policy Statement is to:

[4] In the NPS-EN **electricity network assets (EN assets)** means the physical components of the EN and any physical components of ancillary EN activities that support operation of the EN.

a) *ensure the national, regional and local benefits of REG are provided for;*

b) *enable REG capacity and output to significantly increase;*

c) *enable REG to support the social, economic and cultural well-being of people and communities, and for their health and safety;*

d) *enable REG to provide greater security of electricity supply and resilience to supply disruptions to all people and communities;*

e) *enable REG to support achieving New Zealand's emission reduction target and implementation of the emissions reduction plan under the Climate Change Response Act 2002; and*

f) *ensure REG is developed and operated in a safe, efficient and effective manner while managing the adverse effects from or on REG activities."*

35 The objective of the NPS-REG provides strong direction towards enabling renewable electricity generation activities, noting the national, regional and local benefits they generate. The Haldon Solar Project is strongly aligned with this objective, as described in detail in the substantive application. The Haldon Solar Project is expected to generate approximately 370 gigawatt hours of renewable electricity annually, sufficient to meet the energy needs of around 45,000 households. The Project will therefore provide a significant contribution towards electricity supply and resilience and reducing carbon emissions. While there is some dispute about the way in which the benefits of the project should be determined and evaluated, the outright generation capacity of the Project is not something that is disputed by the section 53 parties.

36 The NPS-REG replaces policies A-D and revokes policies E1-E4, F and G for new policies E and H. These various changes are briefly assessed below.

37 Policy A of the NPS-REG requires the Panel to recognise the national significance and benefits of renewable electricity generation and notes the benefits of these activities which decision makers must recognise and provide for as follows:

1) *Decision-makers on REG activities must recognise and provide for the national significance and the national, regional and local benefits of REG activities.*

2) *Decision-makers must recognise that the benefits of REG activities include:*

   a) *avoiding, reducing and displacing greenhouse gas emissions;*

   b) *contributing to the security, resilience and independence of electricity supply at local, regional and national scales through diverse REG sources and electricity storage in diverse locations;*

   c) *providing for the social, economic and cultural wellbeing of people and communities and for their health and safety;*

   d) *using renewable rather than finite sources of energy;*

   e) *avoiding reliance on imported and domestic fossil fuels for the purposes of generating electricity;*

   f) *the temporary and reversible nature of adverse effects on the environment of some REG technologies;*

   g) *reducing electricity losses by locating REG activities close to electricity demand and existing electricity networks; and*

   h) *reducing adverse effects by:*

      i. *co-locating REG with other appropriate REG assets and activities and other appropriate infrastructure and activities; and*

      ii. *locating REG activities to minimise adverse effects on other activities.*

38 The Project is highly consistent with, and supported by, the above policy direction given it is to large degree a REG activity that will deliver significant national, regional and local benefits. The Project will result in benefits, including economic benefits, contribution to New Zealand's decarbonisation goals and electricity system resilience. This will contribute to the social and economic wellbeing of people and communities and reduce reliance on non-renewable energy resources.

39 Policy B requires decision-makers to consider cumulative gains and losses of renewable electricity generation capacity:

> *1) Decision-makers on REG assets and activities must recognise and provide for the importance of:*
>
> *a) enabling cumulative increases of REG capacity and output at any scale and any location, including small-scale and community-scale REG assets and activities; and*
>
> *b) avoiding, where practicable, any overall or cumulative losses of REG capacity and output from a region or district or existing REG assets and activities.*
>
> *2) Decision-makers must have regard to any potential and reasonably foreseeable reduction in the utilisation of renewable electricity resources from inappropriate subdivision, use and development.*

40 Policy B seeks the enabling of REG capacity and output at any scale at any location. This policy direction directs decision makers to recognise the importance of increasing REG capacity, reflecting the need of New Zealand to have a secure and reliable electricity system both now and into the future. This Project is clearly aligned with this policy and will contribute to meeting the New Zealand government's goal of doubling renewable electricity generation by 2050. Projects such as this must be enabled in order to meet these goals.

41 Further, enabling the cumulative increase of REG capacity is particularly relevant to this Project. We note that there are other solar projects located in the area of the Project site that are also being considered. Policy B provides strong support for the establishment of the Haldon Solar Farm whether or not other solar farms are being proposed.

42 Policy C of the amended NPS-REG provides clearer direction on the operational or functional need of renewable electricity generation activities to be located in particular locations and environments as follows:

1) *Decision-makers must recognise and provide for REG assets and activities that have an operational need or functional need to be in particular locations and environments.*

2) *Decision-makers must recognise that the operational need or functional need of REG assets and activities includes, but is not limited to, the need to:*

   a) *be located where a renewable electricity resource is located and available at a viable scale and quality to sustain the REG activity;*

   b) *be accessible and to connect to electricity networks and be nearby to electricity demand; and*

   c) *have sufficient and accessible land available to support all associated current and reasonably foreseeable future REG activities at that particular location.*

3) *An assessment of alternative sites is not required to demonstrate that an operational or functional need exists.*

43 In accordance with the above policy, the Project has a functional and operational need to be in this location. In particular we note that solar farms must be located in sites where there is a high quality solar resource, of which, the Project Site is located within an area of high solar irradiance. Further, large solar farms such as Haldon must be located in close proximity to the National Grid transmission network in order to connect to this network. The existing BEN-ISL-A 220 kV National Grid transmission line that traverses the Project Site provides that ability for the solar farm to connect to the National Grid without needing to construct new overhead lines. In addition, Lodestone has entered into an agreement with the landowner to enable the construction and operation of the solar farm on this site.

44 We therefore agree with Mr Boyes for MDC and with the substantive application that the Project has a functional and operational need to located at the site.

45 Policy E seeks to recognise and provide for Māori interests:

1) *Decision-makers must recognise and provide for Māori interests in relation to REG assets and activities, including by:*

   a) *Taking into account the outcome of any engagement with tangata whenua on a relevant resource consent, notice of requirement or private plan change;*

   b) *Recognising the opportunities tangata whenua may have in developing and operating their own REG activities at any scale or in partnership; and*

   c) *Local authorities:*

      i. *providing opportunities for tangata whenua involvement where REG assets and activities may affect a site of significance or issue of cultural significance to Māori; and*

      ii. *operating in a way that is consistent with any relevant iwi participation legislation or Mana Whakahono ā Rohe*.

46 The Haldon Solar Project falls within the area of Tauwharekura (mapped as SASM9 in the District Plan) and is adjacent to Te Pā-o-Kāti-Kuri (SASM48) and Te Ao Marama (SASM 19).

47 We acknowledge that only the Papatipu Rūnanga can speak with authority regarding cultural interests and values. We understand Lodestone's engagement with Ngā Rūnanga is ongoing and will continue beyond the consenting phase of the development to ensure that those interests and values are understood and provided for where possible. We note that a Kaitiaki Governance Group framework has been developed with Ngā Rūnanga for this purpose, as set out in the updated resource consent conditions.

48 Policy F directs decision-makers on enabling and managing the effects of renewable electricity generation activities on the environment as follows:

1) *Decision-makers must enable REG assets and activities in all locations and environments*.

2) *Where REG assets and activities are proposed to locate in or are likely to have adverse effects on environments and values provided for in section 6 of the*

Act, the provisions of this policy must be read alongside other relevant national direction, regional policy statements and regional and district plans.

3) *Where (2) does not apply, the adverse effects of REG assets and activities must be, where practicable, avoided, remedied or mitigated.*

4) *Decision-makers must have particular regard to the use of adaptive management measures.*

5) *When considering any residual adverse effects of REG assets and activities that cannot be avoided, remedied or mitigated, decision-makers shall have regard to offsetting measures or environmental compensation, including measures or compensation that benefit the local environment and community affected.*

49 Policy F seeks to enable REG assets and activities in all locations and environments. The Haldon Solar Project is located within the Mackenzie Basin Outstanding Natural Landscape (**ONL**) and the site meets the criteria of the Canterbury Regional Policy Statement (**RPS**) for a "significant natural area" due to the presence of threatened species. It is also noted that the Project falls within or is adjacent to Sites of Significance to Māori ("**SASM**") as identified in the Mackenzie District Plan. Therefore, the policy direction to enable REG activities in all locations must also be read alongside the relevant policy direction for these environments outlined in the regional and district plans. We address this further below, however, for completeness note that we have assessed the project as being consistent with the relevant policy direction.

50 In recognition of these values, a comprehensive effects management response has been developed that appropriately responds to the landscape, ecological and cultural values that may be affected. This includes the application of the effects management hierarchy framework and the adoption of adaptive management measures to manage potential effects on ecology, and the development of a Cultural Monitoring Programme in consultation with Nga Runanga that responds to cultural matters. The Panel must therefore have regard to these proposed management measures when considering this Project in accordance with Policy F of the NPS-REG.

51 In summary, in our view the amendments to the NPS-REG are highly supportive of REG activities and weigh further in favour of the granting of the approvals sought by Lodestone for the Haldon Solar Project. The policy direction clearly directs decision makers to recognise the national significance of Projects such as this and the need for increased renewable electricity generation in New Zealand. The amended NPS-REG provides policy direction on a number of matters that are relevant to the Project, including the functional and operational need for REG activities and the management of environmental effects of these activities. The Project is consistent with this direction.

7. NATIONAL POLICY STATEMENT FOR ELECTRICITY NETWORKS AMENDMENT 2025

52 The NPS-EN replaces the National Policy Statement on Electricity Transmission 2008. Clause 1.3 sets out that the NPS-EN applies to all electricity network activities, including all electricity transmission and distribution networks and ancillary electricity network activities. Those terms are defined in the NPS-EN as follows:

> ***electricity network (EN)*** *means the electricity transmission network (ETN) and the electricity distribution network (EDN).*
>
> ***electricity transmission network (ETN)*** *means all assets and activities that provide electricity transmission and that:*
>
> *a) comprise the network of transmission lines, and cables (overhead, underground and submarine, including the high-voltage direct current link), stations and substations, support structures, facilities and works;*
>
> *b) includes ancillary EN activities;*
>
> *c) includes other works necessary to connect grid injection points and grid exit points to convey electricity;*
>
> *d) is owned or used by Transpower New Zealand Limited;*
>
> *e) and is commonly known as the National Grid*

The ETN does not include the electricity distribution network (EDN).

Electricity distribution network (EDN) *means all assets and activities that provide electricity distribution and that:*

a) is owned or used by a person or body who is both an electricity distributor and an electricity operator;

b) comprise the network of distribution lines, cables (overhead, underground or submarine), switching stations, support structures, substations, transformers, kiosks, cabinets, connections to grid exit points, customer connections, and works used to distribute electricity from the electricity transmission network or generation activities; and

c) includes ancillary EN activities.

Ancillary electricity network activities *(ancillary EN activities) mean all supporting and subsidiary activities necessary to provide for the EN and EN assets, including, but not limited to:*

a) vegetation clearance and tree trimming;

b) earthworks and land disturbance;

c) construction, maintenance, repair and upgrading of access tracks, accessways, bridges and culverts; and

d) construction, maintenance, repair and upgrading of power supply, telecommunication cables and devices

53 Of relevance to the Project, the proposed upgrades to the existing National Grid transmission line and construction and operation of the part of the substation that will be owned and operated by Transpower meet the definition of electricity transmission network, and as such, the NPS-EN is applicable to these aspects of the Project.

54 The NPS-EN sets out the objective and policies for managing the electricity transmission network and includes:

(a) acknowledgement of the national significance of the national grid, which has to be considered in local decision making on resource management;

(b) guidance to local decision makers in the management of the impacts of the transmission network on its environment;

(c) recognition of the national benefits of electricity transmission, such as better security of supply of electricity;

(d) guidance on the management of the adverse effects of activities from third parties on the grid which helps reduce constraints on the operation, maintenance, upgrading and development of the grid; and

(e) long-term strategic planning for elements of the national grid.

55 The Objective of the NPS-EN has been replaced with the following:

"The national significance of the electricity network is recognised, protected and provided for, so that the network:

a) is upgraded, improved and resilient to provide for the social, economic and cultural well-being of present and future generations and their health and safety;

b) is developed and operated in a timely, efficient, and ongoing manner while managing adverse effects from or on the EN; and

c) supports achievement of New Zealand's climate change mitigation and renewable energy targets."

56 Further, the following updates have been made to the policies of the NPS-EN:

(a) Replacement of Policy 1 (National significance and benefits);

(b) Insertion of new Policies 3 (Māori Interests) and 4 (Site, route and method selection);

(c) Replacement of Policies 2 to 9 (Providing for EN activities and managing the effects of proposed EN activities on the environment);

(d) Replacement of Policies 10 and 11 (Managing the effects of third parties on the EN); and

(e) Replacement of Policies 12 to 14 (long-term special and strategic planning for the EN).

57 We provide an analysis of the Project against the above amendments to the NPS-EN below.

58 The Project satisfies the overall Objective of the NPS-EN in terms of contributing to the safe and efficient operation of the electricity network through the diversification of electricity supply and, as a source of renewable electricity generation, support the network in achieving New Zealand's climate change mitigation and renewable electricity targets, and dry year resilience.

59 Policy 1 directs decision makers to recognise and provide for the national significance of the EN. The proposed upgrade to the transmission line and new substation, which will primarily be operated by Transpower, is therefore supported by this policy direction. These components of the Project are integral to the operation of the Haldon Solar Project, as they will enable the electricity generated from the solar farm to be injected to the National Grid, and therefore, will ensure the benefits of the Project can be realised.

60 Policy 2 of the NPS-EN requires decision-makers to recognise the benefits of the EN, including that it provides for the social, economic and cultural well-being of people and communities, provides services essential to support human life and the growth, development and functioning of New Zealand, and provides for the efficient storage and transfer of electricity.

61 The proposed Project activities relevant to the NPS-EN will therefore directly contribute to delivering these benefits and will support the development of a

new REG activities. This will therefore support the electrification of the economy and contribute to resilience of the electricity system.

62 In regard to Policy 3, as noted above, Lodestone acknowledges that only the Papatipu Rūnanga can speak with authority regarding cultural interests and values. Engagement with Ngā Rūnanga is ongoing and will continue beyond the consenting phase of the development to ensure that those interests and values are understood and provided for where possible.

63 Acknowledging that the Haldon Solar Project is within the Mackenzie Basin ONL, Policy 6 is relevant in that it asks decision makers to ensure that non-routine electricity network activities (such as new connections) seek to avoid effects on ONLs. Through the design and siting of the network connection in close proximity to the existing national grid assets, Lodestone has sought to avoid adverse effects on the ONL by minimising the extent of or need for any additional transmission lines (and the potential adverse effects that may arise from their construction and operation).

64 In turn, Policy 7 sets out that the operational or functional need for the electricity network should be provided for, including in terms of connecting electricity generation, wherever located. The Project has an operational need to be located near the existing National Grid network to provide the connection for the solar farm to the National Grid. An element of the effective and efficient functioning of the electricity network is connecting electricity generation, wherever located, to improve the electricity network resilience, and to increase and improve capacity to meet changing demand and supply, as matters that are to be recognised and provided for.

65 Policy 8 also anticipates that the operational or functional need for the electricity network to be located in areas such as ONLs, may give rise to unavoidable adverse effects on those environments. Again, we note there is an existing National Grid transmission line that crosses through the site, and therefore, such activities in this location are consistent with the existing environment.

66 We also note the Project achieves consistency with Policies 11 and 12 as Lodestone has engaged directly with Transpower and expert consultants in relation to the design and specifications for the proposed network connection, and in terms of setbacks from the National Grid assets when considering the layout of the solar farm.

67 Overall, we consider the electricity network activities associated with the Haldon Solar Project are consistent with the policy intent of the NPS-EN.

68 In summary, for the purposes of applying the relevant national direction, the Project can be virtually partitioned by the line dividing the Lodestone portion of the proposed substation from the Transpower portion as illustrated on Figure 30 of the substantive application. All aspects of the project on the Lodestone side are considered renewable electricity generation activities (or ancillary renewable electricity generation activities) and subject to the NPS-REG. All other activities on the Transpower side of the line including connection to the existing National Grid are subject to the NPS-EN. This partitioning of the Project also assists with interpretation of the District Plan discussed later in this evidence.

8. REGIONAL POLICY STATEMENT

69 We are not aware of any changes having been made to the provisions of the Canterbury Regional Policy Statement ("**CRPS**") since the substantive application for the Project was lodged. Section 53 comments relating to the provisions of the CPRS provide some recognition of the Chapter 16 provisions relating to energy, however, comments tend to emphasise the direction at Chapter 9 to protect areas of ecological significance to ensure no net loss of indigenous biodiversity value[5] without necessarily recognising the tensions that exist between that direction and other direction in the RPS.

70 In our experience, it is common for there to be tension between provisions that enable infrastructure such as renewable electricity generation and

[5] See, for example, comments received from F&B, DOC, EDS and CRC.

provisions which seek to protect the environments in which that infrastructure might locate. The Panel will be aware that a degree of balance will be required when evaluating the Project against potentially competing policy directives. In this instance, however, we agree with helpful observation made by F&B at paragraph 128 of their comments that the Panel can rely on the MDP as giving effect to the relevant provisions of the CRPS. In other words, the MDP provisions can be seen as resolving the tension in the CRPS considering the local context. For that reason, we do not consider that further assessment or discussion of the CRPS, including in response to specific comments made by CRC, would be overly helpful for the Panel. Instead, we focus on the provisions of the MDP which are more relevant to the local site context.

9. MACKENZIE DISTRICT PLAN

71 As noted above, and as set out in the evidence prepared by Mr Boyes on behalf of MDC, when the substantive application for the Project was submitted, some appeals remained on provisions relevant to the REG chapter of the MDP (Stage 3 of the District Plan Review). Therefore, the substantive application considered the provisions of both the Proposed Mackenzie District Plan and the Operative Mackenzie District Plan.[6] These appeals have since been resolved, and as such, Stage 3 has been made operative and consideration no longer needs to be given to the provisions of the previous plan. For completeness, we note that some parts of Stage 4 of the MDP Review remain subject to appeal, but we note those provisions subject to appeal are not relevant to the Project. As such, the Project no longer needs to be assessed against the previous version of the Mackenzie District Plan.

72 Mr Boyes helpfully sets out the District planning context in his paragraphs 100 to 171. We generally agree with the assessment of the MDP provisions set out in Mr Boyes' evidence except where discussed below.

[6] As explained in Section 5.3.2 of the substantive application.

73 Several section 53 parties identify policy REG-P6 as being a key policy of direct relevance to the Project. We agree REG-P6 is highly relevant and is the key guiding policy in relation to the management of effects associated with the REG activities associated with the Project. REG-P6 states:

> *Provide for renewable electricity generation activities (not otherwise specified in REG-P3 and REG-P4) within areas of significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna, Outstanding Natural Landscapes, Outstanding Natural Features, Sites and Areas of Significance to Māori, riparian areas, or within area of Highly Productive Land, where:*
>
> 1. *there is a functional need or operational need for the activity to be in that location;*
> 2. *adverse effects on the values of the area are avoided as far as practicable, including through site, route or method selection, design measures and other management methods;*
> 3. *adverse effects on the values of the area that cannot be avoided are remedied or mitigated, where practicable;*
> 4. *other adverse effects (that do not affect the values of the area) are avoided, remedied or mitigated as far as practicable;*
> 5. *regard is had to any proposed offsetting measures or environmental compensation (including considering Policy 4 in Section 19 and Appendix Z), where there are significant residual adverse effects that cannot be avoided, remedied or mitigated; and*
> 6. *particular regard is had to the practical constraints associated with renewable electricity generation activities, including the:*
>
> a) *location and efficient use of existing electricity generation, transmission and distribution infrastructure; and*
>
> b) *the need to locate the renewable electricity generation activity where the renewable energy resource is located.*

7. *following application of 1-6 above, consideration is given to whether the benefits of the activity outweigh any significant residual adverse effects on the values of the area.*

The direction in REG-P6 does not apply in relation to managing adverse effects on the outstanding natural landscape and features of Te Manahuna/the Mackenzie Basin where REG-P2[7] applies.

74 As we discuss above, the functional and operational need of the proposal is well established and, in our observation, not disputed by the section 53 parties. As such, overall avoidance of adverse effects is not an outcome directed by REG-P6. We therefore agree with the comments made by F&B at their paragraph 138 where they state:

> *"Policy REG-P6 does not require the strict avoidance of adverse effects in all circumstances. As noted above, where there will be significant residual adverse effects despite any appropriate offsetting or compensation measures, REG-P6.7 provides for a proportionality assessment of whether the benefits of the activity outweigh any significant residual adverse effects on the values of the area."*

75 It follows that REG-P6 contemplates some degree of adverse effect but does not set a threshold for what is considered an overall acceptable level of adverse effect.

76 In our assessment, to properly assess the alignment (or otherwise) of the proposal with REG-P6 requires an understanding of the adverse effects and residual adverse effects on the *values* of the site. In paragraph 19 of our evidence, we outline the current residual uncertainty in relation to the assessment ecological effects and make suggestions around what could be done to reduce that uncertainty. Considering that uncertainty, we provide an evaluation of the outcomes that we consider REG-P6 directs, rather than a direct evaluation of the Project against the policy.

[7] REG-P2 relates to infrastructure and operations existing on 1 October 2011.

77 Noting REG-P6 is not specific to ecological effects, we are of the view that if residual adverse effects (including ecological) are managed to levels that are not significant, REG-P6 would not weigh against the granting of the approvals sought. In our view, therefore, it would be helpful if the ecological experts could converge on an effects management regime that ensures residual adverse effects are not significant. If that cannot be achieved, we emphasise that REG-P6.7 still invites the proportionality assessment in relation to the project benefits, as does the FTAA at s85(3). In which case, the Panel must take into account the benefits of the Project, as discussed in detail in the substantive application, when considering the Project against REG-P6.

78 As we and F&B observe, similar direction is also provided under section 85(3) of the FTAA, whereby the Panel may only decline approval if it forms the view that the adverse impacts of the Project are sufficiently significant to be out of proportion to the project's regional or national benefits, even after taking into account any conditions set in relation to those adverse impacts including conditions requiring offsetting or compensation.

79 F&B contends at paragraph 135 that consideration of biodiversity offsetting or biodiversity compensation under REG-P6 is required because Mr Head and Dr McClelland consider the adverse effects to be significant. They then go on to refer to the criteria for biodiversity offsetting and biodiversity compensation set out in Policy 4 of Section 19 and Appendix Z. If by reference to these criteria, F&B is implying that these criteria are essential for any offsetting or compensation measure to be considered in the REG-P6 framework, we do not share that view. Instead, reading REG-P6 on its face, it requires decision makers to *consider* those criteria when having regard to any offsetting or compensation measures that form part of the effects management framework. In our view, more directive wording would have been used if the intention was to enshrine these criteria in the effects management framework for RE

80 We acknowledge the comments by Mr Boyes and others raising concerns around the application of the effects management hierarchy to the management of ecological effects. In response to those comments and broader concerns around ecological effects, the proposed conditions have been updated to address identified uncertainties to the extent possible, noting that it is acknowledged that further work is likely to be required to further reduce uncertainty and encourage expert alignment. We discuss these changes in further detail below and overall we consider the proposed updated condition set provides an appropriate framework to address the potential adverse ecological effects that could result from the Project.

81 Turning to the Infrastructure (**INF**) Chapter of the MDP which we consider to be applicable to those parts of the Project defined as electricity network assets as discussed above. We agree with Mr Boyes that the construction of the Transpower part of the substation will require resource consent as a discretionary activity under the INF provisions, as contemplated by the substantive application.

82 The key policy that guides the management of adverse effects of infrastructure is INF-P5 which states:

Avoid locating infrastructure in identified sensitive areas (outside the road reserve) or within an area of significant indigenous vegetation or significant habitat of indigenous fauna, unless:

1. *there is a functional or operational need for the infrastructure to be in that location;*
2. *it is demonstrated through site, route or method selection, design measures and other management methods how significant adverse effects on the values of the sensitive or significant area have been avoided as far as practicable, and otherwise remedied or mitigated;*
3. *more than minor residual adverse effects are avoided, remedied or mitigated and where they cannot be, regard is had to any offsetting or compensation; and*

4. *Following application of 1. - 3. above, there are no significant adverse effects remaining, (except that this clause shall not apply to the National Grid).*

83 In our assessment, INF-P5 in relation to the electricity network assets directs a similar outcome to REG-P6 in relation to renewable electricity generation activities. That is, avoidance is preferred but where a functional or operational need is established, some adverse effects are contemplated. We also note that INF-P5 is more lenient towards National Grid assets which the proposed infrastructure parts of the Project will ultimately be.

84 Mr Boyes identifies the other provisions of the MDP that apply to Infrastructure activities at paragraph 161 of his evidence. Whilst we agree that, as set out in Table 1 of the Infrastructure Chapter, Rules SASM-R5 and SASM-R6 apply to these Infrastructure activities, and therefore if the proposed substation is considered a 'hazardous facility' resource consent is required for a non-complying activity under rule SASM-R6. As Mr Boyes notes however, there is some uncertainty about that as "hazardous facility" is not defined in the MDP or the RMA. Mr Boyes' concludes that a precautionary approach would be to consider the activity as a non-complying activity under SASM-R6. We agree a precautionary approach would land there if one was necessary.

85 However, we note that in accordance with clause 17(1)(b) of Schedule 5 of the FTAA, section 104D of the RMA is not relevant to the decision making under the FTAA for non-complying activities. Therefore, if the proposal falls to be a non-complying activity due to the application of SASM-R6, in our view that is of no consequence to the determination required by the Panel.

86 Turning to the SASM objectives and policies, comments received from Te Rūnanga o Arowhenua note that the substantive application does not provide a detailed assessment of the objectives and policies of the SASM chapter of the MDP. While Mr Boyes considers these provisions would apply if resource consent is required under SASM-R6, we do not share that view. Table 1 of the Infrastructure chapter clearly sets out the other provisions of

the MDP that apply to Infrastructure activities. In regard to the SASM chapter, it explicitly lists the two rules SASM-R5 and SASM-R6 and no other provisions are noted. Comparatively, for other topics, Table 1 identifies all provisions or specific policies associated with the topics that do apply to Infrastructure activities. In our view, if the intent of the MDP was that the policies of the SASM chapter apply to Infrastructure activities where resource consent is required under Rules SASM-R5 or SASM-R6, then these policies would also be listed in this table. As such, we consider the relevant policy direction for these activities are instead provided for in the Infrastructure chapter of the MDP. We note that INF-P5 provides direction for managing infrastructure activities on sensitive sites such that reliance on the SASM policies is not necessary.

87 Mr Boyes' comments relating to the lighting and noise provisions are acknowledged. We confirm proposed condition 32 in relation to noise has been updated to reflect the District Plan time format as suggested.

88 Mr Boyes agrees with our assessment that the portion of the proposed substation that will be operated by Transpower (as identified in Figure 30 of the substantive application), as well as the proposed upgrades to the existing transmission line, should be assessed under the provisions of the Infrastructure chapter of the MDP.

10. CONDITIONS

89 Comments received in relation to conditions were included in the section 53 reports received from the following parties:

(a) Minister for the Environment;

(b) Te Rūnanga o Ngai Tahu;

(c) Te Rūnanga o Arowhenua;

(d) Te Rūnanga o Moeraki and Te Rūnanga o Waihao;

(e) Canterbury Regional Council;

(f) Mackenzie District Council;

(g) Department of Conservation;

(h) Royal Forest and Bird Society;

(i) Environmental Defence Society;

(j) Meridian Energy;

(k) Transpower; and

(l) NZ Transport Agency.

90 We have considered the comments and the suggested additions and amendments made by the various commenters and prepared an updated set of proposed conditions for each of the approvals sought, included as Addendum 5a (CRC amended conditions) and Addendum 5b (MDC amended conditions) of the Applicant's response. Where we agree with the suggested amendments or have made additions, we have included these as tracked changes. Where we disagree with the suggested amendments we have stated why.

91 Where the comments relate to ecological matters, our responses are informed by the following:

(a) *Terrestrial Invertebrate Assessment*, prepared by SLR Consulting New Zealand Limited

(m) *Lizard Assessment*, prepared by Blueprint Ecology Limited;

(b) *Statistical Advice for a Solar Power Installation at Haldon Station*, prepared by Proteus; and

(c) The Ecological Addendum prepared by the Applicant setting out their proposed response to avoiding, minimising, mitigating, offsetting and (if necessary) compensating of effects on ecology.

92 In relation to conditions, a recurrent theme of comments received from the Minister for the Environment, CRC, MDC, DOC, F&B and EDS is the requirement for or adequacy of conditions relating to ecological management.

93 As is discussed in the Ecological Addendum prepared by the Applicant, there has been differing advice on the ecological values present at the site, with the condition set as proffered with the substantive application reflecting the view of AgScience that only a limited response to ecological effects was needed on the basis that the ecological values on the site were low. Based on the further advice of CRC and DOC staff and the undertaking of additional surveys, the Applicant has accepted that a more fulsome management response is required to some of the unique ecological values that have now been confirmed on the site. The detail of that proposed response is set out in the Ecological Addendum supported by the revised conditions.

94 The proposed response to ecological management is supported by the introduction of a range of additional conditions relating to ecological management, specifically threatened of at-risk vascular plants, herpetofauna, invertebrates and avifauna. The ecological conditions:

(a) Codify the proposed response in the Ecological Addendum;

(b) Provide a management plan framework that sets out the respective management objectives and the matters to be considered (including monitoring and methods to avoid, minimise, mitigate, offset or (if required) compensate impacts);

(c) In the case of avifauna, provide an adaptive management framework including triggers in response to solar farm-related bird mortality; and

(d) Set out the requirements for specialist inputs into the development of the management plans, and the process for their certification.

95 As is evident from the comments received, the relevant statutory agencies will be interested in the form and substance of the ecological conditions as proposed. The Applicant has expressed a willingness for further engagement with those parties to assist with their refinement should that be necessary.

96 Other than in response to ecological management, CRC and MDC provided detailed comments and confirmed that they were generally comfortable with the remaining conditions. Some suggested changes and amendments on technical matters have been provided by their respective expert peer reviewers, and in terms of alignment with the relevant planning frameworks. The condition set has been also amended to accommodate various administrative matters that have largely been accepted in the updated condition set.

97 Te Rūnanga o Ngai Tahu and Te Rūnanga o Arowhenua suggested changes to the form and function of the Kaitiaki Governance Group and the establishment of a Cultural Monitoring programme. The Applicant has expressed a willingness to accept these changes, representing an appropriate response to matters raised.

98 Transpower and NZ Transport Agency have largely agreed conditions relating to potential effects on their assets and interests with minor amendments accepted to align with their requirements. The Applicant has also accepted a specific condition sought by Meridian Energy Ltd that responds to potential inundation from an uncontrolled release of water from the Waitaki Power Scheme.

99 Notwithstanding any changes that have been made to this point, it is acknowledged that this may not be the final opportunity to look at conditions due to the requirements of section 70 of the Fast Track Approvals Act.

Ethan Glover and Mark Henry

10 February 2026

Appendix A

QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE OF MARK HENRY

My full name is Mark Alan Clive Henry.

I hold a Master of Science degree in Earth Sciences from the University of Waikato and hold memberships with the Resource Management Law Association and New Zealand Geothermal Association.

I am an Associate at Mitchell Daysh Limited, which practices as a resource management planning and environmental consultancy firm throughout New Zealand. I have over 30 years of experience in resource management. I have worked in numerous renewable electricity projects across New Zealand, including hydro-electric schemes, geothermal power generation, wind and solar farms, as well various large-scale infrastructure and primary resource-related projects.

Below is a selection of key clients and projects I have been involved with:

- Lodestone Energy Ltd – consenting of Kairanga Solar; pre-feasibility of other solar development sites.
- Mercury (NZ) Ltd – consenting and consent implementation of Waikato Hydro System; Kawerau, Nga Awa Purua and Nga Tamariki Geothermal Power Stations; Turitea and Puketoi Wind Farms.
- Contact Energy Limited – consenting of Glenbrook and Stratford Battery Energy Storage System facilities.
- Fulton Hogan – Wellington and Dunedin Asphalt Production Facilities.

QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE OF ETHAN GLOVER

My full name is Ethan John Glover.

I hold a Bachelor of Science (Honours) degree in Physical Geography from the University of Otago. I am an associate member of the New Zealand Planning Institute.

I am an Associate at Mitchell Daysh Limited, which practices as a resource management planning and environmental consultancy firm throughout New Zealand. I have over 7 years of experience in resource management. I have worked in several renewable electricity and infrastructure projects across New Zealand, including solar farms, as well various large-scale infrastructure and primary resource-related projects.

Below is a selection of key clients and projects I have been involved with:

- Lodestone Energy Ltd – consenting of changes to consents at Clandeboye; pre-feasibility of other solar development sites.
- OceanaGold (New Zealand) Limited – consenting and consent implementation of various mine expansion projects at the Macraes Gold Project in Otago.
- Tasman Mining Limited – consenting of mining related infrastructure at the Snowy River gold mine.
- Wellington International Airport Limited – consenting of airport related infrastructure; district plan review.