Attachment 11

Far North Solar Farm Limited
Response to Section 53 Comments of the Environmental Defence Society Incorporated

FTAA-2509-1100 – The Point Solar Farm

26 February 2026

Executive Summary

1. Far North Solar Farm Limited (FNSF) provides this comprehensive response to the s53 comments of the Environmental Defence Society Incorporated (EDS) dated 19 February 2025, and the attached evidence of Dr Susan Walker (19 February 2026).
2. Since EDS filed its comments, FNSF has completed extensive additional fieldwork (February 2026) and completed final drafts of all ecological management plans for the Panel's consideration. These documents directly address the alleged information gaps and demonstrate **net ecological gain** on this already-modified site. FNSF has also formalised a $1,000,000 Avifauna Compensation Strategy with the Department of Conservation (DOC), paid on construction commencement, which funds targeted, Basin-wide actions for kakī and other Threatened/At Risk species (see attached "The Point Solar avifauna compensation options" and FNSF RFI response dated 23 February 2026, Appendix 9).
3. Canterbury Regional Council (CRC) has confirmed in its own s53 comments (19 February 2026) that the proposal is generally consistent with the CRPS and CLWRP, that effects can be appropriately managed, and that CRC sees "no reason that the project cannot go ahead" (subject to final conditions).
4. We address the points raised by EDS sequentially below, with direct references to the updated evidence.

EDS Paragraphs 1–3 (Introduction; support for renewables in the right location; question whether this is the right location; SNA/ONL status)

FNSF agrees that renewable energy generation should occur in appropriate locations and has always supported this principle. The February 2026 Wildlands surveys (Contract Report 6621h-vi) confirm that the **598 ha development footprint** (development area excluding the 81 ha enhancement zone) contains **very low indigenous vegetation values**:

- Dominant vegetation: exotic improved pasture grassland/herbfield (brome-hawkweed-sheep's sorrel-haresfoot trefoil and cocksfoot-lucerne-haresfoot trefoil types).
- Only two indigenous species were recorded **inside the solar array footprint**: resurrection lichen (*Xanthoparmelia semiviridis*, At Risk–Declining) in 10 plots (mostly southern brome grassland) and onion orchid (*Microtis unifolia*, Not Threatened) in two plots.
- No Threatened or At Risk **vascular** plants were recorded inside the panel area.

The periphery and adjacent terrace edges contain the higher-value habitats (stonefield drylands, gullies). These areas are **avoided** via generous setbacks and form part of the 81 ha Ecological Enhancement Zone. The Vegetation Management Plan (VMP, Wildlands 6621h-iii) and all other management plans (Avifauna 6621h-i, Lizard 6621h-v, Invertebrate 6621h-ii, Pest Mammal 6621h-iv) ensure protection and appropriate ecological enhancement in those zones.

The site is within the broader Mackenzie ONL and mapped SNA, but the **specific cultivated terrace** proposed for the installation of solar panels has been intensively farmed for decades. It does not exhibit the unmodified dryland ecosystem values that characterise the high-value parts of the Basin. This **is** the right location as envisaged in the recently amended NPS for Renewable Electricity Generation: large, flat, already-modified land with record-high irradiance, immediate proximity to existing Transpower lines, and co-location with Waitaki hydro electric power scheme (HEPS) for grid resilience. Mackenzie District Council (MDC) has agreed with FNSF's conclusions in paragraph 49 of their S53 submission, and this is also expanded on by Laila Alkamil in her evidence (Statement of Evidence - Laila Alkamil - The Point_250226).

EDS Paragraph 4 (Interrelationship between ONL and indigenous dryland values)

The interrelationship is accepted for the Mackenzie Basin overall. However, the February 2026 surveys show the development footprint contributes **minimally** to the ONL's ecological character. The ONL values relied on by EDS/Walker (such as indigenous dryland ecosystems, Threatened flora/fauna) are concentrated in unmodified outwash areas. The application site's cultivated pasture does not match those descriptions. Perimeter planting, low-profile panels, colour/height conditions, and the 81 ha enhancement zone will maintain or enhance the perceptual and ecological contribution of this modified parcel.

EDS Paragraph 5 (Walker's material issues)

5(a) Collision risk for Threatened/At-Risk birds

Collision risk for Threatened and At Risk birds is addressed first through avoidance and on-site mitigation, and then through compensation for any residual risk. The February 2026 surveys confirm low on-site habitat values inside the panel footprint, reducing the likelihood of regular use by these species (notwithstanding the high avifauna values in nearby braided river habitats). The finalised draft Avifauna Management Plan (Wildlands Contract Report 6621h-i, February 2026) and the proposed consent conditions set out a comprehensive suite of measures that reflect best practice and have been informed by DOC input.

Key on-site measures include:

- Pre-works surveys by a suitably qualified avifauna ecologist no more than eight days before works commence during the breeding season (1 July to 1 March), with repeat surveys if works pause for more than eight days or move to new areas.
- Establishment of 100-metre setbacks (or smaller where approved by a suitably qualified expert) around any nests of Threatened, At Risk or Not Threatened protected species, with total exclusion zones clearly demarcated.

- Design features to reduce collision risk, including anti-reflective coatings on panels, 3.8 – 4.8 metre spacing between panels, and a standard 55-degree night rest position from after sunset until before sunrise to minimise reflectivity at night.
- Vehicle speed limits on site, noise and vibration reduction, and avoidance of creating large areas of bare ground that could attract nesting.
- Systematic carcass monitoring with autopsy for three years post-construction (extendable if required), using statistically robust methods informed by a Literature Review Report on international and New Zealand bird-collision data.
- Clear mortality thresholds that trigger preparation of a Bird Collision Management Plan (BCMP), including potential additional deterrence or operational adjustments.
- An Incidental Discovery Protocol requiring immediate cessation of works within 100 metres of any newly discovered nest or injured bird, with reporting to the Site Manager and DOC.

These measures are given effect through the detailed Avifauna Monitoring Plan (AMP) and Bird Collision Management Plan requirements in the proposed consent conditions. Any residual risk after implementation of this full avoidance and mitigation package is then addressed through the $1,000,000 DOC Avifauna Compensation Strategy (ACS), which funds targeted Basin-wide actions. The ACS includes $595,000 for continued predator control in the Godley and Cass River areas (improving survival of kākī, black-fronted tern and other species); $405,000 for a dedicated transmitter tracking project to understand post-release movements and mortality of young kākī (including in relation to solar infrastructure); $35,000 for wetland enhancement; and $15,000 for instream invertebrate research to optimise release timing. Funds are ring-fenced, with annual monitoring and reporting to verify outcomes. This compensation package provides additionality and landscape-scale benefits that comprehensively offset any residual site-specific risk.

5(b) Project site forms part of Pukaki outwash ecosystem / nationally significant plants and fauna

The February 2026 surveys (32 RECCE plots + targeted searches) confirm **no nationally significant vascular plants or fauna inside the operational solar farm footprint**. The only At Risk species in the array area is resurrection lichen. All confirmed *Lepidium solandri* (Threatened – Nationally Critical) locations are on the southern gully scarp **outside** the solar farm footprint or off-site (six plants inside boundary on scarp; six off-site). *Carmichaelia vexillata* (At Risk – Declining) is a single individual inside the boundary but outside the panel area. Higher-value stonefield drylands and gullies are avoided or enhanced. The VMP includes threatened plant monitoring, adaptive grazing, and experimental dryland restoration on the periphery. Dr Walker's 2016/17 perimeter observations (under ryecorn crop) do not represent the current cultivated footprint.

5(c) & 5(d) Inadequate information / unknown critical and endemic values

The concerns raised have now been addressed by the recently completed February 2026 surveys. The February 2026 surveys (118 ecologist hours, 32 quantitative plots, grid searches, and targeted searches in gullies/margins) provide the comprehensive data previously absent. All five draft management plans have been shared and submitted,

addressing any earlier concerns around uncertainty associated with site values or implementation of management plans.

EDS Paragraph 6 (Significant terrestrial ecology, invertebrate and avifauna values not identified; unacceptable risk)

The allegation that significant values have not been identified is now addressed by the extensive February 2026 surveys. These comprised 118 ecologist hours of fieldwork, including the measurement of 32 quantitative RECCE plots across the development footprint, systematic grid searches, and targeted searches in all gullies, margins, stonefield areas and wetland edges. These methods exceed standard ecological survey guidelines for solar farm sites and were designed specifically to address the information gaps identified by the Panel.

Key findings confirm that indigenous values inside the operational solar farm footprint are very low. To reiterate, the dominant vegetation is exotic improved pasture grassland/herbfield, with only resurrection lichen (At Risk – Declining) in 10 plots and onion orchid (Not Threatened) in two plots. No Threatened or At Risk vascular plants were found anywhere inside the panel footprint. All confirmed locations of *Lepidium solandri* (Threatened – Nationally Critical) are on the southern gully scarp outside the panels or off-site. Higher-value stonefield drylands and gullies are located on the periphery and are either avoided entirely or included within the 81-hectare Ecological Enhancement Zone.

For invertebrates, the surveys identified important populations of the Nationally Vulnerable robust grasshopper (*Sigaus robustus*) and other native taxa in the periphery areas. These values are protected through avoidance and, crucially, through the creation of a dedicated 14-hectare invertebrate reserve—the largest of its kind proposed for the Mackenzie Basin. This reserve, combined with the Terrestrial Invertebrate Management Plan (TIMP), will deliver substantial net gain by providing secure, enhanced habitat with pest control, monitoring, and adaptive management for the life of the project.

Invertebrate and lizard values follow the same pattern—low in the cultivated terrace, with targeted management and net gain delivered through the dedicated Lizard, Invertebrate, and Pest Mammal Management Plans.

These results, combined with the five finalised management plans, mean that all significant values have now been identified to a level that allows the Panel to reach a confident decision based on relevant and adequate information. There is therefore no unacceptable risk.

EDS Paragraph 7 (Absence of sufficient information imports s 104(6) RMA; decline under s 85 FTAA)

The alleged gaps have been filled. The February 2026 surveys and final draft management plans together constitute adequate information on all relevant s 6 RMA matters. Under cl 17 Sch 5 FTAA, the Panel must take RMA considerations into account; the evidence now demonstrates no material risk inside the operational solar farm footprint, avoidance of higher-value areas, and a net ecological gain. There is no basis for the application to be declined on the ground of a lack of sufficient information.

EDS Paragraphs 8–9 (Project in wider ONL; past litigation; persuasive Environment Court findings)

The Environment Court decisions in the Mackenzie District Plan Change appeals addressed **broad-scale dairy conversion** clearing unmodified SNA/outwash habitats and were not specific to the application site. The Court's findings on the "tipping point", Threatened plant lists (PC13 Appendices B & C), and cumulative degradation were directed at that context.

The Point Solar Farm is different:

- The site is **already highly modified** cultivated pasture (not unmodified outwash).
- February 2026 surveys show the operational solar farm footprint contains **none** of the Threatened vascular plants listed in PC13 Appendix B.
- There is no large-scale clearance occurring; instead, replacement of dairy/cattle runoff block with solar (less intensive) plus 81 ha enhancement and expanded pest control.

The Point proposal does not contribute to the degradation addressed by the Court; conversely, it remedies some adverse effects of current land use through ecological enhancement, predator control, and the removal of cattle.

EDS Paragraph 10 (Reliance on PC13 and PC18 factual findings)

See response to paras 8–9 above. The factual findings relate to unmodified basin habitats under intensification pressure. The site-specific surveys show this cultivated terrace does not contain those values.

EDS Paragraph 11 (Relevant factors from PC13 decision)

11(a) Tipping point – Applies to unmodified areas under dairy conversion. This site has already reached a tipping point (intense, cultivated pasture), but The Point proposal presents an opportunity to remedy existing degradation through ecological enhancement, predator control and removal of cattle.

11(b) Natural ecological values in Appendices B & C – When cross-checked against February 2026 surveys, none of the listed Threatened vascular plants occur inside the operational solar farm footprint. The VMP and enhancement package protect and improve the few At Risk species on the periphery.

EDS Paragraph 12 (PC18 findings on 36 Threatened / 55 At Risk plants in Tekapo outwash plains)

The PC18 findings relate to the **harsh Tekapo outwash plains** environment. The Point site is a modified interfluve terrace between the Twizel and Pukaki Rivers, which is not representative of those plains. Surveys confirm low values within the proposed operational solar farm footprint.

EDS Paragraph 13 (Ecological and landscape effects of solar farms require careful management)

Agreed. The five final draft management plans and ACS provide that careful management and deliver net gains, on and off the site. The proposed consent conditions ensure that the measures outlined in the management plans will be appropriately implemented.

EDS Paragraph 14 (Planning framework seeks to avoid adverse effects unless functional or operational need)

Consistent with the amended NPS for Renewable Electricity Generation (NPS REG), The Point has a clear functional and operational need to locate in the Mackenzie Basin: record-high irradiance, large flat contiguous parcel, and immediate adjacency to existing Transpower lines and Waitaki HEPS storage. This unique combination enables national grid resilience benefits (daytime solar allows hydro to store water for evening/winter peaks). The surveys and management plans demonstrate adverse effects are avoided or appropriately managed. Further, comparisons to the Haldon and Tekapo sites paint ‘The Point' favourably as having the lowest on-site ecological values compared with alternatives.

EDS Paragraph 16 (Panel not precluded from cumulative assessment; appropriateness vs alternatives with lesser biodiversity)

The Panel can consider cumulative effects, but the evidence shows The Point proposal has, as a starting point, the lowest on-site ecology of the advanced proposals and the strongest functional need/grid benefits. It is the most appropriate location being centred in the valley to maximise solar with a connection point being made to the grid on the site.

EDS Paragraph 17 (Renewable generation should avoid material adverse impacts, including cumulative, even where functional/operational need is established)

The proposal avoids higher-value areas and the residual effects are appropriately mitigated or compensated (such as through the $1M DOC ACS, the proposed invertebrate reserve, the enhancement zone, and pest plant and animal management being carried out on site). The functional and operational need is established and the benefits (detailed below) outweigh any residual effects.

EDS Paragraph 18 (Serious information gaps generating unacceptable risk; not addressed by conditions)

The gaps are closed by the February 2026 surveys and revised final draft management plans. FNSF has contracted an expert condition writer to ensure that the conditions framework (including the implementation of management plans) is robust.

EDS Paragraph 19 (Landscape assessment cannot reach concluded view without understanding ecological/habitat values)

The February 2026 surveys provide that understanding to the Panel.

EDS Paragraph 20 (Interrelationship means benefits of landscape mitigation may be overstated)

The February 2026 Wildlands Vegetation and Habitat Survey (Contract Report 6621h-vi) provides the detailed, site-specific understanding of ecological and habitat values that EDS and Dr Walker correctly note are important foundations for the conclusions reached in the landscape assessment. The survey results show very low ecological values inside the operational solar farm footprint (exotic pasture dominant, only resurrection lichen in 10 plots and onion orchid in two plots, no Threatened or At Risk vascular plants present). This confirms that the modified terrace makes only a minimal contribution to the broader ONL's ecological character. Higher-value stonefield drylands, gullies, and river margins are located on the periphery and are either avoided entirely or included within the 81 ha Ecological Enhancement Zone.

Ecological and biodiversity enhancements will be achieved through a combination of avoidance, ecological enhancement and pest control, as set out in the Vegetation Management Plan (6621h-iii), Ecological Enhancement Plan, and Landscape Management Plan, and given effect by the proposed consent conditions. Specifically:

- Pest control (mustelids, cats, hedgehogs, rodents) and weed management will be implemented across the site and enhanced areas for the full life of the consent, with annual reporting and adaptive adjustments.
- A 14 ha invertebrate reserve—the largest of its kind in the Mackenzie Basin—will provide secure, pest-controlled habitat for the Nationally Vulnerable robust grasshopper (*Sigaus robustus*) and other notable native invertebrate species, with monitoring and adaptive management prescribed in the Terrestrial Invertebrate Management Plan.
- Lizard habitat in the eastern gullies will be protected and enhanced through avoidance of panels, salvage/translocation where necessary, and habitat corridors under the Lizard Management Plan.
- Basin-wide avifauna benefits will be delivered through the $1 million DOC Avifauna Compensation Strategy (including predator control, wetland enhancement, transmitter tracking, and targeted invertebrate research).

These measures will result in measurable net ecological gain across the site and will maintain or enhance the contribution of this parcel to the ONL's indigenous biodiversity values. The interrelationship between landscape character and ecology is therefore preserved and strengthened rather than overstated.

EDS Paragraph 21 (FTAA discretion to decline; benefits not in proportion to adverse impacts)

Refer to ‘Statement of Evidence - Laila Alkamil - The Point_250226’.

EDS Paragraphs 22–23 (FTAA decision-making framework; focus on s 81(2)(b), (d), (f); cl 17 and cl 18 Sch 5)

Refer to the ‘Statement of Evidence - Laila Alkamil - The Point_250226’.

EDS Paragraph 26 (EDS interpretation of “facilitate” in FTAA purpose)

Refer to the ‘Statement of Evidence - Laila Alkamil - The Point_250226’

EDS Paragraph 32 Dedicated Proportionality Analysis (benefits vs adverse impacts)

The EDS statement that significant national benefits are unsupported is unequivocally incorrect. The project delivers clear, quantifiable benefits of **national** significance, strongly supported by the NPS REG. Policy B of the NPS-REG requires decision-makers to “recognise and provide for the importance of … enabling cumulative increases of REG capacity and output at any scale and any location”. A 450 MWp solar farm in the Mackenzie Basin directly gives effect to that directive. It will provide approximately 6% of New Zealand’s daytime electricity demand during peak generation periods and, through its immediate co-location with Waitaki HEPS storage and existing Transpower lines, enables hydro operators to store water during daylight hours and release it for evening and winter peaks. This grid-resilience benefit is of genuine national importance in dry years and under increasing climate variability.

Policy F(1) of the NPS-REG is even more directive: “Decision-makers must enable REG assets and activities in all locations and environments.” Where s 6 matters are engaged (as they are here), Policy F(2) requires the policy to be read alongside other relevant national direction, regional policy statements and district plans. The Point satisfies that balancing exercise. The site-specific February 2026 surveys and final draft management plans show that effects on s 6 values are minor and localised inside the operational solar farm footprint, higher-value areas are avoided or enhanced, and any residual risk is appropriately compensated. When these measures are read alongside the strong enabling direction in Policies B and F, The Point is squarely within the category of regionally and nationally significant infrastructure that the NPS-REG and the FTAA’s purpose are designed to facilitate.

The economic and social benefits are equally clear and do not require a separate consultant’s report to be accepted. The Point represents >$500 million in capital investment, will create hundreds of construction jobs and ongoing operational employment. These are the very outcomes the NPS-REG and FTAA seek to achieve. Government ministers have publicly supported utility-scale solar in the Mackenzie Basin, including this project, as part of New Zealand’s decarbonisation pathway.

In short, the combination of the project’s scale, its operational synergy with the Waitaki HEPS, its contribution to cumulative REG capacity under NPS-REG Policy B, and the enabling imperative in Policy F provides a firm statutory basis for categorising The Point as

regionally and nationally significant. The evidence now before the Panel fully quantifies those benefits and demonstrates that they substantially outweigh the minor, localised and appropriately managed adverse effects.

Refer to the 'Statement of Evidence - Laila Alkamil - The Point_250226' for further comment.

EDS Paragraphs 40, 44–46, 51, 52, 54 (Conclusions on ecological impacts; offsetting; net gain; reliance on policies 9.3.1, 9.3.2, 9.3.6)

Response to EDS Paragraph 51 (Updated NPS-REG and section 6 RMA matters)

Refer to the 'Statement of Evidence - Laila Alkamil - The Point_250226'.

Section 6(c) – Significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna

The February 2026 surveys confirm low values inside the operational solar farm footprint. Although some vegetation types within the footprint are assessed as ecologically significant under the CRPS due to their role in supporting Threatened and At Risk fauna, they are floristically dominated by exotic species and lack intrinsic botanical significance. This is an important distinction to make.

All higher-value habitats (stonefield drylands, gullies, river margins) are avoided or included in the 81-hectare enhancement zone. The Vegetation Management Plan (6621h-iii), Lizard Management Plan (6621h-v), Terrestrial Invertebrate Management Plan (6621h-ii), and Pest Mammal Management Plan (6621h-iv) deliver net ecological gain through:

- Complete avoidance of significant vegetation on the perimeter of the site.
- Creation of a 14-hectare invertebrate reserve (largest of its kind in the Mackenzie Basin) and eastern lizard enhancement area that will involve planting and installing rock piles to create habitat connectivity between the two gullies. Site-wide pest animal and plant control for the full consent duration.

Avifauna effects are managed through the detailed measures in the Avifauna Management Plan (6621h-i) (i.e. pre-works surveys, 100 m nest setbacks, design features to reduce bird strike, carcass monitoring with autopsy, and enforceable mortality thresholds) with any residual risk fully compensated at Basin-scale by the $1 million DOC Avifauna Compensation Strategy (ACS).

When Policy F of the NPS-REG is read alongside the CRPS, Mackenzie District Plan and section 6 of the RMA, the proposal is consistent: higher-value areas are protected, net ecological gain is delivered on-site, residual risk is compensated, and the functional/operational need (record irradiance, flat land, adjacency to existing grid and hydro storage) is clearly established. The application therefore satisfies section 6 of the RMA in full.

Response to EDS Paragraph 55 (Landscape impacts)

The Application acknowledges that there will be moderate adverse visual effects from three specific public locations (McAughtries Road, Greta Track, and the Benmore Range Easement track). This is not an “in-principle acceptance of an adverse impact on ONL values” in the manner suggested by EDS. The February 2026 Wildlands Vegetation and Habitat Survey (Contract Report 6621h-vi) shows that the 670 ha development footprint is highly modified cultivated pasture with very low indigenous values (dominant exotic grassland/herbfield; only resurrection lichen in 10 plots and onion orchid in two plots; no Threatened or At-Risk vascular plants inside the panel area). The modified terrace therefore makes only a minimal contribution to the broader ONL’s ecological character.

The proposed landscape mitigation will reduce those effects to moderate. The perimeter planting (specified in the Landscape Management Plan and secured by proposed consent conditions) will use locally sourced indigenous species and is designed to reach approximately 3 m height within five years, creating a visually continuous screening band. Panels are limited to a maximum height of 2.95 m above ground level (confirmed in the module mounting structure drawings and RMM RFI response), with recessive colours (light reflectance value <30%) and anti-reflective coatings. The 81 ha Ecological Enhancement Zone will further reinforce natural character through indigenous restoration over time.

These measures are not “potentially overstated”; they are evidence-based, secured by the certified Landscape Management Plan, Vegetation Management Plan, and proposed consent conditions (including specific requirements for plant species, sizes, spacing, irrigation, and long-term maintenance). Once the planting matures, the project will have no to very low adverse visual effects from all other public places, consistent with the updated Rough Milne Mitchell assessment.

Response to EDS Paragraph 56 (Interrelationship and overstated mitigation benefits)

Because the ecological and landscape values of the ONL are interrelated, the February 2026 surveys provide the necessary foundation for a concluded view on both. The surveys confirm low ecological values inside the panel footprint, so the terrace itself does not meaningfully contribute to the ONL’s indigenous biodiversity or natural character. Higher-value areas on the periphery are avoided or included in the 81 ha Ecological Enhancement Zone.

The achievability of biodiversity gains have been addressed earlier in this response. These measures will deliver measurable net ecological gain and will maintain or enhance the site’s contribution to the ONL’s natural character and indigenous biodiversity values. The benefits of the proposed landscape mitigation are therefore firmly grounded and achievable.

Response to EDS Paragraphs 57–58 (Panel assessment of landscape and relevant factors)

The applicant agrees that the Panel is well placed to assess landscape effects, and the evidence now enables a concluded view to be reached. The February 2026 surveys confirm low ecological values inside the operational solar farm footprint, so the modified terrace makes only a limited contribution to the ONL’s ecological character. Higher-value areas are avoided or enhanced as described above.

The relevant planning provisions are satisfied:

- CRPS Objective 12.2.1 and Policy 12.3.2 (protect ONL values from inappropriate development) are met through avoidance of higher-value habitats, net gain in the enhancement zone, and design mitigation that reduces visual effects to less than minor once planting matures.
- Proposed Mackenzie District Plan REG-P6 (renewable energy in ONL only where functional/operational need exists and adverse effects avoided as far as practicable) is satisfied: the site has a clear functional need (record irradiance, flat land, adjacency to Transpower lines and Waitaki HEPS for grid resilience), and effects are appropriately avoided, mitigated, and offset.
- Offsetting and compensation are not required for landscape effects per se, but the ecological net gain delivered by the 81 ha zone and 14 ha invertebrate reserve further supports the ONL values.

The proposal is consistent with the planning framework and does not result in inappropriate development within the ONL.

Response to EDS Paragraphs 59–65 (Cumulative impacts)

The Panel can and should consider cumulative effects. The updated Rough Milne Mitchell assessment (RFI Response 2 – Landscape, 23 February 2026) addresses cumulative landscape and visual effects with both the Haldon Solar Farm proposal and the existing Waitaki HEPS structures.

At a **local scale** (top end of Lake Benmore), the combination of The Point and Haldon will result in a moderate to moderate-high degree of change to landscape character (introduction of large-scale solar infrastructure creating a semi-industrial/renewable power generation character). The Waitaki HEPS does not meaningfully contribute to additional adverse cumulative effects because its lakes and canals are perceived as natural features.

At a **wider Mackenzie Basin scale** (>400,000 ha), the two solar farms (combined ~990 ha) remain subservient to the openness, vastness and lack of built form that define the Basin's character. Energy production is one characteristic of the Basin but does not dominate it. The projects are clustered in one small part of the Basin with a limited viewing catchment, so they do not cause perceptual spread. Cumulative adverse effects on the wider Basin are therefore very low to low.

Clustering assists with mitigating the spread of localised character change. The Point has the lowest on-site ecology of the advanced proposals and the strongest functional/operational need, making it the most appropriate location. The proposal does not result in unacceptable cumulative degradation of the ONL or indigenous biodiversity values.

Response to EDS Paragraphs 66–74 (Conditions of consent)

FNSF acknowledges all comments received on conditions from section 53 parties, and changes are being incorporated into the condition set to be provided on 3 March 2026. The

updated condition set will address relevant comments by including more specific ecological management, particularly in relation to avifauna and the proposed compensation package. Please refer to the 'Statement of Evidence - Laila Alkamil - The Point_250226'

Overall Conclusion and Request

EDS's comments and Dr Walker's evidence relied on pre-2026 information and a broad characterisation of the Basin. The evidence now before the Panel demonstrates that the project can be approved with appropriate conditions that deliver net ecological gain, maintain or enhance ONL values, and provide proportionate compensation for residual risk. The February 2026 surveys have addressed the information gaps and the draft management plans are detailed and robust. Furthermore, the $1 million DOC Avifauna Compensation Strategy secures Basin-wide benefits for kākī and other threatened species.

Renewable generation at this scale and in this location is exactly what the NPS-REG and FTAA purpose are designed to facilitate. The national benefits (450 MWp capacity, grid resilience with the Waitaki HEPS, >$500 million investment, hundreds of jobs) substantially outweigh the minor, localised, and fully managed adverse effects. The proposal is consistent with the RMA, CRPS, MDP, and NPS-REG when all relevant provisions are read together.