

Fast-track Approvals Act 2024

Further Statement

Waitaha Hydro [FTAA-2505-1069]

Prepared by Jeremy Head Registered NZILA Landscape Architect as adviser to the Department of Conservation in response to **Minute #8 of the Expert Panel**

19 February 2026

LANDSCAPE AND NATURAL CHARACTER EFFECTS

1. This statement responds to Minute #8 of the Expert Panel (issued 2 February 2026) and is limited to additional matters pertaining to landscape and natural character effects raised through evidence presented in the 13 February 2026 joint empanelment hearing. I attended that hearing in the capacity as an observer. My statement also comments on landscape and natural character issues relating to additional information that has been provided by Westpower in response to inquiries of DOC following the joint empanelment hearing.
2. In particular, my statement focusses on the landscape and natural character effects of the instream and bank maintenance works that will require the use of a 12-20 tonne digger after large floods during the scheme's operation, and the issue discussed by Dr Tunnicliffe and Dr Clunie of whether a berm (bund) would be created in the river to guide the water to the intake channel. I commented on both of these issues in my earlier statement (Appendix C1 to DOC's Section 51 report).
3. I broadly agree with Mr Bentley's discussion and findings for the Applicant throughout his reporting regarding the visual, landscape and natural character effects of the project, when it is static and operating normally.
4. However, in my opinion, the operational effects – that is, when instream flow path and/or gravel bank intervention is required via a mechanical digger, the effects will be potentially greater than what has been assessed by Mr Bentley. This opinion is based on the statement of evidence prepared by Dr Tunnicliffe (23 January 2026) regarding the geomorphological effects of the proposed scheme on the Waitaha River catchment and the general level of uncertainty around when gravel and boulders will need to be cleared from the intake area that I heard from Westpower's experts during the joint empanelment hearing. In addition, I base my below statement on the 'potentially' greater than 15 times per year the digger will be working at the intake end

of the scheme following floods of greater than 250 cumecs, as confirmed by Dr Clunie, and the further information from Westpower of 18 February 2026.

5. Mr Bentley mentions in his report that the excavator will be used instream 5 - 15 times per year¹. We heard from Dr Clunie (when answering question 44) that it may 'potentially' be more times than this based on yet to be completed sediment modelling and that some 'variability' needs to be allowed for. For these reasons I base my statement on the digger being in operation *at least* 15 times per year.
6. Effects are discussed by Mr Bentley at [7] – [12]² where he states that when the scheme is operating with the digger the adverse effects on landscape and natural character will be '**Moderate-high**' and when the digger is not in operation, the effects will drop one notch down on the seven-point scale of effects to '**Moderate**'. I consider these effects ratings to be fair and reasonable *if* the public are not present (landscape and natural character effects do not need to be seen by people to exist).
7. My earlier statement was prepared before Westpower had provided the indicative range (of 5 to 15 times per year) that the use of the digger could be required. As above, this was elaborated on at the hearing, i.e. that this could potentially occur more than 15 times per year (based on a 250 cumec flood), and further clarified by Westpower to DOC after the hearing that it is reasonable to assume in-river work will more than likely not be required for floods smaller than 250 cumecs, but that Westpower requires flexibility for maintenance works given it cannot control natural processes.
8. As I set out at page 4 of my earlier statement, in my opinion, a 12-20 tonne digger moving about in the stream, when observed by the public will have a '**High**', if not '**Very high**' (both of which equate to a "significant") effect on landscape and visual amenity values at the localised level due to the acute (albeit temporary) adverse effect on landscape values in the vicinity of the headworks area. This short term, but very pronounced 'spike' in adverse landscape and amenity effects would occur when walkers hear and/or see the activity from the swing bridge and nearby sections of the adjoining track. Information from Westpower and its experts during and following the hearing would suggest that it is not a remote possibility that walkers will be in the

¹ Attachment 7 to memorandum #7: Statement of James Bentley.

² Attachment 7 to memorandum #7 Response to section 53 comments: Statement of James Bentley.

area when the digger is operating. This aligns with Ms Sidley's opinion, as set out in her further statement on recreational issues.

9. My assessment factors in the following:

- Despite its recessive colour as is now proposed by Mr Bentley, which will go some way towards reducing its visibility, the digger moving about will appear incongruous in an otherwise highly natural and remote setting. The presence of a digger will be quite surprising this far from 'civilisation'. Kiwi Flat is quite a reasonable walk from the entry point to the Valley.
- The entrance to the gorge holds particularly high landscape values as it is where loose sediment meets hard rock and swift waters change to turbulent. These values will be decreased when the permanent parts of the scheme are in place, although natural processes will continue albeit controlled. The presence of the nearby swing bridge and track provides key vantage points, where people would likely pause to observe the scheme. The presence of the digger in operation combined with the control structure and weir will cumulatively reduce natural values further to the point where the natural elements, processes, and patterns become overwhelmed by the industrial forms and kinetic activity of the digger.
- The sound of the digger's diesel engine could overwhelm natural sounds (rushing water, birdsong) and the engine noise and rocks being pushed around will likely carry for some distance at times. In this regard the presence of the machinery and its non-visual effects will at times extend well beyond its operational footprint.
- The digger will draw attention to the other permanent parts of the scheme that may have otherwise gone partly unnoticed by walkers.
- Due to the adverse effects on landscape, natural character and amenity values, for regular back country walkers, a repeated experience of the digger in operation (or possibility thereof) would be a disincentive to further returns to the area.
- The digger in operation would reinforce the industrial nature of the scheme and likely have a negative effect on those that see it.

- As Ms Sidley explains in her further statement, the timing of the digger in operation following storm / flood events is likely the same time walkers will be keen to get into the back country. Further, spring storms combined with snow melt and higher river levels will typically be at the same time of year walkers will want to access Kiwi Flat. This timing coincidence could exacerbate the scale of impact (i.e. more people may be on the track than would be usually expected).

10. Website based notifications regarding when the digger will be operating will be helpful in informing walkers who may wish to walk into Kiwi Flat. However, this will not necessarily capture everyone heading into the area. Not all would think to check online – especially in fine weather when safety was not an issue. Warning signs could be posted at the track entrance points informing when the digger will be operating. Any signage would need to be appropriately located and of a size that would attract attention and be readable without further detracting from landscape, natural character and amenity values.

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