

## Attachment 23

### FNSF response to Canterbury Regional Council (CRC) comments

26 February 2026

Far North Solar Farm Limited (FNSF) thanks Canterbury Regional Council (CRC) for its detailed Section 53 comments dated 19 February 2026, including the technical appendices and the summary of key issues.

FNSF has assessed the CRC submission (including the 98-page document and all appendices) and cross-referenced it against the supporting evidence now before the Panel. Every point raised is addressed below, grouped thematically for clarity but with explicit paragraph references.

Updated consent conditions are being finalised by expert condition writer Carlyne Wratt and will be provided to the Panel and CRC on 3 March 2026. FNSF remains committed to ongoing consultation with CRC on the final wording of consent conditions.

Cross-references are made to:

- **Haigh Workman** – Erosion and Sediment Control Plan Draft (ESCP, February 2026, reference 23 119) - and drawings.
- **RMM** – Landscape S53 Response (26 Feb 2026) and RFI Response 2 (23 Feb 2026).
- **Wildlands** – February 2026 surveys (6621h-vi Vegetation and Habitat Surveys) and all five draft management plans (Avifauna 6621h-i, Invertebrates 6621h-ii, Vegetation 6621h-iii, Pest Mammals 6621h-iv, and Lizards 6621h-v).
- **WWLA** – Planning Evidence of Laila Alkamil (26 Feb 2026).

#### 1. Overall Position and Consistency with CRPS, LWRP and CARP (CRC paras 1–5, 13–16)

FNSF agrees with CRC's overall position (paras 1–5 and 13–16) that the proposal is generally consistent with the Canterbury Regional Policy Statement (CRPS), the Canterbury Land and Water Regional Plan (LWRP) and the Canterbury Air Regional Plan (CARP). All actual and potential adverse effects have been appropriately identified and can be avoided, remedied, mitigated, offset or compensated through the detailed measures set out in the application documents and the supporting expert evidence now before the Panel.

#### Canterbury Regional Policy Statement (CRPS)

The proposal is consistent with the CRPS when read as a whole:

- **Chapter 9 (Indigenous Biodiversity):** Higher-value habitats are avoided or included in the 81 ha ecological enhancement area. Net ecological gain can be delivered through the 14 ha predator-proof invertebrate reserve (largest of its kind proposed in the Mackenzie Basin), eastern gully lizard corridors with planting and enhanced habitat to improve connectivity, and site-wide long-term pest animal and weed control for the

full consent duration (Wildlands Invertebrate Management Plan 6621h-ii, Lizard Management Plan 6621h-v, Pest Mammal Management Plan 6621h-iv, Vegetation Management Plan 6621h-iii, and February 2026 Vegetation and Habitat Surveys 6621h-vi).

Residual avifauna risk is addressed through on-site mitigation in the Avifauna Management Plan 6621h-i (anti-reflective coatings, 55° night-time storage position, pre-works surveys, 100 m nest setbacks, carcass monitoring with autopsy and enforceable mortality thresholds), plus the \$1,000,000 DOC Avifauna Compensation Strategy that provides for Basin-wide predator control, kākī transmitter tracking, wetland enhancement, and targeted invertebrate research).

This is expected to achieve no net loss and contribute toward a measurable net gain, consistent with Objective 9.2.1 and Policy 9.3.2.

- **Chapter 12 (Outstanding Natural Landscapes):** The operational solar farm footprint is characterised by cultivated pasture with very low indigenous vegetation values, thus making only a nominal contribution to the Mackenzie Basin ONL’s ecological character.

Effects on landscape values are mitigated appropriately by having a maximum panel height of 2.95 m, recessive colours (LRV <30 %), and 36,000 indigenous plants in the Landscape Mitigation Strips that will reach ~3 m within five years (RMM S53 Landscape Response, 26 February 2026 and RFI Response 2, 23 February 2026).

Cumulative effects when combined with Haldon Solar remain acceptable at the wider basin scale.

- **Chapters 5, 7 and 8 (Land Use, Infrastructure, Water and Hazards):** The project utilises existing 220 kV infrastructure with minimal upgrades, avoids new transmission lines, and manages stormwater and hazards as permitted or consented activities under the LWRP (see below).

## Canterbury Land and Water Regional Plan (LWRP)

CRC correctly identifies the three activities requiring CRC consent (Table 1, para 2):

- Use of land for earthworks over an aquifer (s 9, Rule 5.176 – Restricted Discretionary, 5 years).
- Discharge of construction-phase stormwater to land (s 15, Rule 5.94B – Restricted Discretionary, 5 years).
- Discharge of operational stormwater to land (s 15, Rule 5.97 – Discretionary, 35 years).

All these activities are addressed through the Haigh Workman Erosion and Sediment Control Plan (ESCP, February 2026, reference 23 119) and accompanying drawings (ESCP Sheet 1 and Sheet 2).

The ESCP demonstrates compliance with GD05 principles and the Canterbury Erosion and Sediment Control Toolbox through silt fencing (installed in stages), sediment retention ponds,

clean/dirty water diversion channels, staged construction, progressive stabilisation, weather-sensitive scheduling, and regular inspection/monitoring. No off-site sediment discharge is anticipated.

The final conditions (3 March 2026) will clearly link the CRC consents to the certified ESCP and Stormwater Management Plan.

## **Canterbury Air Regional Plan (CARP)**

No significant air discharges are proposed.

A Dust Management Plan has been prepared and will form part of the updated consent conditions.

Construction dust and vehicle emissions will be managed through standard best-practice measures in the Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) and ESCP (vehicle speed limits on unsealed roads, progressive stabilisation, water carts where required).

Operational air effects are negligible and the proposal is consistent with CARP.

## **2. Consent Requirements and Scope (CRC paras 2, 22–25, Table 1, and throughout)**

CRC correctly identifies the three activities requiring CRC consent:

- Use of land for earthworks over an aquifer (s 9, LWRP Rule 5.176 – Restricted Discretionary, 5 years).
- Discharge of construction-phase stormwater to land (s 15, LWRP Rule 5.94B – Restricted Discretionary, 5 years).
- Discharge of operational stormwater to land (s 15, LWRP Rule 5.97 – Discretionary, 35 years).

### **Response:**

FNSF seeks these consents for the site as a whole for construction stormwater and for the solar panels, GIP and substation for operational stormwater. The terminology used in the application (GIP Substation vs Solar Farm Substation) is clarified as follows: Transpower will own and operate the GIP Substation; FNSF retains ownership and operation of the Solar Farm Substation and arrays.

All stormwater and earthworks effects will be addressed in the Haigh Workman's Erosion and Sediment Control Plan. The recently submitted draft ESCP demonstrates compliance with GD05 principles and the Canterbury Erosion and Sediment Control Toolbox. Sediment retention ponds, silt fencing, clean/dirty water diversion, staged construction and progressive stabilisation are all detailed for if they are required. No off-site discharge of sediment is anticipated.

The final conditions (3 March 2026) will clearly delineate the CRC consents and will link them to the final certified ESCP and Stormwater Management Plan.

For further information on consent requirements, please refer to the Planning Evidence of Ms Alkamil.

### **3. Terrestrial Ecology Effects – Avifauna (CRC paras 4, 17–21, 46–49, 54 and Appendix 1)**

This is CRC's primary remaining concern. FNSF and Wildlands fully acknowledge the limited New Zealand-specific data on bird strike at utility-scale solar farms and the potential high magnitude of any adverse effect on kākī/black stilt (a Nationally Critical species) and other Threatened/At Risk avifauna.

#### **Response (Wildlands February 2026 Vegetation and Habitat Surveys 6621h-vi and Avifauna Management Plan 6621h-i):**

The February 2026 surveys confirm that the operational solar farm footprint itself (within the 678 ha lot) itself has **very low avifauna values**. The area is dominated by highly modified exotic improved pasture grassland/herbfield with negligible indigenous vegetation or breeding/foraging habitat. No Threatened or At Risk bird species were recorded breeding or regularly using the cultivated terrace. Higher-value habitats (such as braided river margins, wetlands) are located on the periphery of the site, with gullies and dryland stonefield only occurring outside the development area. These are **completely avoided** by the panel layout and if onsite, are included within the **81 ha ecological enhancement zone**.

On-site mitigation is comprehensive and multi-layered, as detailed in the Avifauna Management Plan, and includes the following measures:

- Anti-reflective coatings on all panels to reduce the “lake effect”.
- Standard nighttime storage position of panels at **55 degrees** from after sunset until before sunrise to minimise reflectivity at night.
- Pre-works nesting surveys and **100 m setbacks** from any active nests of Threatened or At Risk species.
- Vehicle speed limits on site, pest mammal control, and measures to ensure no bare ground persists during construction.
- Limits on works during bird breeding seasons.

Post-construction monitoring is robust and adaptive:

- Systematic carcass searches with autopsy to determine cause of death.
- Searcher efficiency and carcass persistence trials to calibrate detection rates.
- Clear, enforceable mortality thresholds for Threatened/At Risk species.
- Any threshold trigger immediately activates a **Bird Collision Management Plan** and an independent expert review in full consultation with DOC.
- Monitoring can be extended beyond the initial three years if carcasses of Threatened or At Risk species are found.

In addition to these on-site measures, residual risk is proposed to be addressed through the **\$1,000,000 DOC Avifauna Compensation Strategy**. This payment is made on construction commencement, is ring-fenced, and will fund targeted Basin-wide actions including enhanced predator control in the Godley and Cass Rivers, kākī transmitter tracking and

breeding support, wetland enhancement, and targeted invertebrate research. This compensation is **additional** to all existing DOC and community conservation programmes in the Mackenzie Basin and will deliver landscape-scale benefits that directly address the small population sizes and vulnerability of species such as kākī.

FNSF is also willing to engage a biostatistician to undertake a detailed analysis of operational mortality data once the solar farm is commissioned. This analysis can incorporate the results of the carcass monitoring, searcher efficiency and persistence trials to refine understanding of actual risk and inform any further adaptive management.

The Avifauna Management Plan (including all monitoring methods, mortality thresholds, trigger mechanisms and adaptive management provisions) will be **explicitly referenced and required** in the final consent conditions. FNSF and Wildlands are willing and available to workshop the precise wording of these conditions with CRC, DOC, and the Panel to ensure they are clear, enforceable and achieve the outcomes sought by all parties.

These measures collectively ensure that any potential adverse effects on avifauna are minimised on-site and fully compensated at a basin scale, satisfying the requirements of CRPS Chapter 9 and delivering net ecological gain overall.

#### **4. 14 ha Invertebrate Reserve (CRC paras 17–21)**

CRC supports the reserve but wants it clearly linked to conditions.

##### **Response (Wildlands Invertebrate Management Plan 6621h-ii and Vegetation Management Plan 6621h-iii):**

The proposed 14 ha predator-proof invertebrate reserve (largest of its kind proposed in the Mackenzie Basin) is located on even terrain on the eastern side of the site, south of the gullies, and includes high-value grasshopper and other invertebrate habitat. It is described in the Invertebrate Management Plan. It will be funded and maintained for the life of the project and complemented by ongoing site-wide pest animal control. The reserve is additional to existing conservation work in the Basin. All measures will be detailed in the updated condition set supplied on 3 March 2026.

## 5. Night-time Panel Positioning (CRC paras 17–21)

### Response:

FNSF has adopted the 55° night-time stow (rest) position from after sunset until before sunrise to minimise reflectivity. This is provided for in the Avifauna Management Plan and will be detailed in the amended conditions. The Avifauna Management Plan also allows for more precise placement of the panels at night (such as away from moonlight), if required.

## 6. Conditions – Form, Enforceability and Linkage to Management Plans (CRC paras 5, 20–21, and throughout)

FNSF agrees conditions must be certain and enforceable with clear objectives/performance standards.

### Response:

- Expert condition writer Carlyne Wratt is finalising the set (due 3 March 2026). It will separate consents by authority (CRC for its three consents) with clear cross-reference tables.
- All five Wildlands management plans (Avifauna, Terrestrial Invertebrates, Lizards, Pest Mammals, and Vegetation) are now fully drafted and attached. They include carcass monitoring/autopsy, triggers for intervention, anti-reflective coatings, no-irrigation buffers (minimum 40 m from threatened plants, directed into site, no spraying on windy days), and adaptive management if required.
- FNSF and Wildlands are willing to workshop the final conditions with CRC, DOC, Iwi, and the Panel.

## 7. Survey and Baseline Information

**(CRC references to earlier surveys being inadequate – e.g. single-day effort in 2023, AgScience report lacking probative value)**

FNSF and Wildlands fully acknowledge CRC’s concern that the pre-2026 ecological surveys (particularly the 2023 work relied on in the initial application) were limited in effort and scope. The 2023 surveys were preliminary and did not provide the quantitative baseline needed for robust effects assessment under the RMA and NPS-IB. The AgScience report has been superseded and is no longer relied upon.

The **February 2026 Wildlands surveys** (Contract Report 6621h-vi: Vegetation and Habitat Surveys of The Point Solar Farm, January–February 2026) provide the comprehensive, site-specific baseline now before the Panel. These surveys were specifically designed to address the information gaps identified by CRC, DOC, and the Panel.

### Key details of the February 2026 survey effort:

- Total field effort: **118 ecologist-hours** across three qualified vegetation ecologists (Luke Liddell, Andrew Wells, and Sarah Wright).
- Survey period: 10–12 February and 19 February 2026 (following an initial reconnaissance on 20 January 2026).

- **Methods:**
  - **32 quantitative RECCE plots** (10 m × 10 m) systematically placed to represent the full range of vegetation types within the 670 ha development footprint. Each plot recorded the percentage cover of all species (vascular plants and lichens), canopy height, and ground cover.
  - **Grid-based searches** at 500 m spacing to detect patchy or cryptic species.
  - **Targeted searches** focused on habitat likely to support Threatened or At Risk plants (gullies, dryland stonefield, terrace edges, wetland margins).
- All work was undertaken by ecologists with extensive experience in Mackenzie Basin dryland communities.

### Key findings from the surveys:

- The development footprint is dominated by **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, always sparse).
  - Onion orchid (*Microtis unifolia*, Not Threatened) in two plots.
- **No Threatened or At Risk vascular plants** were found inside the panel area.
- All confirmed locations of **Nationally Critical *Lepidium solandri*** (six plants) are on the southern gully scarp **outside** the panel footprint or off-site.
- *Carmichaelia vexillata* (At Risk – Declining) is represented by a single individual inside the site boundary but outside the panel area.
- Higher-value dryland stonefield and gullies are confined to the periphery and are either avoided entirely or included within the **81 ha ecological enhancement area**.

### Management of periphery values:

Threatened plants on the southern gully scarp and other peripheral areas are fully protected through:

- Avoidance of panels in these zones (Vegetation Management Plan 6621h-iii).
- Ongoing monitoring and adaptive management (including seasonal grazing to maintain open conditions and prevent shrub and grass encroachment).
- Experimental dryland restoration trials in the enhancement zone.
- No irrigation within **40 m** of any threatened plant locations (irrigation directed into the site only, no spraying on windy days).

These surveys and management measures supersede some earlier work and provide the robust, quantitative baseline required for effects assessment. The February 2026 survey data suggest that the development footprint is characterised by low to negligible indigenous biodiversity values, while higher-value peripheral areas are proposed to be protected or enhanced, contributing toward an overall net ecological gain.

## **8. Wildlife Act Approvals (CRC para 2.9 reference in appendices)**

### **Response (Wildlands Wildlife Act Approval Checklist 6621i-a):**

Separate Wildlife Act Authorities will be sought outside the FTAA process for protected species (skink, gecko, grasshopper). Wildlands has prepared WAAs for numerous projects and will consult directly with DOC alongside FNSF. Wildlands has already prepared a Wildlife Act checklist and this was shared alongside the recent survey results and management plans.

## **9. Stormwater and Earthworks (CRC Table 1 and paras 22–25)**

### **Response (Haigh Workman ESCP, February 2026):**

Construction and operational stormwater are addressed as permitted or consented activities under LWRP Rules 5.94B and 5.97. The ESCP provides detailed controls (silt fencing in stages, sediment retention ponds, clean/dirty water diversion, progressive stabilisation). No off-site sediment discharge is anticipated. Earthworks over the aquifer (Rule 5.176) are managed through the same ESCP. All measures will be secured in the final CRC conditions.

## **10. All Other Points (CRC paras 6–16, 26+, Appendices)**

Background matters (including previous RMA applications, consultation, and the summary of key issues) are noted. Cumulative effects are addressed in Wildlands 6621h-vi, which identifies a moderate to high cumulative avifauna collision risk for the northern Lake Benmore cluster. Measures are proposed to manage these effects through adaptive management and Basin-scale compensation..

### **Overall Position**

FNSF submits that all CRC concerns have been addressed through the February 2026 Wildlands surveys, the five draft management plans, the draft Haigh Workman ESCP, and the landscape evidence from RMM. The proposal is consistent with the CRPS, LWRP, and CARP. Any residual avifauna risk is managed on-site and compensated at basin scale. National benefits substantially outweigh the localised, manageable effects.