

The Auckland Conservation Board (ACB) Commentary on the Fast-Track Proposal for Hunua Quarry Expansion (FTAA—2603-1185)

Introduction:

Te Rūnanga Papa Atawhai o Tāmaki Makaurau/The Auckland Conservation Board (The Board) is an independent statutory body appointed by the Minister of Conservation under the Conservation Act 1987. The purposes and functions of conservation boards are set out in sections 6M and 6N of the Conservation Act.

The Board operates in accordance with Section 4 of the Conservation Act to uphold te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations and give effect to the Treaty's principles. This requires fostering conservation partnerships with tangata whenua (Māori) at a local level, recognizing and supporting their aspirations for cultural and environmental stewardship, and incorporating Māori values and knowledge into conservation decisions and management.

Under the Ngā Mana Whenua o Tāmaki Makaurau Collective Redress Act 2014, three members of the Board are appointed by the Minister of Conservation on the recommendation of the Ngāti Whātua rūpū, Marutūāhu rūpū and the Waiohua Tāmaki rūpū. Board members have individual expertise in ecology, biodiversity, statutory process, cultural redress, policy, communications, and bring this to board work.

The proposed expansion of the Hunua Quarry is a listed project under Schedule 2 of the Fast-Track Approval Act (FTAA 2603-1185). Under Section 53 (2)(m) of this Act, the Board is identified as a party to consult with, if Wildlife Act 1953 permits are required. Under Section 4 of the Act, approvals are also required for complex fisheries activities including culverting disturbance and diversion.

The Board comments are therefore focused on the proposed project's terrestrial and freshwater ecological impacts and associated impact mitigation, offsets and management plans.

Project Description

The Hunua Quarry Expansion involves expanding and deepening of the existing Symonds Hill Pit to access high-quality greywacke and extend the quarry's operational life by approximately 50 years. This is intended to help with the ongoing and reliable supply of aggregates required to meet Auckland's infrastructure needs.

The proposed works are located within the Winstone Aggregates landholding. To enable access to this greywacke a tributary of Mangapū Stream (Symonds Stream) will be diverted.

The stream is bordered by private properties towards the south and quarry to the north and drains west towards Slippery Creek.

Board review process

The Board feedback is based on review of the following documents:

1. Fast Track Approvals: Wildlife Approvals report - DOC 51 report (July 2026)
2. Complex Fisheries Report DOC July 2026
3. Ecological Assessment Appendix B12.4.5 of Assessment of Environmental Effects June 2026
4. Lizard Management Plan (LMP) Appendix B12.8.4 of Assessment of Environmental Effects June 2026
5. Ecological Management Plan Appendix B12.8.10 of Assessment of Environmental Effects June 2026
6. Stream Realignment Plan Appendix B12.8.7 of Assessment of Environmental Effects June 2026

The ecological sections of the project overview conference video, which occurred on the 8th July 2026 were also viewed.

Board Feedback

The following provides the Board's feedback on the ecological impact mitigation measures proposed by Winstones, and outlined in the documentation reviewed.

Terrestrial Conservation

The key terrestrial conservation impacts arising from the proposed project are loss of indigenous forest habitat and resulting impacts on native fauna within and adjacent to the quarry footprint, including indigenous lizard species.

The proposed Hunua Quarry expansion is located within and adjacent to areas identified as Significant Ecological Areas (SEAs) under the Auckland Unitary Plan, including SEA_T_5323 and SEA_T_7032. These SEAs form part of a wider network of indigenous forest remnants and ecological linkages on the western margins of the Hunua Ranges, within the Manukau Ecological District. The area contains some of the most extensive remaining indigenous vegetation in the Manukau Ecological District, which is otherwise dominated by pastoral land use. Predominant ecosystem types are :

- Kānuka forest

- Tawa-taraire forest with mature kānuka
- Kānuka/Manuka scrub

The ecological significance of the area arises from its contribution to the fragmented indigenous forest landscape of south-east Auckland, providing habitat for native fauna and supporting ecological processes across the foothills of the Hunua Ranges. The area includes indigenous vegetation communities typical of the region's lowland forest ecosystems, as well as associated streams and riparian environments.

Over the life of the project approximately 44.4 ha of the indigenous forest habitat within and adjacent to the existing SEAs and nine small inland wetlands will be lost.

To mitigate this loss, the applicant is proposing substantive restoration initiatives to create a “*well connected and valuable biodiversity hubs*”¹.

More specifically the applicant is proposing to:

- Plant 85 ha of new indigenous forest alongside existing mature forest
- Implement progressive rehabilitation of the site
- Implement pest animal and weed control programmes within the overall site
- Enhance wetlands within the Hunua quarry and at the Winstone MereMere quarry in Waikato
- Provide additional fencing and stock protection in the vicinity.

The site supports a range of:

- indigenous birds, including Kereru, Tui, Piwakawaka, Tauhou (silvereye) Riroriro (Grey Warbler),
- gecko and skink species recorded as present or likely to be present (based on habitat) including elegant geckos (*Naultinus elegans*), copper skinks, ornate skinks, forest geckos and Pacific geckos.

Elegant geckos, which have a conservation status of At Risk - Declining, were previously abundant in the area inhabiting mature kānuka . vegetation. Between 2011 and 2015 , 152 Elegant geckos were collected and relocated, initially within the site and subsequently to Tiri Tiri Matangi. Only three elegant geckos have been found since 2020.

To mitigate loss of wildlife, Winstone are seeking authorisation for activities including the capture, handling and relocation of protected wildlife and, where impacts cannot be completely avoided, authority for incidental mortality associated with quarry development.

Where possible, Winstone's are proposing to salvage and relocate gecko and skink species, as described in their Lizard Management Plan (LMP)² and the DOC Wildlife Approvals Report³

¹ Appendix B12.4.5a Assessment of Environmental Effects

² Lizard Management Plan Appendix B12.8.4 of Assessment of Environmental Effects June 2026

³ Fast Track Approvals: Wildlife Approvals report - DOC 51 report (July 2026)

The LMP provides for best practice lizard salvage methods for elegant geckos (*Naultinus elegans*). The salvage work will only be:

- undertaken Oct to mid-April when Lizards active
- carried out by a named project ecologist or herpetologist

Post-release monitoring will be carried out at the release sites.

The LMP provides detailed methods for pre-salvage surveys and ongoing detection efforts during the indigenous vegetation removal. Given the recent substantive reduction in population numbers of elegant geckos in the area, it is likely that very few will be found and relocated.

The ACB commends Winstone's for their commitment to implement substantive ecological restoration and improvement initiatives as part of the quarry expansion project. The documents reviewed to prepare this submission all reflect a strong motivation to go beyond offsetting adverse impacts, to restoring and enhancing the natural environment. It will, however, be critically important that the significant suite of proposed initiatives to counter environmental impacts are effectively implemented. To ensure this occurs, ACB recommends that the project approvals include specific conditions for Winstones to

- monitor and report on all terrestrial ecological enhancement initiatives described in the project resource consenting documents for the duration of the project.
- implement additional agreed ecological enhancement where predicted net impacts are less positive than expected,

It will also be critical that the effectiveness of relocating any salvaged lizards is carefully monitored. Over recent years there has been a significant increase in commitments to offset ecological damage through initiatives such as ecological restoration in a different location and relocating native species to new homes. The little information currently available strongly suggests that such lizard relocations have a very low probability of success (~20%). As such, there is a significant long term ecological risk from approving projects on the strength of offsetting commitments. In most cases the ecological impacts, in particular habitat loss, are immediate and can be accurately predicted, whereas the success of offsetting initiatives are unknown, and occur over the long term.

Freshwater Conservation

A total of approximately 1,157 metres of existing intermittent and permanent stream in the vicinity of the proposed quarry expansion will be permanently lost.

To offset this impact, Winstones are proposing to:

- realign the existing Mangapū Stream Channel

- enhance 1000 meters of current pasture watercourses in the Meremere Quarry Stream in the Waikato and the Waipokapū stream along the northern boundary of the Hunua quarry site
- remove willows along 2,580 m of the Mangatawhiri stream
- improve aquatic habitat conditions in the headwaters of the Waipokapū and Meremere Quarry Streams

Based on aquatic ecological surveys and eDNA sampling, the species inhabiting the Mangapū stream include short and long finned eels, banded kokopu, koura (freshwater crayfish,) and numerous other invertebrate species including snails, limpets and mayflies. The stream has been rated as having a natural character of high to very high⁴

The stream realignment is proposed to occur in short successive increments as a way of testing the success of different habitat reconstruction efforts and modifying methods as required. The new U-shaped stream channel will be approximately 1 metre wide and will be formed using a bulldozer and excavators. It will be lined with low permeability material and be sufficiently sized to capture the 1 in 100-year rainfall event. Boulders will be placed within the new channel to create a more diverse habitat.

Both the section 51(2)(e) complex freshwater fisheries activity approval report and the Freshwater Technical Advice Report indicate that there are unresolved issues regarding the status of shortjaw kōkopu on the site. DOC (and their technical advice) consider that a survey for shortjaw kokopu must be concluded prior to initiating any works. This must be addressed in the relevant management plans.

Despite the proposed careful sequential approach to creating the new realigned stream environment, it is unlikely that the proposed new sections of streams will closely replicate the existing complex natural environment that has evolved over millenia. Similarly, the proposed enhancement in other locations, particularly for streams draining pastoral catchments will not be sustainable unless the catchment land uses are also recreated. As with the proposed terrestrial offsetting, ACB recommends that the project approvals include specific conditions for Winstones to:

- monitor and report on all freshwater ecological enhancement initiatives described in the project resource consenting documents.
- implement additional agreed ecological enhancement where predicted net impacts are less positive than expected,

Summary

There are a total of five management plans that describe multiple ecological offset commitments to be implemented as part of the Winstones quarry expansion project. These are:

⁴ Stream Realignment Manage Plan, Appendix B12.8.7 of the Assessment of Environmental Effects June 2026

1. Aquatic Fauna Salvage and Relocation Plan
2. Lizard Management Plan
3. Pest Management Plan
4. Stream Realignment Management Plan
5. Ecological Management Plan

The ACB commends Winstone's for their commitment to all of the proposed ecological impact mitigation and enhancement measures intended to offset the predicted adverse terrestrial and freshwater ecological impacts arising from the proposed quarry expansion. We have concerns, however, regarding the extent to which the offsets will be effective. If the project proceeds as described, the predicted impacts, in particular loss of high value indigenous terrestrial and aquatic habitats, will certainly occur. The replacement habitats created as an offset to this definite loss are significantly less certain to be close or even near to the quality of the lost habitat.

As outlined in the above management plans, Winstones appear to have adopted a strategy of over-offsetting, as an antidote to the uncertainty surrounding the effectiveness of the proposed methods. This is also commendable. Given the need for aggregate supplies as Auckland develops, the ACB are not opposing this project with all its associated ecological impact mitigation and offsetting. We are, however, requesting, a best practice adaptive management approach is adopted, to closely monitor the effectiveness of the proposed offsets and inform revised improved actions if required.

Recommendations

The Auckland Conservation Board recommends that project approvals include specific conditions for Winstones to take an adaptive management approach to the proposed offset provisions for mitigating predicted adverse impacts. More specifically, conditions that require Winstones, for the duration of the project, to:

- monitor and publically report on the results of all terrestrial ecological and freshwater enhancement initiatives, including the effectiveness of lizard relocations, as described in the project resource consenting documents
- implement additional agreed ecological enhancement where predicted net impacts are less positive than expected,

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Thank you for the opportunity to input.