BEFORE THE PANEL CONVENER

IN THE MATTER of the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 (**FTAA**)

AND

IN THE MATTER of an application by Winstones Aggregates Ltd under section 42 of the FTAA for the Belmont Quarry development

APPLICATION NO. FTAA-2607-1262

MEMORANDUM FROM THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF CONSERVATION RESPONDING TO MINUTE 2 OF THE PANEL CONVENER

2 November 2026

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Introduction

1. This memorandum has been prepared on behalf of the Director-General of Conservation (D-G) by the Department of Conservation (DOC). It responds to a minute of the Panel Convener dated 19 October 2026 in respect of the Belmont Quarry development substantive application (the "Minute").

2. The Minute refers to an upcoming conference to gather participant views that will inform decisions of the Convener regarding:

    a) Appointment of Panel members.

    b) The timing of the Panel decision.

3. This memorandum addresses the matters set out at paragraph 6 of the Minute, as relevant to the above two decisions required of the Panel Convener.

4. The memorandum focuses on the DOC approvals sought under section 42(4) of the Fast Track Approvals Act 2024 (FTAA), being a land exchange, a wildlife approval and a concession.

Gaps

5. In the completeness assessment, DOC noted that was no assessment of the proposed concession activity against the Wellington Conservation Management Strategy 2019 in the application documentation.

Engagement

6. DOC staff worked closely with the Applicant throughout the land exchange process and that level of engagement has continued through to the substantive application process in relation to the DOC approvals.

Complexity

7. The land exchange component of the application is highly complex. This is in part due to the land exchange report being prepared in accordance with the pre-amendment version of the FTAA and the substantive application, which includes the land exchange application, having been lodged under the post-amendment version of the Act. This matter is canvassed in detail in a joint memorandum on Counsel to the Panel Convener from the Applicant and

DOC dated 19 August 2026[1]. The second reason this component of the application has high complexity is because it is novel, being the first land exchange proposal to be decided under the FTAA.

8. The D-G considers that the wildlife approval and concession component of this Project is of low to moderate complexity.

9. In relation to the resource consent component of the Project, the D-G considers this to be of medium complexity.

Principal environmental effects and matters in contention

10. Aside from the legal matter relating to the land exchange identified in paragraph 7 above, DOC's primary concerns at this time relate to lizard management and the likelihood of success of the proposal to transplant swamp maire.

11. The land exchange itself has a far more detailed assessment of the various environmental considerations at stake, which go to the overall consideration of whether there is an enhancement to conservation values.

Where scope can be narrowed

12. DOC is currently working with the Applicant on matters related to the wildlife approval, in particular the proposed Lizard Management Plan. If agreement is reached, the Panel will be informed in a timely manner.

Proposed conditions

13. A suite of conditions were proposed in the land exchange report. These conditions are specific to the exchange and not directly applicable to the other approvals that are being sought. Staff are not aware of any proposed changes to these by the Applicant.

14. DOC will likely propose additional conditions to the wildlife approval and the concession.

15. DOC has not yet reviewed the proposed consent conditions.

[1] 2026-08-18-Belmont-Land-Exchange-Joint-Memo-signed. Redacted.pdf

16. DOC does not consider additional time over and above the usual will be required to work through the conditions.

Changes since lodging

17. DOC has identified that the concession will be processed as a research and collection permit. No additional information is required from the Applicant in relation to this.

Timing of panel decision

18. The land exchange component of the application is complex, and will require extra processing time because it involves complicated legal issues and the Applicant has indicated that it may request a hearing to determine the appropriate legal framework for making a decision on the application. On this basis, the D-G considers that the 90-working day maximum processing timeframe is appropriate for this application.

Panel composition

19. In terms of the D-G's interests, key matters to be considered in this application are the land exchange proposal, effects on absolutely protected wildlife, the concession activity, and on conservation matters dealt with as part of the proposed resource consents (herpetofauna and freshwater habitat).

20. The D-G requests that a highly experienced lawyer or ex-Judge be appointed to the Panel to determine the complex legal issues associated with the land exchange application.

21. Secondly, the D-G considers it is desirable that the Panel Convener appoints a Panel that includes relevant ecological expertise, albeit recognising that the Panel would be guided by reports and advice from the D-G and others.

22. An understanding of effects on wildlife and biodiversity values would be highly desirable to assess the DOC approval issues associated with this project.

23. The D-G considers that appointing more than the default number of Panel members is not required.

Conclusion

24. DOC confirms willingness to engage directly with the Applicant and Panel as necessary to advance the progress of the application.

25. The D-G's representatives will be happy to elaborate further on any of the above points at the conference set for 10:00 a.m., Thursday 5 November 2026.

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Jeremy Prebble
Counsel for the Director-General of Conservation