
MINUTE 15 OF THE EXPERT PANEL

Panel Facilitated and Expert Conferencing
Central and Southern Block Mining Project [FTAA-2512-1153]

(10 June 2026)

- [1] Further to Minute 11, the Panel has granted the Applicant’s request to suspend processing of the application until 22 June 2026, when the applicant’s response to comments must now be received. Further to Minute 12, the Panel has requested the Applicant also respond to questions raised in the initial Peer Review (Earthtech, 2026)¹ by 22 June 2026.
- [2] As also previously signalled, after this date the Panel will issue its own request for information (**RFI**) and then hold a Facilitated Conference once the Applicant’s response to that RFI has been received.² Previous indicative dates for this conference (17 and 18 June)³ now require amendment to accommodate the current suspension. The Panel proposes new dates for a Facilitated Conference over two days between 20 – 23 July. Further directions regarding this conference will follow in due course.
- [3] The Panel notes again,⁴ that there is considerable overlap between issues raised in s53 comments and matters likely to be included in the Panel’s RFI. The Panel anticipates that the more comprehensive the Applicant’s response to comments, the less extensive that the RFI will need to be.
- [4] As matters stand (pending receipt of the applicant’s response to comments), the Panel remains of the view that a Facilitated Conference would be an appropriate and efficient procedure to “grasp the nettle” on the various issues raised by the Substantive Application and the comments received, in order to “focus on conditions regarding issues where differences of opinion between experts remain”.

¹ Letter from PI Kelsey, Earthtech to Dave Serjeant, Expert Panel Chair dated 29 May 2026.

² Minute 8, paragraph [4], Minute 11, paragraph [13]

³ Minute 8, paragraph [4].

⁴ Minute 11, paragraph [9].

- [5] In this regard, the Panel intends the Facilitated Conference be more akin to a workshop as described in the FTAA Practice and Procedure Guidance Note (**Guidance Note**),⁵ where the Panel would work interactively with experts to resolve key issues and proposed conditions for the Substantive Application which can be applied by the Panel, in the event the application is to be approved. Consistent with paragraph [15.7](#) of the Guidance Note, the Panel Facilitated Conference will bring together experts in relevant western science disciplines and the corresponding Mātauranga Māori as nominated by the commenting parties representing mana whenua interests.
- [6] The Panel considers however that one matter is sufficiently important to necessitate separate expert conferencing (prior to the Panel's Facilitated Conference).
- [7] The Department of Conservation and, to a lesser extent, Waikato Regional Council have raised significant criticisms of the Applicant's methods and approach to calculating offset requirements that have in turn created significant uncertainty for the Panel as to the adequacy of the proposed offset measure for the wetlands that are proposed to be removed.
- [8] The Panel notes that the absence of certainty on this matter may be further exacerbated by the proposed offset site potentially being subject to hydrological impacts (groundwater drawdown at site 27).⁶
- [9] The Panel anticipates that the Applicant will respond to these comments and criticisms. However, the Panel requires greater surety, in particular, that offset calculations underpinning the offset proposal are adequate for that proposal to be appropriately referenced in consent conditions, as would be the focus of the Panel Facilitated Conference in turn.
- [10] Accordingly, the Panel directs that independently facilitated expert conferencing on the adequacy of the proposed offset measure is to be convened as soon as possible following receipt of the Applicant's response to comments and resumption of application processing on 22 June 2026.
- [11] Specifically, the experts are requested to conference on:

⁵ *Fast-track Approvals Act 2024: Panel Conveners' Practice and Procedure Guidance*. 22 July 2025. Prepared by Panel Convenor and Associate Panel Conveners. [[Online](#)]. Refer *inter alia* , paragraph 17.5.

⁶ Appendix K, section 6.6.5

- (a) The suitability or otherwise of the Tonkin and Taylor Biodiversity Compensation Model⁷ and whether a different model such as the Department of Conservation's Biodiversity Offset Accounting Model (**BOAM**) (2026)⁸ should be applied.
- (b) The extent and nature of the offset required for the loss of the wetlands being removed by mining activities to meet the principles outlined in the National Policy Statement on Indigenous Biodiversity 2023 (**NPS-IB**) and National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020 (**NPS-FM**).
- (c) Measures to ensure that the offset site is adequately and appropriately established, protected from mining activities, remains in perpetuity, and that potential effects from groundwater drawdown are adequately avoided.
- (d) Monitoring and reporting requirements to document (c).

[12] The Panel wishes to provide for further modelling, should it be required, by facilitating conferencing in stages. For example, if experts agree that the BOAM model should be applied, conferencing could resume once that modelling has been completed, with the objective of producing a Joint Witness Statement (JWS) prior to the Panel Facilitated Conference, if possible.

[13] The following experts are requested to attend this expert conferencing:

- (a) For the Applicant, the authors of Appendix K and Appendix DD.
- (b) For the Department of Conservation, Dr Katherine Beard and Dr Fleur Maseyk.
- (c) For the Regional Council, Kaitlin Morrison.
- (d) For Te Nehenehenui, an expert in mātauranga Māori as it relates to aquatic ecology/habitats.
- (e) For Ngaati Mahuta ki te Hauaarua, an expert in mātauranga Māori as it relates to aquatic ecology/habitats.

[14] The expert conferencing would be facilitated by Mr Steve Mutch from ChanceryGreen.

[15] The Panel seeks feedback on the matters covered at paragraph [15.4](#) of the Guidance Note as relevant, including the proposed issues to be conferenced as

⁷ Baber M, Dickson J, Quinn J, Markham J, Ussher G, Heggie-Gracie S, and Jackson S 2021. *A Biodiversity Compensation Model for New Zealand – A User Guide* (Version 1). Prepared by Tonkin & Taylor Limited. [[Online](#)]

⁸ Maseyk, F, Maron M, Seaton R, and Dutson G. 2015. *A Biodiversity Offsets Accounting System for New Zealand*. Prepared for the Department of Conservation. Hamilton. New Zealand. [[Online](#)]

set out at paragraph [11] above, and notes the requirements for a JWS at paragraph [15.8](#) are applicable. Responses must be received **by 11.59pm on 22 June 2026**.

- [16] To be clear the Panel does not invite comment on the proposal to schedule expert conferencing for the purpose recorded in this Minute.
- [17] The Panel does not envisage ‘will-say’ or summary statements would need to be filed prior to the conferencing as the experts’ respective opinion should be evident from their comments and the Applicant’s responses.
- [18] In summary:
- (a) Responses from all parties to the matters in paragraph 15 are due 22nd June 2026, including for Te Nehenehenui and Ngaati Mahuta ki te Hauaarua, the names of the nominated experts attending;
 - (b) The independently facilitated expert conference is to take place between 22nd June and 17th July 2026; and
 - (c) Panel Facilitated Conference is set for 20th - 23rd July 2026.
- [19] The final dates and further details for (b) and (c) will be confirmed in due course.
- [20] Counsel for the Applicant and parties requested to participate in expert conferencing are directed to liaise with the facilitator over details of timing, venue and logistics for hosting the conferencing as soon as possible after 22 June 2026 and producing a Joint Witness Statement prior to the Panel’s Facilitated Conference in the week 20 July 2026.



Dave Serjeant

Central and Southern Block Mining Project Expert Panel Chair