

12 October 2026

Fast-track Approvals Act Wildlife approvals report

Section 51(2)(c) wildlife approval report for –
FTAA-2605-1236
Remarkables Ski Area Upgrade and Doolans Expansion



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

**Te Kāwanatanga
o Aotearoa**
New Zealand Government

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 NZSki (the applicant) lodged a substantive application with the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) for the Remarkables Ski Area Upgrades and Doolans Expansion Project (the Project). On 8 July 2026, after requesting and receiving further information from the applicant, the EPA determined that the application was complete and complied with section 46 of the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 (FTAA/the Act).
- 1.2 NZSki has applied for wildlife approvals for the activities within the Project's vegetation clearance and earthworks disturbance footprint:
 - to capture and, as a last resort destroy, nests of New Zealand pipit (relocation of nests was originally also sought, however the application for Approvals relating to Wildlife updated 3 September 2026, when updated (on 3 September 2026) removed reference to relocation of nests and/or chicks from the management approach to New Zealand Pipit. Therefore, DOC understands that the relocation of nests is no longer sought as part of the Wildlife Approval), and
 - to disturb, injure and/or kill the Not Threatened McCann's skink within the Project's vegetation and earthworks footprint.
- 1.3 On 11 June 2026, in accordance with section 51(2)(c) of the Act, the Panel Convener directed the EPA to obtain a report prepared by the Director-General of Conservation in accordance with clause 3 of Schedule 7. This report is due on 12 October 2026.
- 1.4 This report is one of a suite related to various conservation approvals sought by NZSki, and for efficiency a covering report has been prepared that discusses matters common to the approvals sought, including Treaty of Waitangi settlement considerations and obligations. The DOC Covering Report should be read in conjunction with the individual approval reports.

2.0 Purpose of the report

- 2.1 This report provides commentary on information provided by the applicant to support the Panel's assessment of the application for wildlife approvals. The content of this report has been informed by information from our Treaty partners, where available.
- 2.2 In accordance with clause 3 of Schedule 7, this report must address the following matters:
 - The purpose of the Wildlife Act 1953 and the effects of the Project on the protected wildlife that is to be covered by the approval.
 - Information and requirements relating to the protected wildlife that is to be covered by the approval (including, as the case may be, in the New Zealand Threat Classification System or any relevant international conservation agreement).
 - Any conditions that should be imposed to manage the effects of the activity on protected wildlife.

- Any conditions that should be imposed to recognise or protect a relevant Treaty settlement and any obligations arising under the Marine and Coastal Area (Takutai Moana) Act 2011 or the Ngā Rohe Moana o Ngā Hapū o Ngāti Porou Act 2019.

3.0 Overview of DOC's report

- 3.1 This report addresses the wildlife approvals sought for McCann's skink and New Zealand pipit.
- 3.2 Overall, DOC's assessment concludes that, subject to the recommended conditions, the proposed activities are consistent with the protective purpose of the Wildlife Act 1953 at a species level. However, the proposal is not protective of McCann's skink at an individual level.
- 3.3 Subject to some amendments to the conditions sought, on balance DOC considers that the Project is unlikely to affect the long-term viability of affected populations of both McCann's skink and New Zealand pipit. There will however be residual effects from the activities sought to be undertaken. This assessment is specific to the wildlife approvals sought and does not take into account the broader effects of the Project for which the wider suite of approvals is sought.

4.0 Sources

- 4.1 This report draws on information from the substantive application, in particular:
 - A-18 - Approvals Relating to Wildlife Act updated 3 September 2026
 - B-23 - Lizard Assessment and Management Plan 27 Aug 26
 - F.03 – Terrestrial Ecology Management Plan
 - H.06 - Proposed Conditions – Wildlife Approval - Avifauna updated 3 September 2026
 - H.07 - Proposed Conditions – Wildlife Approval - Lizards
- 4.2 This report is informed by expert advice from the following technical experts. Their advice and credentials are provided as Appendices to the DOC Covering Report.
 - Nicholas Harker – Technical Advisor (Fauna) for DOC. Advising on lizards.
 - Dr Kerry Weston – Senior Science Advisor (Fauna) for DOC. Advising on avifauna.

5.0 Context and background

5.1 Project overview

- 5.1.1 The project for which the application seeks approvals is the Remarkables Ski Area Upgrade and Doolans Expansion. The Project involves the upgrade and development of infrastructure at the Remarkables Ski Area, and the expansion and development of ski activities, trails and associated infrastructure within the adjacent Doolans Basin.

5.1.2 NZSki is seeking a range of approvals under the FTAA, being concessions, resource consents, complex freshwater fisheries approval and wildlife approvals.

5.2 Summary of wildlife approvals sought

5.2.1 NZSki seeks wildlife approvals for activities involving McCann's skink (*Oligosoma maccanni*) and New Zealand pipit (*Anthus novaeseelandiae novaeseelandiae*).

5.2.2 Wildlife approval is sought for the species in Table 1.

	Common name	Species name	New Zealand Threat Classification System
Lizard(s)	McCann's Skink	<i>Oligosoma maccanni</i>	Not Threatened
Avifauna	New Zealand Pipit	<i>Anthus novaeseelandiae</i>	At Risk – Declining

Summary of wildlife approval sought – lizards

5.2.3 NZSki seeks a wildlife approval under the FTAA to authorise the disturbance, injury and incidental killing of McCann's skink (*Oligosoma maccanni*) associated with vegetation clearance, earthworks and construction activities required for the Project. The approval is sought because areas within the project footprint provide habitat for McCann's skink and construction activities may result in adverse effects on individual animals.

Summary of wildlife approval sought – avifauna

5.2.4 NZSki seeks wildlife approval under the FTAA to authorise the capture and removal of nests of New Zealand pipit (*Anthus novaeseelandiae*) and, as a last resort, the destruction of nests and eggs where necessary to enable construction activities associated with the Project. The approval is sought because vegetation clearance and earthworks may affect nesting New Zealand pipit within or immediately adjacent to the project disturbance footprint during the breeding season.

6.0 Matters considered in relation to the criteria for a wildlife approval

6.1 Statutory context

6.1.1 Clause 1 of Schedule 7 of the FTAA defines "wildlife approval" as a "lawful authority for an act or omission that would otherwise be an offence under any of sections 56(1), 58(1), 63(1), 63A, 64, 65(1)(f), 70G(1), 70P, and 70T(2) of the Wildlife Act 1953".

6.1.2 Indigenous lizards and avifauna are absolutely protected under the Wildlife Act 1953. Catching, killing and liberating protected wildlife without lawful authority are offences under the Wildlife Act:

Sections 63(1) and 70G(1) make it an offence to “hunt or kill” (the definition of which includes related activities such as “taking”, “capturing” and “disturbing”) protected wildlife without lawful authority. This also includes killing that is incidental, being that which is not directly intended but is unavoidable and foreseeable as a consequence of carrying out an otherwise lawful activity (s 53A).

Section 56(1)(ab) establishes that no person may liberate; or capture or attempt to capture or have in their possession for the purpose of liberating, wildlife without the prior written authority of the Director-General.

6.1.3 The wildlife activities proposed (capturing, releasing, and killing wildlife) can be considered for wildlife approval under the FTAA. A wildlife approval granted under the Act is treated as if it were granted under the Wildlife Act (Schedule 7, clause 7(1)).

6.1.4 The relevant purpose of the Wildlife Act 1953 is to protect wildlife. In assessing an application for species management against the purpose of the Wildlife Act, it is relevant to consider protection at both the individual level (e.g. minimising impacts, safe capture and handling) and population level (e.g. taking into account benefits offered by habitat enhancement etc).

6.1.5 The Panel's decision must therefore consider both effects on individual animals and the likely consequences for the population of the species concerned.

6.2 Purpose of the Wildlife Act

6.2.1 The relevant purpose of the Wildlife Act is to protect wildlife.

6.2.2 The Wildlife Act creates a tiered system, with different levels of protection required for different species. Most native wildlife is absolutely protected – meaning that it cannot be lawfully hunted, killed, harassed, or possessed without specific authorisation. The Wildlife Act also identifies wildlife that is not protected and not controlled for hunting purposes.

6.2.3 NZSki is seeking wildlife approvals in relation to absolutely protected species. In this report, the application and the effects of the Project are considered against the purpose of the Wildlife Act.

6.2.4 McCann's skink: DOC's technical advisor, Mr Harker, has reviewed the applicant's proposed non-salvage approach for McCann's skink. Technical advice indicates that the species is abundant within the wider landscape, that there are logistical challenges with relocating skinks into existing populations which are likely at capacity (given their occurrence in most suitable habitats nearby), that there is uncertainty around positive outcomes were a salvage to be undertaken, and that the proposed habitat management is acceptable in the circumstances. However, at an individual level McCann's skink will not be protected. There will be residual effects from the activities sought to be undertaken, including the injury to or killing of individual skinks, and it is important that these are appropriately compensated for.

6.2.5 New Zealand Pipit: DOC's technical advisor, Dr Weston has reviewed the applicant's proposed management framework for New Zealand pipit. Where avoidance is not possible, destruction of eggs may in some circumstances provide the breeding pair with the greatest opportunity to survive and successfully renest within the same breeding season. Dr Weston advises that works should not occur near to nests with chicks, and works should be delayed until the chicks have fledged.

6.2.6 Conclusion: Accordingly, DOC considers that, subject to the recommended conditions, the proposed activities are in keeping with the protective purpose of the Wildlife Act at a species level. However, there will be injury and killing of individual skinks.

6.3 Information and requirements relating to protected wildlife

6.3.1 Having reflected on the criteria for assessment of an application for wildlife approval, DOC summarises its comments below.

6.3.2 Lizards:

6.3.2.1 McCann's skink is classified as Not Threatened under the NZTCS. The Applicant estimates that between 300 and 600 individual McCann's skinks may be affected by the Project. Mr Harker indicates that this may underestimate actual abundance because no mark-recapture methodology was undertaken and skink densities in comparable habitats can be considerably higher.

6.3.2.2 Several other indigenous lizard species are known from the wider landscape. While the applicant's surveys indicate these species are unlikely to occur within the disturbance footprint, DOC's technical advice considers central-southern cryptic skink to be moderately likely to be present in low numbers.

6.3.3 Avifauna:

6.3.3.1 New Zealand pipit is classified as At Risk – Declining and Dr Weston notes that New Zealand pipit was the most abundant indigenous bird species recorded within the Project area and is likely to be the indigenous avifauna species most affected by the Project due to the loss of nesting and foraging habitat within the disturbance footprint. However, the proposed management framework is considered appropriate to manage those effects, subject to appropriate conditions. In saying that, the documentation around the management of the species appears contradictory between the Terrestrial Ecology Management Plan as it relates to New Zealand pipit and the Methodology referred to in the Applicant's proposed Wildlife Approval conditions, being *“As set out in Table 18, Section 7 and Section 8 Recommendation 23 of the Terrestrial Ecology Assessment (prepared by e3 Scientific dated April 2026”*.

6.4 The role of species management plans

- 6.4.1 Wildlife Act approvals commonly rely on species management plans to set out the methods that will be used to avoid, minimise, remedy, offset or compensate for effects on protected wildlife.
- 6.4.2 These plans typically describe the species present, the nature and scale of anticipated effects, proposed mitigation measures, monitoring requirements, reporting obligations and contingency actions.
- 6.4.3 A species management plan provides the technical basis for assessing whether the proposed activities are consistent with the purpose of the Wildlife Act and whether appropriate safeguards are in place to manage effects on protected wildlife.
- 6.4.4 DOC notes that the approach proposed for McCann's skink differs from many Wildlife Act applications involving lizards. Rather than seeking authorisation to undertake salvage and relocation of lizards, the applicant proposes a non-salvage approach supported by habitat management and compensation measures. Mr Harker considers that this approach is justified in the circumstances of this application, having regard to the conservation status of McCann's skink, the lack of availability of suitable release sites, and uncertainty regarding the effectiveness of mitigation translocations.
- 6.4.5 Methods for managing effects on New Zealand pipit are set out within the Terrestrial Ecology Impact Assessment and the proposed wildlife approval conditions (which refers back to that Assessment as the applicable Methodology). These measures perform a similar function by establishing procedures for nest surveys, and avoidance of active nests and eggs where disturbance cannot be avoided.

6.5 Conditions to manage effects on protected wildlife

- 6.5.1 NZSki has provided draft wildlife approval conditions for both the proposed avifauna approval and the proposed lizard approval. *H.06 Wildlife Approval - Avifauna Updated 3 September 2026* and *H.07 Wildlife Approval - Lizards* contain conditions relating to the authorised activities, personnel, reporting requirements, incidental discovery procedures, management measures and monitoring requirements.
- 6.5.2 DOC generally supports the condition framework proposed by the applicant, should the Wildlife Approvals be granted.
- 6.5.3 DOC has identified one matter where amendment of the proposed avifauna wildlife approval conditions is recommended.
- 6.5.4 DOC recommends that the avifauna wildlife approval include specific procedures for situations where chicks, rather than eggs, are present in a nest. The application contains a detailed methodology for management of nests containing eggs but does not clearly address circumstances where chicks are present. Where chicks are present, avoidance of works in the immediate vicinity of the nest and allowing fledging to occur should be prioritised.

6.5.5 Additionally, a placeholder condition is proposed in the lizard wildlife approval conditions to ensure that appropriate compensation is made.

6.6 Schedule 7 considerations

6.6.1 Under clause 6 of Schedule 7 of the Act, the Panel must consider whether conditions would avoid, minimise or remedy impacts on protected wildlife and, where residual impacts remain, whether offsetting or compensation is appropriate.

6.6.2 DOC considers that, should the Wildlife Approvals be granted, the recommended conditions, with the amendments sought by DOC, are proportionate to the conservation status of the species concerned. For New Zealand pipit, the recommended conditions focus on avoiding and minimising impacts on active nests. For McCann's skink, where some residual effects cannot be fully avoided, the recommended conditions include measures intended to compensate for those residual effects through research and conservation initiatives.

6.6.3 DOC also notes that the species covered by the proposed approvals differ in conservation status. New Zealand pipit is classified as At Risk - Declining, while McCann's skink is classified as Not Threatened. DOC therefore considers that a greater level of management intervention and condition specificity is appropriate for New Zealand pipit than for McCann's skink.

7.0 Additional information

7.1.1 The following international agreements are relevant to the consideration of the approval sought:

7.1 The United National Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

7.1.2 The United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is an international agreement that promotes the development of global targets, national strategies and action plans by countries for the protection, restoration and sustainable use of biodiversity.

7.1.3 As a party to the CBD, New Zealand is required to have a national biodiversity strategy and action plan. Te Mana o te Taiao – Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020 sets out New Zealand's contribution to reversing the loss of biodiversity worldwide.

7.1.4 Key objectives of the strategy that are relevant to this application include:

- *Biodiversity protection is at the heart of economic activity.*
- *Natural resources are managed sustainably.*
- *Management ensures that biological threats and pressures are reduced through management.*
- *Ecosystems and species are protected, restored, resilient, and connected from mountain tops to ocean depths.*

7.1.5 The wildlife approval sought concerns indigenous species and therefore falls within the broad scope of the CBD. However, DOC has not identified any specific obligations arising under the CBD that would materially affect consideration of the wildlife approval sought. The proposed

approvals relate to species for which mitigation and management measures are proposed, and DOC has not identified any inconsistency with New Zealand's obligations under the CBD.

International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

7.1.6 The IUCN is a globally recognised conservation body and New Zealand's membership reflects its commitment to biodiversity and ecosystem protection. While the IUCN is not a treaty-level 11 agreement, New Zealand's contributions to the IUCN's Contributions for Nature platform and its alignment with global biodiversity targets (e.g. the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework) reflect a strong public commitment to species recovery and habitat protection.

7.1.7 The IUCN Red List status of species named in the application is provided in Table 3.

Table 3: IUCN Red List status of species named in application

Common Name	Scientific Name	IUCN Red List Status
McCann's Skink	<i>Oligosoma maccanni</i>	Least Concern (stable population)
New Zealand Pipit	<i>Anthus novaeseelandiae</i>	Least concern (stable population)

7.2 Consistency with statutory planning documents and policy

7.2.1 The following statutory planning documents and associated policies are relevant to the consideration of the wildlife approval sought for this Project.

Conservation General Policy 2005

7.2.2 The Conservation General Policy 2005 (CGP) provides guidance for the administration and management of lands and waters and natural and historic resources managed under conservation legislation including the Wildlife Act.

7.2.3 The CGP does not contain policies specific to the proposed wildlife activities, however, the following policies are relevant:

- 11.1(a) Any application for a concession or other authorisation will comply with, or be consistent with, the objectives of the relevant Act, the statutory purposes for which the place is held, and any conservation management strategy or plan.
- 11.1(c) ...authorisation holders should monitor the effects of authorised activities on natural resources, historical and cultural heritage, and the benefit and enjoyment of the public, including public access, to inform future management decisions.

- 11.1(d) ...authorisation holders will be responsible for the safe conduct of their operations, including the safety of staff, clients, contractors, and the public, and compliance with relevant safety standards and legal obligations.

7.2.4 The application is not inconsistent with these provisions at a species level; noting however that an individual level many McCann's skinks are likely to be injured or killed .

7.2.4.1 Otago Conservation Management Strategy 2016 – Partial Review 2022.

DOC considers the wildlife approvals sought are not inconsistent with the relevant outcomes and policies of the CMS at a species level, provided the proposed mitigation, management and compensation measures relied upon in the application are implemented through enforceable conditions. In particular, the proposed management of New Zealand pipit nesting habitat, implementation of the Lizard Management Plan and appropriate compensation measures proposed for residual effects are relevant to maintaining indigenous biodiversity values recognised by the CMS.

Appendices

Appendix A: Wildlife Conditions – Lizards (DOC suggested tracked changes)

Appendix B: Wildlife Conditions – Avifauna (DOC suggested tracked changes)