Before the Expert Panel

under: the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024

in the matter of: an application for resource consents, approvals and a notice of requirement to alter a designation, to construct a four-lane, median divided highway to replace existing State Highway 2 corridor between Te Puna and Ōmokoroa, known as 'Takitimu North Link - Stage 2'

applicant: **NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi**
Requiring Authority and Applicant

Statement of Evidence of **Andrew Blayney** for NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi

Dated: 16 December 2025

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STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF ANDREW RUSSELL BLAYNEY FOR NZ TRANSPORT AGENCY WAKA KOTAHI

1 My full name is Andrew Russell Blayney.

2 I am a Senior Terrestrial Ecologist (Senior Principal) at Boffa Miskell. I have held this role since 2017. An overview of my relevant experience and qualifications is set out in the Ecological Effects Assessment (*EEA*) lodged with the Application.[1]

3 I have been involved in the Project since 2020. I am the co-author of the EEA lodged with the Application.

CODE OF CONDUCT

4 Although this matter is not before the Environment Court, I confirm that I have read the Code of Conduct for expert witnesses as contained in section 9 of the Environment Court Practice Note 2023. I agree to comply with that Code. My qualifications as an expert are set out in the EEA. I am satisfied that the matters which I address in this statement of evidence are within my area of expertise. I have not omitted to consider material facts known to me that might alter or detract from the opinions I express.

SCOPE OF EVIDENCE

5 My evidence has been prepared to support the NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi's (*NZTA*) response to comments from the Department of Conservation (*DOC*) / Director-General of Conservation and the Bay of Plenty Regional Council (*BOPRC*)[2] in relation to:

5.1 Offset ratios for wetlands;

5.2 Maintenance of wetland restoration areas;

5.3 Bat management; and

5.4 Lizard management.

Offset ratios for wetlands

Magnitude of effect

6 I consider the approach proposed by BOPRC, of assessing magnitude of effects at an individual wetland scale, is an inappropriate application of the EIANZ Guidelines (2018).[3] It

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1 Appendix 9.4.4. Ecological Effects Assessment.

2 Made pursuant to s53 of the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024. Comments 10 and 16.

3 Environment Institute of Australia and New Zealand's (EIANZ) Ecological Impact Assessment Guidelines (EIANZ, 2018).

conflates the impact on a single wetland at an individual level to the impact of effects on wetland ecological values, the magnitude of effect on wetland ecology, and the level of ecological effect. To assess these matters properly, an appropriate scale must be defined.

7 While BOPRC applies the EIANZ Guidelines differently from me, I consider the distinction to be largely academic. In my opinion, what matters is the actual effect, for example the loss of 1 hectare of wetland, not how that effect is described. The magnitude of impact depends on the scale of assessment: at the level of a single wetland, losing 1 hectare might be considered a very high effect, but at a catchment scale, the same loss could be low or moderate. The ecological impact does not change; only the way it is communicated. Importantly, this communication has little influence on the practical measures needed to manage the effect. To that point, I emphasise that the EIANZ guidance framework of assessing values, magnitudes of effect, and level of ecological effects are methods with which to contextually communicate effects and assessments. They are not a replacement for descriptions of effects and clarity in providing a line of sight between these effects and the mechanisms recommended to manage them.

8 I disagree that the total loss of a single feature constitutes a very high magnitude of effect on wetland ecology.[4] The BOPRC approach sets the scale of the assessment of the magnitude of effects on wetlands at the scale of individual features, which is a variable spatial scale.

9 I maintain my conclusions as set out in the EEA, in particular I maintain my position as to the magnitude of effects as set out in Tables 29 and 30 of the EEA.

Compensation and offsetting

10 I consider an offset for moderate value wetlands at a 1:1:1 (loss : creation : restoration) ratio is appropriate in this ecological context. My position is further explained in Section 5.3 of the EEA. I do not consider the implementation of a 1:1:1 ratio versus a 1:2 (loss : creation) ratio equates to a loss of wetland area as both options ensure at least a 1:1 (loss : creation) replacement. The 1:1:1 option allows flexibility for the NZTA/contractor to determine the best approach for managing effects on wetlands, while ensuring no net loss of wetland extent, as restoration opportunities exist along the alignment that could provide considerable benefit to wetland values. I note there is no proposal to offset wetland loss with only restoration, as is suggested in the last paragraph of Section 5.4 of

[4] As stated in paragraph 5.3 of the BOPRC comment part 1 (dated 9 December 2025).

BOPRC's comments. I also note that DOC has not opposed the 1: 1: 1 ratio proposed for this Project.

11 In Section 5.4 of BOPRC's comments, BOPRC suggests there is potentially uncertainty with regards to the extent of wetland restoration for impacted wetlands. They also recommend multiple matters that they consider should be included within consent conditions. For example, BOPRC recommends that the wetland offset ratios should be included in the conditions, and the Wetland Management Plan (*WMP*) should be referenced within the conditions.

12 I consider the WMP and associated performance criteria conditions in Appendix 9.1.2 (October) of the Substantive Application (Conditions 23, 28, 30)[5] provide a defined framework and requirements for the implementation of, and standards for wetland effects management, aligned with the recommendations of BOPRC. These conditions specifically include the offset ratios (Condition 30.4) for moderate and low value wetlands (excluding the Ōmokoroa and Merrin Wetland), and include detailed requirements for the WMP (Condition 23).

13 For the Ōmokoroa and Merrin Wetland, Condition 30.3 provides a 'cap' of 2.56 ha for maximum loss. Condition 30.2 sets out a comprehensive process for the specific offset or compensation to be implemented in relation to the Ōmokoroa and Merrin Wetlands, providing for flexibility in the detailed design process and ensuring the actual loss of wetland extent / impacts is provided for. Condition 30.2 requires NZTA to offset or compensate that loss through creation of new Wetland/s *and* restoration of existing Natural Wetland. I consider, as aligned with the EEA (Appendix 10), that a loss of 2.56ha of natural inland wetland in these areas would require[6] 2.56ha of wetland creation as well as the restoration proposed as part of this package. If a subsequent roading design achieves less loss of natural inland wetland, this would require a commensurate reduction in wetland creation.

Mapping / locations of wetland creation not necessary

14 I do not consider it is necessary to map the areas of wetland restoration and creation at this stage.[7] I am satisfied the proposed conditions provide a robust framework to manage the Project's potential effects on wetlands. The EEA has assessed an effects envelope within which the Project can operate, while being able to manage the effects on wetlands. This envelope includes limits on

5 Note that the conditions referred to in this evidence are the Applicant's Proposed Resource Consent Conditions (October) – Appendix 9.1.2.

6 The EEA details a 1:1 loss : creation as part of a comprehensive restoration package. However, there are equally valid methods that may be utilized that utilized a greater amount of wetland creation and smaller scale restoration of existing natural inland wetlands within this proposal.

7 As stated in paragraph 5.4 of the BOPRC comment part 1.

the impacts on higher value wetlands in the alignment. However, as the design is refined, the exact locations of effects, the extent of effects, and thus the required quantum of offsetting required, is likely to change. Locking the effects management areas and scale into the conditions at this stage disincentivises design refinement to further reduce impacts and commensurately reduce the effects management requirements of the Project.

15 The EEA (Section 5.3) provides recommendations on the locations and suggests emphasising expanding existing wetlands, adding wetlands to stream realignments and focusing on larger continuous features, which will inform the exact wetland restoration and creation in the detailed design.

Maintenance of wetland restoration areas

16 BOPRC suggests the maintenance of wetland restoration areas should continue for the duration of consent.[8] I consider this an arbitrary timeframe. The maintenance of the wetland restoration areas is tied to the achievement of performance criteria for planting (Condition 28.4). I consider that at the point where the performance criteria have been achieved, the effects management has achieved no-net-loss and likely a net benefit of wetland ecological values compared to that lost. There is also a requirement to maintain planting (including wetland planting) under the EMP (Condition 28.5). NZTA has proposed further consent conditions that require monitoring and ensure the outcomes required by the wetland restoration and creation are achieved (Conditions 23.1(a), 30.6).

Bat management

17 In DOC's comments (3.35 – 3.40)[9] DOC suggests that a Bat Management Plan (*Bat MP*) should be required by conditions of consent to be prepared in advance of any surveys to detect whether bats are present in the area of the Project. DOC's justification for this request is that long-tailed bats have been detected nearby in the Takitimu North Link Stage 1 project area. However, as identified in Section 3.1.3.3 of the EEA, there were very low detection rates of two confirmed passes and seven potential passes over 336 detector-nights in the Stage 1 area in 2017. Subsequent survey in this same Stage 1 area as well as throughout the Stage 2 area has not detected any long-tailed bats.

18 On the basis of this information, it is unclear to me why DOC has assumed that the Project *will* have effects on bats, requiring preparation of a Bat MP without undertaking surveying to confirm whether bats are present in the area. I disagree that the current survey data support that such effects are likely for this Project.

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8 As stated in paragraphs 3.5 and 5.4 of the BOPRC comment part 1.

9 Director-General of Conservation comments received (dated 8 December 2025).

When bats have been detected in the wider area, they have been detected at a low rate of activity or, more commonly, not at all.

19 Effects assessments should be proportional to the risk of the effects occurring. The near absence of bat activity in the area suggests the Project area is not likely to have any importance to bat populations, nor is it likely to have these effects on the long-tailed bat population in the wider area.

20 I consider NZTA's current proposal for a survey and then development of a Bat MP, in the event that long-tailed bats are detected, is a precautionary approach to ensure that data, contemporary to the timing of construction, is utilised to make decisions around appropriate management of long-tailed bats. This approach will prevent implementing effects management approaches like tree felling protocols universally where the risk is very low and will have no benefit to long-tailed bats (if long-tailed bats are not present in subsequent surveys). It will ensure appropriate responses are developed in response to the detection of their presence, and the frequency of detection.

21 BOPRC, in relation to Condition 26 requiring a Bat MP, considers that DOC's Protocols for Minimising the Risk of Felling Occupied Bat Roosts (*Bat Roost Protocols*) should be referenced as a minimum standard in the conditions.[10] I agree in principle that the Bat Roost Protocols will be a minimum standard for a Bat MP, if needed. However, I prefer the current proposed condition wording of the conditions which notes: *"Where potential roost felling is not able to be avoided, detail on current best practice for tree removal protocols to avoid injury and/or mortality of roosting long-tailed bats;"* rather than referring specifically to the current versions of said guidance. The existing condition wording ensures that the condition is robust to changes in best practice that may arise between now and the implementation of the condition.

Lizard management

22 DOC considers that further resource consent conditions should be required to manage the effects of lizard habitat loss.[11] DOC considers the Lizard Management Plan (*LMP*) is a suitable document for capturing the methods and requirements for lizard habitat replacement (eg planting).

23 The location of lizard management conditions is primarily a planning / legal matter and therefore I do not comment on it further in this evidence.

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[10] Section 5.4 of the BOPRC comment part 1.

[11] Paragraphs 3.29 – 3.34 of the Director-General of Conservation comments received (dated 8 December 2025).

24 However, I do not agree that the LMP is the place to capture detailed habitat replacement requirements such as planting and monitoring requirements. My preference is for species management plans, like the LMP, to be short, concise documents that have a specific purpose of detailing direct operational species management requirements. The reason for this preference is these plans must be an actionable, easy to follow document not just for ecologists. The audience of an LMP is varied and includes a variety of non-specialists such as earthwork contractors and project managers. For this reason, it is my experience that LMPs work best when they are tailored and focused on vegetation clearance processes, controls, and salvage requirements.

25 As such, my preference is that implementation details such as planting, habitat creation and monitoring should be captured in the Ecological Management Plan (*EMP*) or sub plans thereof (as has been proposed by the NZTA). This approach avoids distraction from what I consider the LMP's core purpose, and unnecessary duplication of planting methods, performance standards, and monitoring requirements that will be captured in the EMP as part of its core purpose.

Conclusion

26 I consider NZTA's proposed consent conditions provide a clear and enforceable framework for managing ecological effects. They specify wetland offset ratio standards to the extent appropriate, and performance standards, supported by monitoring and adaptive management provisions, ensuring no net loss and likely net ecological gain. Conditions addressing bat and lizard management adopt a risk-based and precautionary approach, while maintaining operational clarity. The framework allows design refinement without compromising ecological outcomes. In my opinion, these conditions are sufficient to ensure effects are appropriately managed.

Andrew Blayney
16 December 2025