[FTAA-2605-1236]

REMARKABLES SKI AREA UPGRADE AND DOOLANS EXPANSION

FAST TRACK APPROVALS ACT APPLICATION

PEER REVIEW MEMORANDUM REGARDING LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL EFFECTS ASSESSMENT

Ben Espie

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3rd July 2026

INTRODUCTION

1 My name is Benjamin Espie. I hold the qualifications of Bachelor of Landscape Architecture (with honours) from Lincoln University and Bachelor of Arts from Canterbury University. I am a member of the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects and was the chairman of the Southern Branch of that institute between 2007 and 2016. Since November 2004 I have been a director of Vivian and Espie Limited, a specialist resource management and landscape planning consultancy based in Queenstown. Between March 2001 and November 2004, I was employed as Principal of Landscape Architecture by Civic Corporation Limited, a resource management consultancy company contracted to the Queenstown Lakes District Council.

2 The majority of my work involves advising clients regarding the management of landscapes and amenity that the Resource Management Act 1991 provides and regarding the landscape provisions of various district and regional plans. I also produce assessment reports and evidence in relation to proposed development or proposed Regional and District planning provisions as they relate to landscape issues. The primary objective of these assessments and evidence is to ascertain the effects of proposed activities or provisions in relation to landscape character, values and visual amenity.

3 Much of my experience has involved providing landscape and amenity assessments relating to resource consent applications and plan changes both on behalf of District Councils and on behalf of private clients. I have compiled many assessment reports and briefs of evidence relating to the

landscape and amenity related aspects of proposed regimes of District Plan provisions in the rural areas of a number of districts of the South Island.

4 In recent months, I have been engaged by a number of South Island District Councils to provide peer review comments regarding landscape effects assessments that form part of Fast Track Approvals Act (**FTAA**) applications. To date, I have completed two such peer reviews regarding substantive applications (FTAA-2508-1097 - Haldon Solar and FTAA-2508-1100 - The Point Solar).

5 I have been engaged by the Central Otago District Council (**CODC**) and the Queenstown Lakes District Council (**QLDC**) to peer review the landscape assessment work relating to the Fast Track Approvals Act Application FTAA-2605-1236 by NZ Ski to expand the Remarkables Ski Area into the Doolans Basin.

6 I received and read a draft Landscape Effects Assessment and Graphic Supplement, dated the 1st of April 2026, prepared by Boffa Miskell (**the draft BM report**). I prepared and circulated to QLDC and CODC peer review comments dated the 4th of May 2026 regarding the draft BM report. I also had some correspondence with the draft BM report author (Yvonne Pfluger) and the Applicant's planner (Mitchell Heaven) to clarify some queries. I visited the site on the 30th of April 2026 with the guidance of Ross Lawrence, the Applicant's representative.

7 Since the time of my peer review of the draft BM report, a substantive application has been lodged that includes the following final landscape assessment work **(the final BM documents**):

i. Landscape Effects Assessment dated the 7th of May 2026 (**the BM ski area expansion report**);

ii. Graphic Supplement dated the 6th of May 2026;

iii. Visual Simulation Graphic Supplement dated the 7th of May 2026 (high and low resolution versions);

iv. Carpark and Bus Hub Landscape Effects Assessment dated the 5th of May 2026 (**the BM carpark and bus hub report)**;

v. Carpark and Bus Hub Graphic Supplement dated the 5th of May 2026.

8 I have reviewed the final BM documents and give peer review comments in this memo. I will not repeat information set out in my peer review of the draft BM report, and this memo should be read in conjunction with my comments regarding the draft. Essentially, this memo is an update of my previous comments.

9 I generally use the headings of the final BM documents as a structure to my peer review comments.

METHODOLOGY

10 As per the draft BM report, the final BM assessment reports regarding both the ski area expansion and the carpark / bus hub follow a comprehensive and appropriate methodological approach that has been guided by Te Tangi A Te Manu, Aotearoa New Zealand Landscape Assessment Guidelines (**TTatM**)[1].

PROPOSAL

11 In my review of the draft BM report, I suggested some clarification regarding some aspects of the proposal. Following the lodgement of the substantive application, I was asked to assist in checking the completeness of the application. I consider that there is now sufficient information to understand the landscape and visual effects of the proposed activities. Notwithstanding that, I discuss some uncertainties and suggest some inclusions in my commentary regarding landscape and visual effects subsequently.

12 I also set out my understanding regarding some aspects of the proposal for clarity. It is on the basis of this understanding of the proposal that I make my subsequent peer review comments. I understand that:

i. In undertaking all earthworks and rehabilitation work relating to the ski area expansion, no new exotic vegetation will be introduced to the site, that existing exotic vegetation will

[1] 'Te Tangi a te Manu: Aotearoa New Zealand Landscape Assessment Guidelines'. Tuia Pita Ora New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects, July 2022 (**TTatM**).

not increase in distribution, and response measures are in place to deal with exotic spread[2].

ii. Lighting may be on groomers, vehicles, downlights on snowmakers and low lux lighting in or on the mid station. Lighting of the gondola, base and mid stations is restricted to winter months between 6:30am to 5:30pm[3].

iii. The rehabilitation of disturbed ground and batters will be done in accordance with proposed conditions ECO.4 to ECO.19.

iv. Detailed design plans of the carparking area adjacent to SH6 are to be submitted in accordance with proposed condition TRANS.8. A landscape planting plan is be submitted in accordance with proposed conditions LSP.1 to 2 (which set out what must be achieved). Proposed conditions CG.8 and ECO.44 to 49 require a vegetative rehabilitation plan in relation to Carpark B.

13 While more directly relating to planning matters than landscape assessment, I have not seen a full explanation of whether all parts of the ski area access road (including the stretch on Lot 2 DP17411) meet the definition of "public place" as per the Queenstown Lakes Proposed District Plan (**QLD PDP**).

EXISTING ENVIRONMENT

14 As per my review of the draft BM report, I consider that the existing environment has been comprehensively and appropriately described in landscape terms. This equally applies to the BM carpark / bus hub report, although that report makes a number of references to the Coneburn industrial area as a component of the existing environment and visual setting of the proposed carpark / bus hub activities. While that is correct, it should be noted that the industrial area, with its visible earthworks etc, is of a different zoning to the surrounding rural land (Coneburn Industrial Zone), to which different Objectives, Policies and provisions apply.

2 Terrestrial Ecological Impact Assessment, E3 Scientific, May 2026, page 139. Proposed condition ECO.20.
3 BM ski area expansion report, pages 42 and 43. Proposed conditions OP.8 and OP.9.

RELEVANT STATUTORY PROVISIONS

15 The final BM documents (both the ski area expansion and carpark / bus hub reports) appropriately set out the statutory provisions that are useful in framing a landscape effects assessment. I note that the BM ski area expansion report's commentary on the Central Otago District Plan does not refer to Policy 4.4.14, which I consider to be relevant.

16 Some plans (such as Figure 4 of the BM Graphic Supplement relating to the ski area expansion) show the District Boundary incorrectly and therefore misrepresent which parts of the proposed activities are in which zones (Ski Area Sub Zone in the Queenstown Lakes District or Rural Resource Area in the Central Otago District). The fact that the gondola mid station building is within the Rural Resource Area of the Central Otago District is important to the consideration of effects in relation to the statutory documents.

ASSESSMENT OF EFFECTS

17 In an overall sense, the assessment of landscape and visual effects in the final BM documents is thorough and comprehensive. The approach is appropriate and the commentary is clear and logically set out. Notwithstanding that, I make additional peer review comments in the following paragraphs. Where I do not refer to a particular part of the final BM documents, it can be assumed that I consider the BM assessment to be logical and plausible.

Ski Area Expansion

Natural Character Effects

18 Natural character effects within the Rastus Burn catchment are discussed at section 6.1.1 of the BM ski area expansion report. Essentially it is found that, following temporary effects, there will be very low degree adverse effects on the natural character of Rastus Burn and low degree effects on Swan Lake and its margins. Leaving aside any potential ecological/hydrological effects, I consider that the BM assessment findings are appropriate. I consider that a key reason (that is not explicitly set out in the BM report) is the presence of the QLD PDP Ski Area Sub Zone and the activities that it enables.

19 Section 6.1.2 of the BM ski area expansion report deals with natural character effects within the Doolans catchment. This basin is quite different to the Rastus Burn in that it is much less modified; it currently contains no ski area elements and no zoning enabling such elements. The report finds the following regarding these effects:

i. High adverse effects on perceptual natural character;

ii. Moderate to high adverse effects on natural character of freshwater communities;

iii. Low adverse natural character effects in relation to the weir and flow rate of the Doolans Creek but moderate to high natural character effects in relation to the access track to the Doolans Creek water take;

iv. Very high adverse natural character effects in relation to the creation of the water storage reservoir in the location of the relevant existing alpine tarn.

v. Moderate adverse natural character effects in relation to sedimentation within the Doolans catchment.

20 I would rely on the expertise of others (ecology/hydrology) in relation to points (ii) and (v) above. Regarding the other points, I consider the BM conclusions to be reasonable and appropriate. As mentioned, a primary reason being the existing lack of modifications or enabled modifications within the Doolans catchment.

Landscape Effects

21 Section 6.21 of the BM ski area expansion report deals with landscape effects within the Rastus Burn catchment. It is found that the upper return trails (between the proposed mid station and Sugar/Curvey basins), the three upper towers (west of the mid station) and the mid station itself will lead to moderate adverse landscape effects. The aspects of the proposal that are lower down within the Rastus Burn catchment (i.e. within the QLD PDP Ski Area Sub Zone) will have adverse effects of a low degree.

22 The above is agreeable, although I suggest that the adverse landscape effects of the upper elements that are outside of the Ski Area Sub Zone and are within the COD Rural Resource Area could be better described as moderate-high in degree. This part of the Rastus Burn catchment is

as unmodified as the Doolans catchment. The earthworks and retaining associated with the trails and mid station, as well as the mid station itself on helicopter flat, are substantial physical elements that are outside of the currently modified area.

23 Moving to the Doolans catchment, Section 6.22 of the BM ski area expansion report finds variable adverse landscape effects (low to high degree) in relation to structures and earthworks impacting tussocklands, cushionfields and rockfields. It is explained that temporary access tracks will be rehabilitated but permanent trails, buildings and the gondola itself will be incongruous with the current landscape values of this catchment. Some substantial cuts associated with the track to the Doolans Creek water take will extend modifications downhill below the proposed base building and associated activities. The BM report finds adverse landscape effects to be of a high degree despite the incorporated mitigation measures. I agree that this is a credible conclusion.

Visual Effects

24 Section 6.3 of the BM ski area expansion report deals with visual effects. These are discussed in relation to a list of viewing locations (Sections 6.31 to 6.35).

25 Section 6.31 finds a low degree adverse visual effect as experienced from the ski area access road. I generally agree. Visual Simulation 3 demonstrates the significant visibility of the upper return trail towards Curvey Basin and the earthworks of the mid station on the skyline. These are considerable visual elements but I accept they are seen from a ski area access road in the context of other ski area elements.

26 Section 6.3.2 finds a low to moderate degree of adverse visual effect as experienced from the Rastus Burn Recreation Area, depending upon how much of the Curvey Basin return trail's earthworks are revealed to a viewer in a particular location. I consider this credible and appropriate.

27 Section 6.3.3 finds a moderate to high degree of adverse visual effect as experienced from the wider Doolans Basin catchment, depending upon viewing distance. Once rehabilitation is complete, it is found that visual effects of earthworks would reduce to moderate. Again, this is plausible. The visual change within the part of the Doolans close to the new elements will be quite a departure from the existing aesthetic pattern.

28 Section 6.3.4 finds that adverse visual effects as experienced from the Wye Creek Route and Remarkables Conservation Area more generally will range between very low (Doolans Right Branch) to moderate (the ridge between Wye and Doolans catchments). Again, this is logical.

29 Section 6.3.5 finds a very low degree of adverse visual effect as experienced from the relevant part of the Wakatipu Basin, being an area centred on Lower Shotover, Domain and Malaghans Roads. I agree in relation to much of the year, however, unlike Coronet Peak, lights at night are very minimally seen on the Remarkables currently, even during ski season. The Remarkables appear natural and dormant. With reference to my paragraph 12(ii), groomer/vehicle lighting is transient. Fixed lighting in/on the mid station building (even if off between 5:30pm and 6:30am) will be a visual effect that reduces the perception of naturalness of the Remarkables as experienced from the relevant part of the Wakatipu Basin (which includes well-used roads and private dwellings). For the affected observers, I consider this to be a low-moderate degree adverse effect at the times it is experienced.

Summary regarding ski area expansion

30 The BM ski area expansion report goes to the discuss cumulative effects, and to relate effects to statutory documents.

31 The report's commentary on effects in relation to the QLD PDP is logical and follows the previous findings of the report, but again, I consider it should be made clearer that the QLD PDP (including the Ski Area Sub Zone and Priority Area provisions) only apply to the parts of the proposal that are inside the Queenstown Lakes District; for example they do not apply to the mid station or the upper parts of the return trails that are within the Rastus Burn catchment.

32 All aspects of the proposed activities that are within the QLD PDP ONL (and Priority Area) are also within the Ski Area Sub Zone, which is an exception zone[4], hence the ONL related Objectives and Policies of Chapter 3 of the PDP do not apply[5] and Policy 3.2.5.4 does apply.

33 In relation to the part of the proposal within the Central Otago District, section 7.3 of the BM ski area expansion report reiterates that this is the part with the higher degrees of natural character,

[4] QLD PDP, provision 3.1B.5(a)(i).
[5] QLD PDP, provision 3.1B.6.

landscape and visual effects. These effects discord with Objectives/Policies 4.3.2, 4.3.3, 4.4.1, 4.4.2 and (in my opinion) 4.4.14.

Carpark and Bus Hub

34 Section 4 of the BM carpark and bus hub report describes mitigation planting in relation to Carpark B and refers to proposed conditions. I refer to the relevant conditions in my paragraph 12(iv). I consider that proposed condition LSP.2 could be expanded to give more clarity regarding what mitigation planting should achieve. I will comment on this as I discuss effects below.

35 The parts of the BM carpark and bus hub report that describe the existing environment and statutory provisions are thorough and clear. An important point is that Carparks A and B are outside of the ONL, while the Boneyard is within the ONL (but outside any Priority Area).

Landscape Effects

36 The Boneyard is a formed area that has long been used for outdoor storage. The proposal will enable its use to change to carparking. Carpark A will be reconfigured and will expand closer to SH6. The more significant physical change will be the formation of Carpark B. As mentioned in my paragraph 12(iv), detailed carpark design and mitigation planting design are yet to come.

37 I essentially agree with the BM carpark and bus hub report's findings that Carpark A and the Boneyard will have a very low degree of adverse effect on landscape character (despite the Boneyard being within the ONL) and that Carpark B will have a low-moderate degree of adverse landscape effect, however, I consider that this is dependent upon increased clarity regarding mitigation, as I will explain further.

Visual Effects

38 Regarding views from SH6, the BM carpark and bus hub report finds an adverse visual effect of a low degree, when close to the carpark area's road frontage. It is explained that the row of existing deciduous trees is to be retained. These trees are useful and attractive but provide partial screening in summer and very little in winter. I agree that a low degree of effect in relation to SH6 can be achieved but consider that conditions would suitably require these existing trees to be retained and also require a dense band of evergreen shrub planting on the eastern side of these

trees (most appropriately that ties in with the species of the Carpark B vegetative rehabilitation plan). I accept that, given the location of the redirected road, this band of plating will not be extensive in area (perhaps quite hedge-like) but I consider that it would provide useful year-round visual mitigation in relation to Carpark A and also B.

39 Regarding Carpark B specifically, section 4.0 of the BM carpark and bus hub report recommends planting along the eastern edge of Carpark B. I consider this will be useful in terms of visual mitigation in relation to views from the ski area access road. Planting to the west of Carpark B will be most useful in relation to State Highway 6 (**SH6**) and also more distant locations. In fact, the whole area that sits between the western end of Carpark B and the access road (which is subject to rehabilitation conditions ECO.44 to 49) could be revegetated in a way that provides useful screening. I do not consider that the wording of currently proposed conditions will ensure this mitigation.

40 Regarding visual effects from the ski area access road itself, the BM carpark and bus hub report finds moderate adverse effects, reducing to low via mitigatory planting along the northern edge of Carpark B and on the escarpment between the split levels of this carpark. This is appropriate and appears to be covered by proposed condition LSP.2.

41 I agree with the BM report that visual effects as experienced from Frankton or the wider Southern Corridor area are not problematic.

42 Regarding neighbouring properties close to the carparks area, I have not visited private properties. The BM report's commentary regarding Stoney Creek Lane is plausible. The report finds no adverse effects in relation to 247, 247A and 249 Kingston Road. The building platform and dwelling on 247A Kingston Road is particularly close to the Boneyard. The repurposing of the Boneyard from a relatively inert storage area to a potentially busy carpark (including vehicle movements, car lights, etc) could have adverse effects on that property. Without visiting that property, it appears that dense planting to create separation would be advisable to mitigate potential effects.

43 It can be seen from the above that while I generally find the assessment of the BM carpark and bus hub report agreeable, I consider that more certainty is required regarding mitigation by way of planting. The proposed reconfiguration and expansion of carparking represents an opportunity

to enhance the vegetative treatment of Lot 2 DP17411 so as to appropriately mitigate effects and potentially provide positive effects. In short, I consider that conditions of any consent that is granted should require vegetative treatment to provide enhancement and visual screen planting to break up visibility of carparks from outside the site and visually integrate them into their context, including sweeps of dense mixed native vegetation as follows:

i. in the areas to the west of Carpark B, along its northern interface with the ski area access road, to the east of Carpark B, and throughout the escarpment between the split levels of this carpark.

ii. Additional planting to rehabilitate all earthworks or disturbed ground and to tie in with rehabilitation planting (as per conditions ECO.44 to 49).

iii. In the area to the west of the redirected access road adjacent to Carpark A, so as to provide screening in relation to the SH6 frontage. The existing deciduous trees in this area should be retained.

iv. Along the northern edge of the Boneyard Carpark so as to provide strong separation in relation to 247A Kingston Road.

Summary regarding ski area expansion

44 BM carpark and bus hub report goes on to discuss statutory matters and draw conclusions. Subject to my comments above I essentially agree with the commentary of the BM carpark and bus hub report, provided vegetative mitigation is comprehensive.

OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

45 The final BM documents are thorough, comprehensive and follow an appropriate methodology.

46 In relation to the ski area expansion, the BM assessment is very largely logical and plausible. Adverse effects on natural character, landscape values and visual amenity are often of a low degree as they relate to the Rastus Burn catchment. The more elevated elements (mid station and higher return trails) are an exception and have moderate or moderate high effects. Adverse effects will be more pronounced as they relate to the much less modified Doolans catchment. Adverse effects on natural character, landscape values and visual amenity in relation to the

Doolans area range up to a high degree, with natural character effects in relation to the water storage reservoir being very high. I consider that lighting in mornings and evenings will lead to some effects that have not been fully taken account of.

47 Regarding the carpark and bus hub activities, I agree with the BM assessment that adverse landscape and visual effects are generally of a low degree, but I consider that this depends on more certainty being provided regarding mitigation via landscape planting.

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