

Before the Mackenzie District Council Hearings Commissioner

Under The Resource Management Act 1991

In the matter of Resource Consent Application RM230149 by Queenstown
Commercial Parapenters Limited, Lakeside Drive, Tekapo

Statement of Evidence: Jamie Stuart McMurtrie

13 August 2025

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INTRODUCTION

1. My full name is Jamie Stuart McMurtrie.
2. This is my statement of evidence in relation to Resource Consent Application RM230149 by Queenstown Commercial Parapenters Limited to establish and operate a commercial ropes course at Lakeside Drive, Tekapo.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

3. Queenstown Commercial Parapenters Limited is an experience commercial recreation provider and the largest paragliding company in the world. Our goal is to provide world-class commercial recreation experiences.
4. We have an exemplary safety record and put safety at the forefront of everything we do. The health and safety of the ropes course will be highly regulated under health and safety legislation.
5. I selected the site by establishing some site selection criteria, then by identifying suitable sites, and lastly evaluating each site against those criteria. I concluded that the Lakeside Drive site was the only suitable site.
6. I consulted Mackenzie District Council and Tekapo Community Board early on in the process and have received a draft lease agreement from Council and a positive response from the community board.

CODE OF CONDUCT

7. While this is not an Environment Court hearing, I confirm that I have read the Code of Conduct for expert witnesses contained in the Environment Court of New Zealand Practice Note 2023 and that I have complied with it when preparing my evidence. Other than when I state I am relying on the advice of another person, this evidence is within my area of expertise. I have not omitted to consider material facts known to me that might alter or detract from the opinions that I express.

SCOPE OF EVIDENCE

8. My evidence addresses the following:
 - a. Provides a description of the applicant company.
 - b. My role for the applicant company.
 - c. The employment likely to be generated by the proposed activity.
 - d. Health and safety.
 - e. The process I used to select the site.
 - f. Consultation with Council and the Tekapo Community Board.
 - g. Provides some photos of similar ropes courses which illustrate how the course will appear.

THE APPLICANT

9. Queenstown Commercial Parapenters Limited (trading as Gforce Paragliding) is an iconic Queenstown business with deep local roots. From humble beginnings in the late 1980s, the company was formally established in 1991 and began offering daily tandem paragliding flights from our base at the Skyline Gondola complex. While much has evolved since those early days, our core values remain unchanged.
10. As a pioneer in the industry, Gforce has grown to become the largest and most experienced paragliding operator in New Zealand. We are not corporately owned — Gforce remains in the hands of local paragliding pilots, supporting our families by delivering a world-class tourism experience.
11. Safety and risk management are at the heart of everything we do. Gforce were the first paragliding company to be certified by the Civil Aviation Authority under Part 115 as an Adventure Aviation operator (2012), and the first adventure aviation business to achieve certification under Part 100 (Safety Management Systems).
12. Each year, we fly more than 10,000 guests from the top of the Skyline Gondola over central Queenstown. Our commitment to safety culture and best practice is embedded in every Standard Operating Procedure and safety system we follow. Equally, guest experience is a top priority — we strive to ensure every flight is as safe as it is unforgettable.

13. Should we be granted approval to establish a ropes adventure course in Tekapo, we will bring to the community the same level of excellence, expertise and passion that have defined Gforce for decades.

ROLE WITH THE APPLICANT

14. I am a shareholder of the applicant company. My role with the company in relation to this project is to find a suitable site for a commercial ropes course in Lake Tekapo, manage the project for the applicant company and construct the ropes course.
15. I am also a long-term resident of the Mackenzie District having grown up in Farlie. I am a licenced building practitioner and own and operate a building company. Accordingly, I am well invested in the local community and want to make this project a success.
16. I have long been of the view that Tekapo needs an additional high-quality visitor attraction. In my view, the town suffers from the lack of quality visitor attractions to encourage people to stay longer.

EMPLOYMENT

17. I expect that approximately 5-6 full staff will be employed by the proposed activity. This will consist of:
- a. 1 Manager, Full Time Equivalent (FTE)
 - b. 1 Customer service, FTE
 - c. 1 Ropes assistant, FTE
 - d. 2-3 Ropes assistants, part time equivalent

HEALTH AND SAFETY

18. The nature of our paragliding business is that health and safety is critical and therefore has to be at the forefront of everything we do. The ropes course will be regulated by Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 and subsequently under the Health and Safety at Work Act (Adventure Regulations) 2016. Under the latter, we will be required to submit a Standard Operating Procedure to Work Safe to be audited and approved before operation

commences. This will require us to address all reasonable and appropriate measures to protect the public both on the course and on the ground below.

SITE SELECTION PROCESS

19. When we initially started looking at sites suitable for a ropes course in and around Lake Tekapo, we established some key criteria that the site would have to meet. Although we did this informally at the time and did not document the criteria, we did use criteria, most of which will be obvious and self-evident to anyone who has conducted a similar exercise. **Table 1** represents these criteria and provides an explanation as to why each criterion are important to this proposal.

No.	Criteria	Reason
1	Suitable Trees	The site must have tall, straight and strong trees that can bear the weight of the ropes course. There also had to be a suitable number of trees to enable a course of the desirable size. There must be certainty that the trees would be retained long term.
2	Proximity to Tekapo	Being within walking distance of Tekapo's commercial centre was crucial as many tourists arrive by bus and do not have access to a vehicle. Children are also a big customer of ropes courses and therefore it also desirable if they can walk to the ropes course. Walking distance was considered no more than a 10-12min walk. Having a location that was accessible to pedestrians also aligns with our philosophy of not creating an attraction that generates unsustainable vehicles movements.
3	A busy area	An area busy with people helps the sustainability of the business by providing a steady supply of customers and reducing the need for expensive marketing. Locating the business in a busy area also aligns with our philosophy of not creating an attraction that generates unsustainable vehicles movements – the customers would already be there.
4	Infrastructure	The site needed to have: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• pedestrian and road access• a carparking area

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an electricity supply for computers, eftpos, cash register, and wifi • access to the sewer for toilets, or proximity to an existing public toilet facility • a water supply to provide staff and customers with a drinking water supply.
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Table 1 – Site selection criteria

20. After establishing these criteria, we then went onto identify suitable sites. The sites initially considered are listed in **Table 2** and illustrated in **Figure 1**.

No.	Site
1	Lakeside Drive
2	Tekapo dog park
3	Mt John
4	South Tekapo
5	Tekapo Powerhouse Road

Table 2 – The sites initially considered



Figure 1 – Alternative sites considered by the applicant

21. We then evaluated these sites against the criteria in **Table 1**. While, we did this informally and did not document the evaluation, the table in **Table 2** represents our assessment of each site against the criteria in **Table 1**.
22. Sites 4 (South Tekapo) and 5 (Tekapo Powerhouse Road) were immediately dismissed as it was quickly apparent from visiting these sites that they were too remote, not busy enough and lacked critical infrastructure.
23. The Lakeside Drive, Mt John and Dog Park sites were initially considered the leading sites and were closely considered. However, Mackenzie District Council confirmed that the trees on the Dog Park and Mt John sites are to be removed by Environment Canterbury as part of ongoing efforts to remove wilding trees in the Mackenzie Basin. That excluded those sites.
24. The Lakeside Drive site was identified as the preferred site as:
- Council confirmed the trees on the site were staying.
 - The site was closest to the town centre.
 - The site is busy, being the main destination for active recreation in Tekapo.
 - The site has water and power supplies.
 - The site is close to public toilets.
 - The site adjoins an existing carpark, with ample capacity.

No.	Site	Trees	Proximity	Busy	Infrastructure	Total	Comment
1	Lakeside Drive	2	2	2	2	8	– Meets all criteria
2	Dog park	0	1	0	1	2	– Trees being removed – Too remote (2.6km) – No water, sewer, power, toilets – Small carpark, would have to expand – Not busy
3	Mt John	0	1	1	1	3	– Trees being removed – Not as proximate – Not as busy – Limit parking – Not proximate to toilets – Power and water extension required
4	South Tekapo	2	1	0	0	3	– Too remote, 1.4km – Not busy

							<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No carpark, toilets, power or water – Land access uncertain – Unclear if trees are remaining
5	Powerhouse Road	2	0	0	0	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Too remote 2.4km and no footpath – No water, sewer, power, toilets, carpark – Not busy – Land access uncertain – Unclear if trees are remaining

Table 2 – Summary of the applicant analysis used to rank the sites.

Key:

- 0 = Did not meet the criterion at all. These sites were not considered further.
- 1 = Partly met the criterion.
- 2 = Fully met the criterion.

11 As the Lakeside Drive site meets all the criteria, I concluded it was the most suitable site for the proposed ropes course.

COUNCIL & COMMUNITY BOARD CONSULTATION

12 After selecting the site, the applicant then progressed discussions with Council regarding obtaining a lease for the site. The Council provided the applicant with a draft lease agreement but advised they would not sign the lease until a resource consent for the activity was obtained. Subsequently, we started to progress the resource consent application.

13 I meet with the Tekapo Community Board between December 2022 and in March 2023. The community board were very excited about the proposal and were in support of it.

THE APPEARANCE OF THE ROPES COURSE

14 I have included a collection of images from similar ropes courses to illustrate how the course will appear. These are attached as **Appendix 1**.

CONCLUSION

15 My evidence demonstrates that the applicant highly experienced commercial recreation provider. It also demonstrates that we have considered alternative sites in selecting the

subject site and that the subject site is the most suitable site in the Tekapo township area to accommodate commercial ropes course.

APPENDIX 1 – PHOTOS OF SIMILAR ROPES COURSES

























