

## Speaking notes for PC20 hearing:

Lisa to introduce myself and Dean,

- Dean to talk about what DOC does in Mackenzie and what makes it special and unique,
- Lisa to then speak to planning evidence, linking to the values discussed by Dean.

Notes for Dean Nelson – Senior Ranger Biodiversity

- My name is Dean Nelson. I am Senior Ranger for Biodiversity Assets (threatened species) and Project River Recovery – a compensatory agreement set up mitigate the impacts of hydroelectric development that has been running for over 30 years.
- I have lived and worked in the Mackenzie basin for a total of 25 years. I had seven years at Aoraki Mt Cook in the 1980's and more recently the last 18 years based in Twizel.
- I have had experience in the whole range of functions that DOC undertakes however my key skills and knowledge are the management of threatened species, and pest plant and animal control.
- The Conservation Act 1987 sets out DOC's functions which includes management of land and natural and historic resources for conservation purposes, preservation so far as is practicable of all indigenous freshwater fisheries, protection of recreational freshwater fisheries and freshwater fish habitats and advocacy for the conservation of natural resources and historic heritage.
- Section 2 of the CA defines 'conservation' to mean: *'the preservation and protection of natural and historic resources for the purpose of maintaining their intrinsic values, providing for their appreciation and recreational enjoyment by the public, and safeguarding the options of future generation'*.
- This directly informs my work and that of my office and team.
- DOC has one district office covering the Mackenzie Basin. The Twizel Te Manahuna District is based in Twizel and encompasses the area from Burkes Pass in the East to the Lindis Pass in the West and from the Hunter Hills in the South to the main Divide and the boundary of Aoraki Mt Cook National Park in the North. Twizel DOC staff manage 309,160ha of land in the district.
- The adjoining Aoraki Mt Cook District includes all of the national park. The Twizel Operational Team manages all the DOC biodiversity functions for the Basin, including in the National Park.
- The Mackenzie Basin is a special and unique area in New Zealand. It is an intermontane basin surrounded by the Southern Alps and high ranges where the rainfall ranges from 8 metres at the main divide to less than 600mm on the eastern side of the basin. Consequently, it has a range of landforms and ecosystems which reflect this significant climatic gradient and the

dramatic glacial history over many thousands of years.

- Māori interest in the area is strong with the significance of the atua Aoraki and a long history of visiting the area for mahika kai gathering.
- With the clarity of the air and its frequent clear skies, the area has long been recognised for its breath-taking views of the stars, culminating in the creation of New Zealand's first International Dark Sky Reserve in 2012.
- The Mackenzie Basin has significant and unique landscapes and features. Extensive areas of permanent ice and snow along the main divide, the major glaciers and the three large glacial lakes (Ohau, Pukaki and Tekapo) reflect a long history of glacial impact on the basin. The landscape is characterised by glacial terracing, moraines, lakes, tarns and kettleholes in the northwest and extensive, relatively unmodified fluvio-glacial outwash surfaces to the south and east.
- Internationally braided rivers are a rare ecosystem and generally under threat. The Mackenzie Basin still has several relatively pristine braided rivers with associated wetlands and spring systems.
- New Zealand has a high level of endemism in its plants and animals, and the braided river systems and glacial outwash surfaces support a number of special endemic species, several of which are only found in the Mackenzie Basin. Most of these species are threatened by mammalian predators, introduced plant pests, and loss of habitat. Much of the work undertaken by DOC and specifically Project River Recovery and more recently Te Manahuna Aoraki Ltd focuses on mitigating the threats to these species to enable them to survive and hopefully thrive going forward.
- The critically threatened kaki/black stilt only breeds in the Mackenzie Basin and with an adult population of only around 150 birds, it is dependent on the maintenance of braided rivers and their associated glacial landscapes and water features for their continued existence.
- Other threatened birds come inland to breed annually in the braided rivers and outwash plains. These include the wrybill, black-fronted tern, banded dotterel, black-billed gull, and South Island pied oystercatcher.
- The threatened robust grasshopper is only found in the basin and relies on the stabilising rocky habitats near braided rivers.
- New Zealand's rarest freshwater fish, the lowland longjaw galaxiid "Waitaki River" occupies only seven small spring-fed systems in the Basin and Hakataramea River. The Nationally Vulnerable bignose galaxiid is also only found in clear water streams and wetlands in the basin.

- Three large bodied, threatened skinks live in rocky habitats in old river terraces adjacent to braided rivers. They are the Mackenzie Skink, Lakes skink and scree skink.
- Knowledge of terrestrial invertebrates in the basin is not well known. A recent collection in the Tasman River found at least 919 recognisable taxonomic units.
- With the dramatic climatic gradient and areas of dry glacial outwash, several highly threatened plant species are found in the basin. One of the most threatened, a small plant called *Lepidium solandri* is often found growing on the edge of old river terraces and glacial outwash surfaces.
- Less than 1000 plants are known nationally and as a member of the brassica family, it is threatened by an *Albugo* rust which is exacerbated by the increased humidity caused by irrigation. Most of the populations of this plant have disappeared from similar habitat in Central Otago.
- While hydroelectric development has modified the glacial lakes and some braided rivers and wetlands, many of the water systems are still in relatively good condition. Project River Recovery has spent the last thirty years working hard to ensure that the relatively pristine braided rivers and wetlands above the glacial lakes are free of introduced weeds and predators.
- Lake Ohau, while modified for hydroelectric, remains the most natural of the three with significant natural vegetation surrounding the lake and relatively pristine turf communities on the shoreline.
- The examples provided illustrate that the Mackenzie Basin has nationally outstanding and unique landscapes, habitats, and species. Several critically threatened species are endemic to the basin.
- Consequently, I believe that list of values listed in the notified version of Objective NE-01 needs to be retained to ensure that the values that are significant and unique to the Mackenzie District are given due recognition on the objective.

#### Notes for Lisa Thorne – Senior Planner

- Kia ora koutou, my name is Lisa Thorne and I am employed by the Department of Conservation as a Senior Resource Management Planner. I have worked for the Department of Conservation for six months.

[only include next few points depending on panel preference – take this as read if we can]

- Prior to joining for the Department of Conservation, I spent the previous five years as a planning consultant, and prior to that I spent eight years working in the local government sector. I am experienced in resource management planning, policy, and strategy, and have

led or contributed to numerous plan changes and plan review processes for local government, and in my role as a consultant have represented different organisations during the Schedule 1 RMA process.

- I hold a Master of Environmental Planning, and a bachelor's degree with a double major in Environmental Planning and Geography, from the University of Waikato.
- Although this is not an Environment Court hearing, I have read the code of conduct for expert witnesses as contained in the Environment Court's Practice Note 2014 and confirm I will abide by the code.
- Mackenzie District Council has worked proactively and collaboratively with the Department of Conservation in preparing Plan Change 20, and as a result of this way of working the Director Generals submission was limited to seeking a very minor amendment sought to Natural Environment Objective NE-O1, and was largely supportive of the rest of the plan change as notified.
- The approach Mackenzie District Council has taken to working with the Department of Conservation is valued and appreciated and I see this as a useful way of working together on the future stages of the plan review.
- The change proposed in the Director Generals submission sought to amend the objective, so it was clearer that the objective applies to all natural environment values, while still ensuring that the values specifically relevant to the district are explicitly considered.
- Other than this minor change, I consider the natural environment objective as notified to be a well-constructed strategic objective for the Mackenzie District Plan:
  - It requires people to recognise and provide for and where appropriate protect and enhance the values of the natural environment in applying the District Plan, and including those that that make the district unique, contribute to its character, identity and well-being, are significant or outstanding or are intrinsic. This list is not exclusive, but provides a helpful outline of some of the values that should be considered.
  - It also includes a list of those values which are important and relevant to the Mackenzie District, being mahika kai, night sky darkness, outstanding natural features and landscapes, significant indigenous biodiversity, and water bodies and their margins.

As Dean explained earlier, the natural environment of the Mackenzie District is special, and it has nationally outstanding and unique landscapes, habitats, and species. Several critically threatened species are endemic to the basin. These values should be recognised in the natural environment strategic objective.
  - It is the reference to these values that makes the objective strategic and relevant to Mackenzie.

[simplify or elaborate further depending on timing]

- The concerns I have with the proposed amendments in the Section 42A report relate to the inclusion of the term 'important' in the chapeau, and the deletion of the list of specific values.
- I understand that the reason in the section 42A report to amend the chapeau was to provide greater clarity that not all natural values of importance may necessarily be unique, or contribute to the character, identity and wellbeing of the Mackenzie District, but should still be recognised and provided for.
- I do not disagree with this reason, however the addition of the term 'important' is unnecessary and implies a hierarchy of natural values, whereby they must be considered 'important' in order for this objective to apply and I consider that it should be removed.
- This is because the level of importance or significance, and the associated extent to which natural environment values are to be recognised, provided for, and where appropriate protected and enhanced, can then be appropriately addressed in the other chapters relating to these values.
- Similarly, I understand that the reason in the section 42A report to delete the list of values is to provide greater clarity, and to reduce the risk associated with elevating these particular matters over other values that may also be important in the Mackenzie District. I do not disagree with these concerns but consider the issue should be addressed in a different way.
- The Mandatory Directions in the National Planning Standards, set out that if a strategic directions chapter is to be included in a plan, this includes objectives to *address key strategic or significant matters for the district and guide decision making at a strategic level*.
- The deletion of the listed values removes reference to the key strategic resource management matters related to the Natural Environment of the Mackenzie District. The concerns expressed in the section 42A report and submissions can be addressed by retaining the list in the objective, and simply adding the qualifier 'but is not limited to'.
- This will achieve the same intent sought in the section 42A report, while ensuring the objective addresses the key strategic and significant natural environment matters relevant to the Mackenzie District, and in accordance with the Mandatory Directions. This gives effect to the Canterbury Regional Policy Statement and provides a strategic basis to inform the subsequent chapters through the next stages of the plan review, and by which to assess resource consent applications which may affect these values under section 104 of the Act.
- Recommended amendments are set out in my evidence, and Dean and I are happy to take any questions from the hearing panel.