

BEFORE THE OTAGO REGIONAL COUNCIL

IN THE MATTER of the Resource Management Act 1991

AND

IN THE MATTER of the Proposed Otago Regional Policy Statement 2021 –
Chapter 10 ECO – Ecosystems and indigenous biodiversity

**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF KATHRYN RUSSELL ON BEHALF OF
QUEENSTOWN LAKES DISTRICT COUNCIL (138)**

23 NOVEMBER 2022

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 My name is Kathryn Russell. I am an intermediate policy planner employed by the Queenstown Lakes District Council (**QLDC**) and have prepared evidence on the biodiversity section of the Otago Regional Council's Proposed Regional Policy Statement (**RPS**).
- 1.2 I hold the qualifications of a dual Bachelor of Arts degree in Environmental Studies and Modern Literature from the University of California, Santa Cruz. I am undertaking my final coursework towards a Masters in Planning from Massey University, and will graduate in June 2023. I have 3 years' experience in planning policy with QLDC, and have worked previously for the Department of Conservation as a community ranger where I worked for the Sub Antarctic Islands Team.
- 1.3 I confirm that I have read the Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses contained in the Environment Court's Practice Note 2014 and that I agree to comply with it. I confirm that I have considered all the material facts that I am aware of that might alter or detract from the opinions that I express, and that this evidence is within my area of expertise, except where I state that I am relying upon the evidence of another person.

2. PURPOSE AND STRUCTURE OF EVIDENCE

- 2.1 The purpose of my evidence is to consider the Otago Regional Council's (**ORC's**) position on QLDC's submission in relation to the ECO – Ecosystems and indigenous biodiversity section of the proposed RPS. In preparing this evidence, I have read the following:
- a. Section 42A Hearing Report Proposed Otago Regional Policy Statement 2021, Chapter 10: ECO – Ecosystems and indigenous biodiversity, Melanie Hardiman, 4 May 2022 (**S 42A Report**); and
 - b. Brief of supplementary evidence of Melanie Hardiman.

3. ECO-P9 – Wilding conifers

- 3.1 The notified version of ECO-P9 was:
- Reduce the impact of wilding conifers on indigenous biodiversity by:*

(1) avoiding afforestation and replanting of plantation forests with wilding conifer species listed in APP5 within:

(a) areas identified as significant natural areas, and

(b) buffer zones adjacent to significant natural areas where it is necessary to protect the significant natural area, and

(2) supporting initiatives to control existing wilding conifers and limit their further spread.

3.2 The QLDC submission sought a more directive approach to better protect at risk landscapes from wilding conifers. The QLDC submission also provided alternative wording seeking greater controls for wilding tree species beyond conifers. These points were rejected at paragraph 353 of the s 42A Report for being too specific for an RPS.

3.3 The amended ORC policy after s42a and supplementary evidence is:

Reduce the impact of wilding conifers on indigenous biodiversity by:

(1) avoiding ~~afforestation~~ the planting and replanting of plantation forests and permanent forests with wilding conifer species listed in APP5 within:

(a) areas identified as significant natural areas, and

(b) buffer zones adjacent to significant natural areas where it is necessary to protect the significant natural area, and

(2) supporting initiatives to control existing wilding conifers and limit their further spread.

3.4 The replacement of afforestation with planting is supported. It provides clarity for plan users. The concept behind the addition of permanent forests in limb 1 is also supported. However, the term 'permanent forests' could be improved. Paragraph 355 of the s 42A Report indicates permanent forests are related to carbon forestry planting, however this context is not apparent for general readers. Defining or contextualising the term permanent forest to reflect the connection to carbon forestry would be of benefit. Alternatively, changing the term permanent forest to 'carbon forest' or 'forest established for carbon offsets' could also achieve a similar outcome and improved plan legibility.

3.5 The QLDC Proposed District Plan (**PDP**) Chapter 34 addresses wilding species in a different manner by identifying wilding exotic trees as a resource management issue. This approach provides opportunity, where appropriate, for

control of a broader range of wilding trees. To assist the Panel, I set out Objective 34.2.1 and associated policies of QLDC's PDP Wilding Exotic Trees chapter 34 below:

Objective – Protection of the District's landscape, biodiversity, water and soil resource values from the spread of wilding exotic trees.

34.2.1.1 Avoid the further spread of identified wilding tree species by prohibiting the planting of identified species.

34.2.1.2 Ensure that any planting and ongoing management of Radiata pine (Pinus radiata) is effective and can be practicably managed to avoid the adverse effects of the spread of wilding trees and degradation to the landscape.

34.2.1.3 That any proposal for the planting and ongoing management of Radiata pine (Pinus radiata) shall consider the following to ensure the spread of wilding trees can be contained:

- a. The location and potential for wilding take-off, having specific regard to the slope and exposure to wind;*
- b. The surrounding land uses and whether these would reduce the potential for wilding spread;*
- c. The ownership of the surrounding land and whether this would constrain the ability to manage wilding spread;*
- d. Whether management plans are proposed for the avoidance or containment of wilding spread;*
- e. Whether a risk assessment has been completed and the results are favourable to the proposal*

- 3.6 A key control with the PDP is that it seeks to control the planting of identified wilding species throughout the district, including through the application of a prohibited activity status¹. In contrast, the RPS seeks to reduce impacts of wildings in identified Significant Natural Areas (**SNA**) and buffer zones associated with SNAs. Wilding tree species present a significant threat to biodiversity outcomes for the district, and the control of new planting of wilding tree species (inclusive of conifers) should go beyond the boundaries of SNAs and associated buffer zones in some locations. To effect this, the policy should

¹ Rule 34.4.2 of Chapter 34 of the PDP

include a new limb which includes areas which have an identified risk of significant decline in biodiversity value and condition from the spread of wilding conifer species.

- 3.7 Therefore, I recommend that the RPS be amended as follows (my recommended changes are shown in red underlined):

Reduce the impact of wilding conifers on indigenous biodiversity by:

(1) avoiding the planting and replanting of plantation forests and permanent forests with wilding conifer species listed in APP5 within:

(a) areas identified as significant natural areas, and

(b) buffer zones adjacent to significant natural areas where it is necessary to protect the significant natural area, and

(c) areas where there is an identified risk of significant decline in biodiversity value and condition from wilding conifer species

(2) supporting initiatives to control existing wilding conifers and limit their further spread.

- 3.8 The RPS objective ECO – 01 to which ECO-P9 responds seeks to achieve thriving biodiversity in Otago. The amended version of ECO-01 following s 42A Report is:

Otago's indigenous biodiversity is healthy and thriving and any net decline in quality condition, quantity and diversity is halted.

- 3.9 I consider my recommended change to ECO-P9 makes the policy more efficient and effective at achieving the outcome sought ECO – 01. The change will assist in improved protection of indigenous biodiversity from any further loss by broadening the scope of application of the policy to areas where there is an identified risk beyond SNAs and buffer zones. The change also allows for latitude for locations where the risk to indigenous biodiversity is less than significant.

Kathryn Russell

23 November 2022