

## Appendix E: Findings from Review of Council Reports and Evidence, and Submitter Evidence: Landscape

Key conclusions from our review of the Council landscape reports and evidence, and Submitter landscape evidence can be summarised as follows:

### Landscape Character Assessment

- a. The June 2014 Landscape Character Assessment prepared by Dr Read (June 2014 Read Report) relied on limited GIS data and out of date 'consented development' data. This is likely to have resulted in a misunderstanding of the 'existing environment' which has the potential to influence both the delineation and description of the landscape character units, and the assessor's findings with respect to absorption capability.
- b. The June 2014 Read Report found that the majority of the basin retains a rural character typified by pastoral uses. This finding informed the 'characteristics' that were assessed to determine the landscape units across the basin and (in combination with a number of other attributes), the absorption capability of each unit.
- c. In contrast, it is our view that the majority of the Basin comprises a rural lifestyle landscape typology<sup>1</sup> (of varying density and character), with pockets or swathes of 'working' rural landscape evident in places and interspersed with undeveloped roche moutonnées. (NB we generally concur with the evidence of Mr Baxter and Ms Pfluger with respect to their descriptions of the Wakatipu Basin landscape character.) This finding has implications with respect to our landscape character evaluation and analysis of absorption capability.
- d. As could be expected, the variances in the methodology adopted by Dr Read and the project team, combined with the differences in the GIS datasets relied on, has resulted in some differences with respect to the areas of the basin where additional development can be absorbed. Generally, however, it is fair to say that there is a reasonable degree of consistency between the two evaluations with respect to the areas where development should be avoided.
- e. We agree with Dr Read that a minimum lot size is a relatively blunt instrument in managing adverse landscape and visual effects. However, in combination with location-specific assessment criteria that direct a reasonably specific landscape outcome, a minimum lot size can deliver a favourable environmental outcome as is evidenced in the rural lifestyle development throughout the western side of Waiheke Island, Auckland.
- f. Dr Read is supportive of the removal of the (ODP) Visual Amenity Landscape and Other Rural Landscapes overlays and their replacement with a single Rural Landscape classification with tighter provisions to address landscape matters in the PDP. Our assessment finds that the Basin is best described as an 'Amenity Landscape' (consistent with Ms Lucas' evidence). Typically, very careful consideration of buildings (and associated infrastructure) and a cohesive and coordinated approach to landscape restoration and mitigation planting is required in such circumstances to safeguard (amenity) landscape values

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that this reference to 'rural lifestyle' does not relate to the District Plan terminology but rather depicts a landscape character that is dominated by smaller scale, non-productive rural lots.

- g. Related to this issue is the very close proximity of the basin to Outstanding Natural Landscapes (ONL) and Outstanding Natural Features (ONF) which comprise mountain, roche moutonnée and river features. Just as these features serve to shape the character of the Wakatipu Basin landscape, development throughout the Basin has the potential to influence the character of the ONLs and ONFs.
- h. As noted by the Hearing Commissioners, the proposed provisions require an evaluation of cumulative effects to be made on a 'case by case' basis. Unfortunately, it is often the case that adverse cumulative landscape effects become extremely obvious once the tipping point has been breached; however, the tipping point itself is notoriously difficult to determine.
- i. The extremely high sensitivity of the wider Wakatipu Basin context (ONLs and ONFs), together with the sensitivity of the Basin landscape itself, the variability of the landscape character across the valley floor and the acute development pressures evident within the wider area, suggests that greater certainty is required with respect to managing cumulative adverse landscape effects. For these reasons we consider that a more nuanced planning approach is required, in terms of both mapping and policy. The assessment work that follows in Section 8 seeks to address this issue.
- j. We query the appropriateness of a planning approach that effectively relies on the subdivision stage to manage adverse landscape and visual effects given the sensitivities of the landscape as outlined earlier. Whilst fixing building platforms and applying broad-brush development controls (building height, colours etc.) can go a long way in managing adverse effects, the detailed design of a building and how it relates to the landscape patterns (landform, hydrology, vegetation etc.) is critical in managing adverse effects in an Amenity Landscape. These concerns are exacerbated by the considerable scale of building enabled as a Permitted activity post subdivision (i.e. coverage: 1000m<sup>2</sup>; height: 8m). In our experience, a Restricted Discretionary activity status is required for land use consents in such landscapes, with locally appropriate assessment criteria crafted to address key issues. This 'belt and braces' approach is, in our view, warranted in a landscape that is effectively surrounded by ONLs, studded with ONFs, and itself exhibits high amenity values.

#### **Outstanding Natural Features and Landscapes (ONFLs)**

- k. With respect to the Wakatipu Basin ONFLs, we consider that the process undertaken by Council to date is, by and large, methodologically robust. We also agree with Mr Espie that were a 'first principles' landscape assessment approach taken to the identification and delineation on the ONFLs within the District, it is possible that a different ONFL mapping outcome may arise. We are, however, mindful of the close scrutiny of these landscapes by the Environment Court over the years and the effectiveness of the District Plan in limiting development in these landscapes. For these reasons, it is doubtful whether a district-wide re-assessment would result in a substantially different ONFL mapping outcome.
- l. We share the concerns with respect to the accuracy of the proposed ONFL mapping raised by Dr Read arising from the transcribing of her felt pen sketched 1:15,000 scale plans to the Council's considerably more detailed mapping dataset.
- m. In our opinion, concerns in this regard will be addressed by the PDP ONFL Mapping topic to be heard later this year.
- n. Finally, we confirm that the ONFLs throughout the study area have informed the landscape capability analysis that follows as part of an holistic landscape assessment process. In our view, minor amendments to the position of the ONFL boundaries will not influence the capability mapping and recommendations contained in this report.