

Community & Services Committee

6 April 2023

Report for Agenda Item | Rīpoata moto e Rāraki take [1]

Department: Community Services

Title | Taitara : Request for Removal of Council Trees in the Whakatipu Basin

Purpose of the Report | Te Take mō te Pūroko

1. The purpose of this report is to consider three applications to remove and replace trees on reserve land in the Whakatipu Basin.

Recommendation | Kā Tūtohuka

2. That Community & Services Committee:
 1. **Note** the contents of this report and;
 2. **Approve** the request by Arrowtown Golf Club to remove approximately 168 wilding conifer trees from QLDC leased reserve land at the Arrowtown Golf Course.
 3. **Approve** the request from the Whakatipu Wilding Conifer Control Group to remove wilding conifer trees on QLDC reserve land between One Mile to Sunshine Bay Reserve.
 4. **Decline** the request by the Wakatipu Croquet Club to remove eight mature Eucalyptus trees growing on QLDC reserve land at Jardine Park, Kelvin Peninsula.

Prepared by:



Name: Briana Pringle
Title: Parks and Open Spaces Planning Manager
15 March 2023

Reviewed and Authorised by:



Name: Ken Bailey
Title: Community Services General Manager
7 March 2023

Context | Horopaki

3. Council has received three requests to remove QLDC trees within QLDC recreation reserves in Arrowtown, Queenstown and Kelvin Heights.
4. These applications have been processed in accordance with the QLDC Tree Policy 2022. Each application has been individually assessed against the policy by the Council's Arboricultural Officer and reviewed by the Parks Manager.
5. The applications do not include Protected Trees under QLDC's District Plan, trees listed for potential protection in the Proposed District Plan, or Notable Trees from the NZ Tree Register.

Analysis and Advice | Tatāritaka me kā Tohutohu

6. The following relevant tree removal policy guidelines were considered when assessing the applications:

4.3. Tree removal will be considered where the tree is causing, or likely to cause, significant damage to buildings, services or property (both public or privately owned), and the damage cannot be reasonably rectified or mitigated except by removing the tree. More suitable replacements will be sought and planted in the same location or vicinity if it can be achieved.

4.4. Trees that are posing an unacceptable safety risk to the public and cannot be mitigated through pruning or other engineering solutions will be removed as per the tree replacement Policy 1.13.

4.7. Council approval for tree removal to facilitate projects on Council land will consider the value of the project to the community, including public health and/or the local environment, in conjunction with the benefits of retaining existing trees compared with their loss and proposed replacement planting.

4.10. Healthy and structurally sound trees may be removed to manage or prevent the spread of pests and diseases. This includes the removal of pest trees where they are deemed a threat to indigenous flora and fauna and non-pest species.

4.11. Wilding noxious or pest trees may be strategically removed where they are determined to be a threat as a pest species or cause a nuisance in a particular location, to manage or prevent the spread of pests and diseases. This includes the removal or poisoning of pest trees. Requirement for replacement planting will be determined by any amenity values the trees provided.

4.13. QLDC will not remove trees for the following reasons:

- *To minimise obstruction of views*
- *To minimise obstruction of commercial or advertising signage*
- *To reduce leaf or fruit litter and other debris*
- *To reduce shading*
- *For contributing to allergenic or irritant responses*
- *When the risk posed by the tree meets the requirements of the Tree Risk Management.*

4.18. *Other - Requests for removal of tree(s) due to other issues will only be approved under exceptional circumstances and will be required to meet all the criteria below:*

- *The issue caused by the tree has a significant effect on the applicant's day to day living*
- *The tree is the sole cause of the issue*
- *The issue is not able to be mitigated through general maintenance by the applicant (e.g., clearing gutters of leaves)*
- *The issue caused by the tree cannot be mitigated by pruning*
- *No reasonable engineering solution can mitigate the issue caused by the tree.*

Arrowtown Golf Course

7. The Arrowtown Golf Club (AGC), in conjunction with the Whakatipu Wilding Control Group (WCG), has requested the removal of approximately 168 wilding confers from Council leased land. The request includes the removal of 126 (75%) Larch trees and 42 (25%) Douglas Fir Trees. This removal request aligns with the Arrowtown Wilding Strategy and is another step towards the goal of removing the wilding seed source.
8. The request for tree removal includes the removal of the Larch trees that form part of the avenue along Centennial Ave, the gateway into Arrowtown.
9. The tree removal cannot be staged and must be completed as one operation over a period of months, as the funding must be spent this financial year, or the budget is lost.
10. The proposed plan involves planting two trees for every one removed, with a mix of native and exotic species (attachment A).
11. The Arrowtown Planning Advisory Group (APAG) has reviewed the application and provided the following considerations that should be to be acknowledged as part of the application:
 - *Tree removal on the Council-owned 'river' as indicated, should only include wilding species and Birch, where appropriate and not signature trees like Cedar, Spruce, Wellingtonia and Coulter Pine.*
 - *The APAG would like to see a proper planting plan for the land owned by QLDC for final consideration. (we do have concerns also for inappropriate tree removal on the golf course especially on hole #9 as removal should only include wilding species and silver birch.*
 - *Any removal should be staged.*
 - *Hardy native plants are grouped and not planted with deciduous trees or planted as specimen trees.*
 - *Consideration is given to a greater variety of deciduous trees in the avenue extension.*
 - *Consideration is given as to where power lines are and what the long-term implication is of planting too close to infrastructure.*
 - *Greater consideration and variety of replacement species, partially exotic choices*
12. QLDC leased land for the Golf Club is the area shown in Figure 1, while the proposed tree removals are identified in Figure 2.



Figure 1: Arrowtown Golf Course



Figure 2: Identified trees for removal



Figure 3: View overlooking the Golf Course (1)



Figure 4: View overlooking the Golf Course (2)

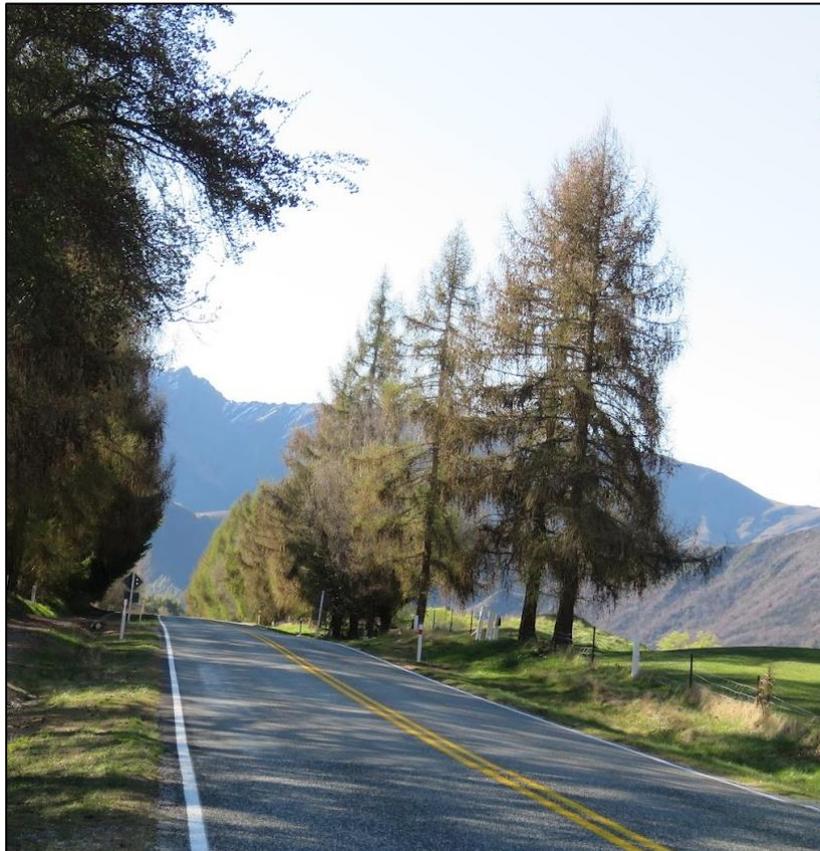


Figure 5: Avenue of Larch trees on Centennial Avenue

13. This report identifies and assesses the following reasonably practicable options for assessing the matter as required by section 77 of the Local Government Act 2002:
14. **Option 1** Approve the application for tree removals at the Arrowtown Golf Club.

Advantages:

- Removal of wilding conifers at AGC and replacement with more appropriate species, removing an invasive pest and improving biodiversity.
- Reduction in seed source of wilding pest tree species.

Disadvantages:

- Loss of a mature established tree canopy and carbon sink, until such time as mature trees can re-establish.
- Loss of an established tree avenue and visual amenity along Centennial Avenue, the gateway into Arrowtown, until the proposed tree replacement avenue is established.

- Removal could have an impact on the habitat of native bird species that may be using the trees for nesting or shelter.

15. **Option 2** Decline the application for tree removals at the Arrowtown Golf Club.

Advantages:

- Retention of a mature established canopy cover and carbon sequestration.

Disadvantages:

- Wilding conifers may continue to have a negative impact on the ecosystem and be a continued seed source.
- The Arrowtown Wilding Strategy may not be fully implemented.
- The Whakatipu Wilding Conifer Control Group will not meet their objective to protect our outstanding natural landscapes and unique alpine biodiversity from wilding pine threats, by reducing spread and removing seed sources.

16. This report recommends Option 1 for addressing the matter because wilding conifers will be removed, protecting iconic landscapes and reducing their effect on native ecosystems, thereby complying with the 2022 QLDC Tree Policy (specifically policy 4.11).

One Mile and Two Mile

17. The Whakatipu Wilding Control Group (WCG) is focused on protecting biodiversity and the remarkable landscape of the Whakatipu for the benefit of residents, users, tourists and particularly, future generations. The WCG's aim is to control wilding trees. Wilding conifers threaten and replace native flora and fauna.

18. The WCG has requested to remove all significant large wilding conifers on reserve land between One Mile and Sunshine Bay Reserve.



Figure 6: Location of removals



Figure 7: Aerial showing trees to be removed in red and natural regeneration area in blue

19. Removal will reduce the wilding seed source and promote natural regeneration of native tree species in the reserves.
20. This work compliments work previously carried out on the Glenorchy-Queenstown Road where the WCG have removed wildings and the natives are flourishing. This work would be a collaboration between DOC and LINZ who have already approved the operation on their land.
21. The contractors will fell the trees and the larger logs will be sold to offset the cost of the operation. Some forestry slash will be left on the site, similar to Coronet Forest.
22. This report identifies and assesses the following reasonably practicable options for assessing the matter as required by section 77 of the Local Government Act 2002:
23. **Option 1** Approve the application for tree removal and One and Two Mile Reserves.

Advantages:

- Removal of the trees will reduce the wilding seed source.
- Collaboration between Doc and LINZ who have already approved operation on their land.
- Allow natural regeneration of native seed sources in this area.
- The carbon removal will be mitigated with native and non-spreading exotic regeneration, supporting actions and goals in the QLDC Climate action plan.

Disadvantages:

- Loss of a mature established tree canopy and carbon sink, until such time as mature trees are re-established.
- The removal of the trees could have an impact on the habitat of native species that may be using the trees for nesting or shelter.

24. **Option 2** Decline the application for tree removal at One and Two Mile Reserves.

Advantages:

- Retention of canopy cover and carbon sequestration.

Disadvantages:

- Ecological restoration will not occur.
- Wilding conifers will not be removed and will continue to spread and threaten biodiversity.

25. This report recommends Option 1 for addressing the matter because wilding conifers will be removed, protecting iconic landscapes and reducing their effect on native ecosystems, thereby complying with the 2022 QLDC Tree Policy (specifically policy 4.11).

Jardine Park Wakatipu Croquet Club

26. Eight exotic Eucalyptus trees form a row adjacent to the south-western boundary of the Wakatipu Croquet Club green at Jardine Park (Figure 8). This boundary separates the club from the adjoining conifer plantation and the Jean Malpas Nursery. There is a row of Thuja plicata (known as Western Red Cedar) trees interplanted with the Eucalyptus (Figure 9 and 10).

27. In 2012, around 14 Eucalyptus in this same row were removed by Council at the Croquet Club's request, due to their proximity to the lawn where roots were beginning to affect the surface of the green. The eight trees as part of the current application are further from the green and the roots do not affect the surface.

28. The Croquet Club wish to remove the trees because of the leaves and gum nuts that fall on the croquet surface, the Club perceives that the trees are a health and safety issue.

29. The eight subject trees were assessed in November 2022 by the QLDC Arborist who concluded that *"there is no justification to remove the Eucalyptus trees based on their health, vigour or structural condition"*. In addition, the risk rating of the trees was assessed to be *'Broadly Acceptable'*.

30. The application was subsequently declined in accordance with policies 14.13 and 14.18. The Croquet Club then requested that this decision was appealed and taken to the Community & Services Committee as per the process set out in the Tree Policy.

31. This appeal was referred to the Community & Services Committee in February 2023. The Committee then directed staff to seek public feedback on the proposed removals before they could decide. Public feedback has now been completed and is summarised in paragraph 38. Full copies of the public feedback are included as Attachment B.

32. Images below show the location of the trees on the Croquet Club property.

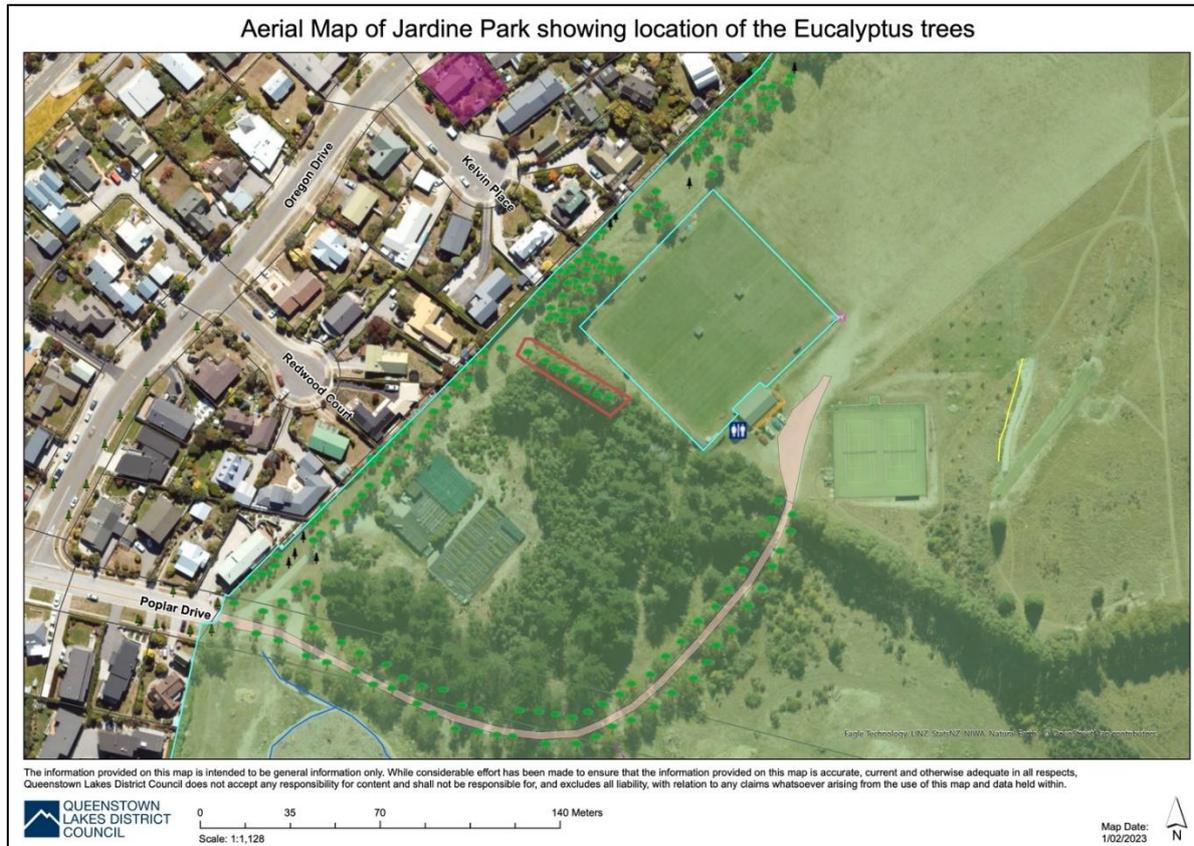


Figure 8: Aerial showing trees to be removed in red in Jardine Park



Figure 9: Photo showing the height of the Eucalyptus Trees



Figure 10: Row of Thuja plicata trees interplanted with the Eucalyptus

33. This report identifies and assesses the following reasonably practicable options for assessing the matter as required by section 77 of the Local Government Act 2002:
34. **Option 1** Approve the tree removal application at the Wakatipu Croquet Club at Jardine Park, Kelvin Peninsula.

Advantages:

- Removal of the trees will reduce regular maintenance to the Croquet Club green as a result of debris dropping onto the green.
- Replacement planting will increase the overall number of trees and the planting of New Zealand native trees will increase biodiversity in the area.
- The Thuja Plicata which are interplanted between the Eucalyptus trees will have a chance to flourish.
- There is an opportunity for the Croquet Club to fell the Eucalyptus trees when 100 Wilding conifers are removed from Jardine Park later this year, utilising machinery that will be on site, and taking advantage of efficiencies such as set up and lay down areas.
- There is a level of public support to fell the trees.

Disadvantages:

- A loss of carbon reduction in the interim although long term the carbon reduction will be doubled.
- Loss of visual amenity.
- Loss of large healthy mature trees that provide habitat and food for native species.
- Approving removal of the trees will not be acting in accordance with the QLDC Tree Policy, in particular policies 4.13 and 4.18.

35. **Option 2** Decline the tree removal application at the Wakatipu Croquet Club, Jardine Park, Kelvin Peninsula.

Advantages:

- Retention of large mature healthy trees that provide habitat.
- Retention of visual amenity.
- No immediate reduction in the carbon sink associated with established trees.
- The assessment of the eight trees identified no obvious issues regarding their health, vigour, structural condition, or root environment.

Disadvantages:

- The Croquet club continues to perceive that there are health and safety issues.
- The Croquet club will need to continue to remove tree debris from the croquet lawn.

36. This report recommends Option 2 as the requested tree removals do not comply with the 2022 QLDC Tree Policy, specifically Policy 4.13 and 4.18:

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- *To minimise obstruction of commercial or advertising signage*
- *To reduce leaf or fruit litter and other debris*
- *To reduce shading*
- *For contributing to allergenic or irritant responses*
- *When the risk posed by the tree meets the requirements of the Tree Risk Management.*

4.18. Other - Requests for removal of tree(s) due to other issues will only be approved under exceptional circumstances and will be required to meet all the criteria below:

- *The issue caused by the tree has a significant effect on the applicant's day to day living*
- *The tree is the sole cause of the issue*

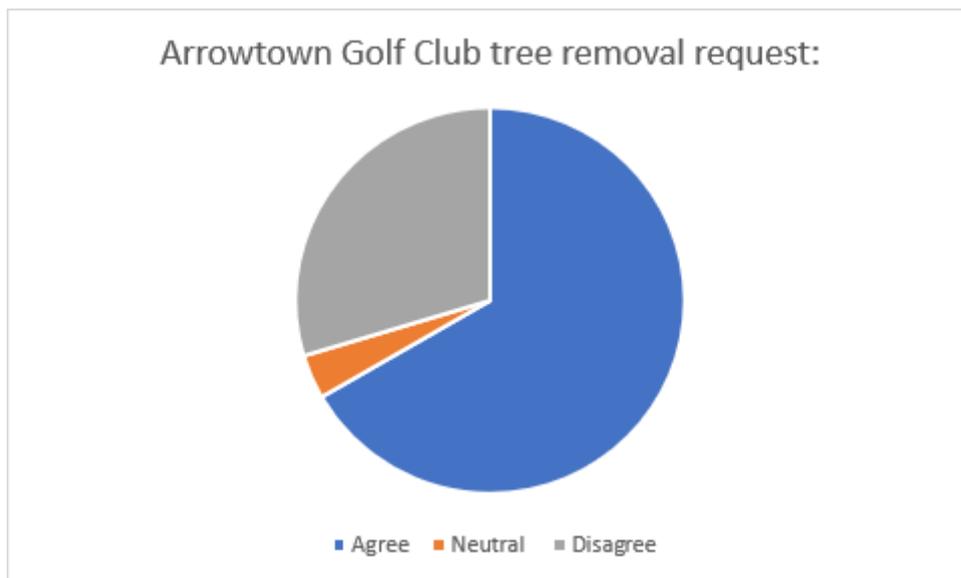
- *The issue is not able to be mitigated through general maintenance by the applicant (e.g., clearing gutters of leaves)*
- *The issue caused by the tree cannot be mitigated by pruning*
- *No reasonable engineering solution can mitigate the issue caused by the tree.*

Consultation

37. QLDC's Let's Talk page invited feedback from the public on the three tree removal requests from the 20th February to the 13th March 2023. The page was shared on QLDC social media and via the Kelvin Peninsula Community Association, Arrowtown Village Association and Fernhill and Sunshine Bay media avenues.

38. Council received a total of 65 submissions on the tree removals. The community were asked to comment on the removals and the responses are summarised as follows (Attachment A).

39. A total of 27 were received in relation to the Arrowtown Golf Course:



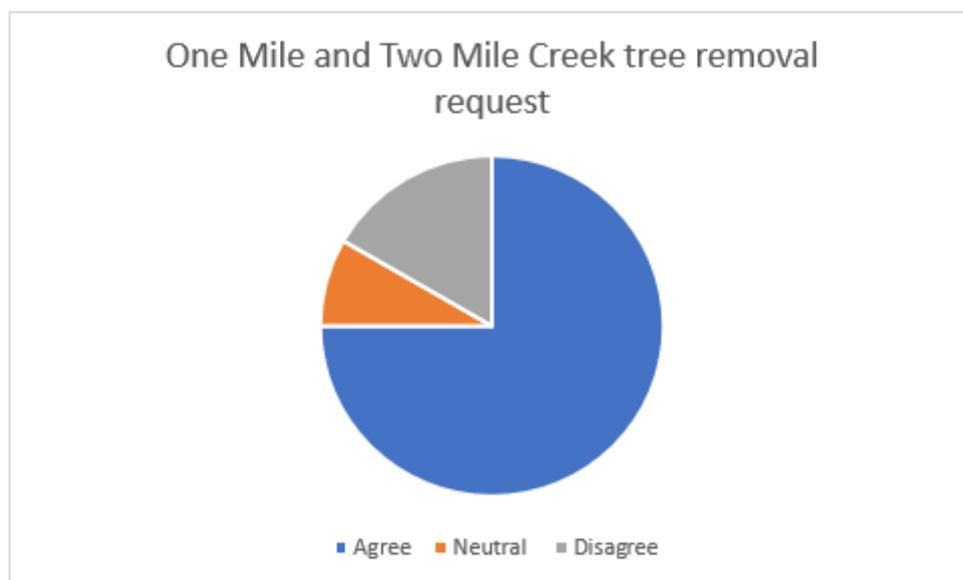
In Support key submission points:

- Support for removing wildings.
- Have witnessed the damage inflicted on the Arrowtown backcountry by wilding conifers, it is important to remove wilding seeding trees on QLDC land.
- Extensive work has been undertaken to start clearing wilding conifers across Tobin's Face which were spreading over the Crown Terrace and out competing the autumnal colour trees of Arrowtown.

In Opposition key submission points:

- Removing 170 plus, eighty-year-old trees from the golf course and replacing them with natives, will drastically change this entrance of Arrowtown.
- The Larch avenue along the roadside should stay.
- New trees will take years to grow and leave a blank charmless space for years. Visitors come to see the tree colours in autumn.

40. A total of 25 were received in relation to the One Mile and Two Mile tree removal.



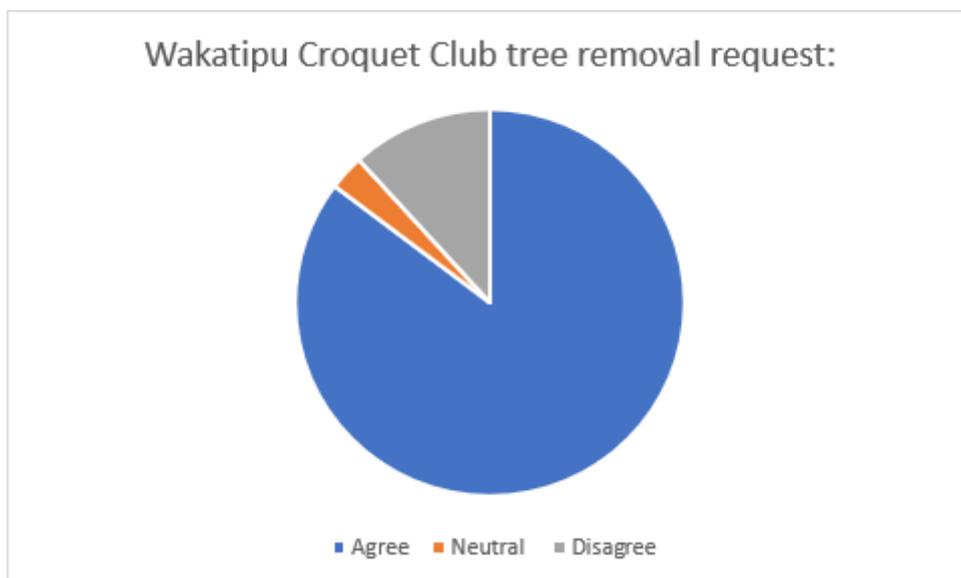
In Support key submission points:

- Implementation of the replanting plan is important.
- Many of the trees are wildings, support for removing wildings.
- Support native planting.
- The fire risk is very unnerving.
- Great to see the native vegetation regeneration following the Council's removal some years ago.

In Opposition key submission points:

- Do not leave the slash lying around, it looks horrible.
- Mature trees along the lake should be left as part of the character on Queenstown and the road trough to Glenorchy.

41. A total of 36 were received in relation to the Wakatipu Croquet Club tree removal.



In Support key submission points:

- Safety Concerns about the tree during high winds.
- The Eucalyptus trees drop a considerable amount of leaf litter.
- Support the native planting.

In Opposition key submission points:

- The trees provide amenity to the reserve.
- The Eucalyptus trees provide shade in the reserve.
- The damage to croquet club green from the Eucalyptus trees is marginal.

Consultation Process | Hātepe Matapaki

Significance and Engagement | Te Whakamahi I kā Whakaaro Hiraka

42. This matter is of medium significance, as determined by reference to the Council's Significance and Engagement Policy because it involves a high level of community interest (trees).
43. The persons who are affected by or interested in this matter the residents and ratepayers of the Whakatipu community, visitors to the Whakatipu and members of the Arrowtown Golf Club and the Wakatipu Croquet Club.

Risk and Mitigations | Kā Raru Tūpono me kā Whakamaurutaka

44. This matter relates to the Community & Wellbeing risk category. It is associated with RISK00009 within the [QLDC Risk Register](#). Current and future development needs of the community (including environmental protection), as documented in the Councils risk register. This risk has been assessed as having a low inherent risk rating.
45. The approval of the recommended option will support the Council by allowing us to retain the risk at its current level.

Financial Implications | Kā Riteka ā-Pūtea

46. There will be no financial impact to the annual or Long Term Plans.

Council Effects and Views | Kā Whakaaweawe me kā Tirohaka a te Kaunihera

47. The following Council policies, strategies and bylaws were considered:

- ‘Deafening Dawn Chorus’ Vision Beyond 2050: <https://www.qldc.govt.nz/vision-beyond-2050/>
- QLDC Tree Policy 2022
- QLDC Climate & Biodiversity Action Plan 2022
- Otago Regional Council Pest Management Plan 2019
- Parks and Open Space Strategy 2021
- Otago Regional Council Pest Management Plan 2019
- Wildlife Act 1953

Refer to online documents here: <http://www.qldc.govt.nz/policies>

48. The recommended option is consistent with the principles set out in the named Tree Policy 2022.
49. This matter is not included in the Ten Year Plan or Annual Plan and there is no expenditure required.

Local Government Act 2002 Purpose Provisions | Te Whakatureture 2002 o te Kāwanataka ā-Kiaka

50. The recommended option:

- Section 10 of the Local Government Act 2002 states the purpose of local government is (a) to enable democratic local decision-making and action by, and on behalf of, communities; and (b) to promote the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of communities in the present and for the future. As such, the recommendation in this report is appropriate and within the ambit of Section 10 of the Act;
- Can be implemented through current funding under the Ten Year Plan and Annual Plan;

- Is consistent with the Council's plans and policies; and
- Would not alter significantly the intended level of service provision for any significant activity undertaken by or on behalf of the Council, or transfer the ownership or control of a strategic asset to or from the Council.

Attachments | Kā Tāpirihaka

A	AGC-Wilding Pine Removal & Replanting Project
B	Submissions from Let's Talk community feedback
