

2 September 2026

Hearing Panel, Upper Clutha Landscape Schedules Variation

Steve Skelton, Registered Landscape Architect, PATCH Ltd

**Summary of Evidence, Schedules 21.22.25 Mata-au Clutha River and 21.23.9
Wānaka Airport Environs**

1. My name is Steve Skelton. I am a Registered Landscape Architect and the Director of Patch Limited. I have prepared landscape evidence on behalf of Dirk and Rebecca Venter, Kathryn and Vaughn Woodfield and the NW & DJ Pittaway Family Trust. My statement of evidence is dated 26 June 2026. I attended expert conferencing on 6 July and signed the Joint Witness Statement dated 14 July. I have also reviewed Ms Gilbert's updated markups of both Schedules dated 1 September 2026.
2. I do not challenge the identification of the Mata-au Clutha River as an Outstanding Natural Feature, and I agree with the majority of the physical, associative and perceptual attributes and values recorded in Schedule 21.22.25. In my opinion the river, its escarpments and terraces, its ecological and cultural values and its recreational role are appropriately described. My evidence is concerned with the level of detail in the Schedule and the way it treats the different parts of the Priority Area, rather than with the ONF identification itself.
3. Conferencing was productive in relation to 21.22.25. The agreed text now identifies the Poplar Beach terrace and the horseshoe bend peninsulas as distinct landforms within the ONF. It records the productive and amenity tree plantings at Poplar Beach, the gold mining history on the terrace, and the presence of productive farming, pivot irrigation and horticulture within the Priority Area. The naturalness text has been moderated so that modification "sits comfortably within" the landscape rather than being "dwarfed by" it. Remoteness and wildness are now described as "appreciable" rather than "strong", and as applying to those parts of the trails that are separated from settled land uses. Associative values have moved from very high to high. The visitor accommodation capacity statement now extends to locations where existing landform and vegetation can keep development recessive, and the site-specific earthworks rule for the Woodfield land is recorded in the earthworks capacity statement.
4. In my opinion these are material improvements. They go a long way towards addressing my principal concern, which was that the Schedule treated the Priority Area as a single, uniform landscape.
5. Before turning to the remaining differences, I want to explain why the wording matters. The Preamble is helpful. It states that the Schedules are a tool to inform assessment and that a site-specific assessment is still required for any consent. That is the intent. In my experience, however, Council's consultant landscape architects tend to treat the Schedules as the test itself and expect every element of a proposal to satisfy each attribute and capacity statement. I recorded that concern in the Joint Witness Statement. It is why greater specificity about what is anticipated in these areas matters, and why I understand the submitters' request for precise wording, even though I do not adopt all of their proposed text. A consultant landscape architect reading the Schedule should be able to see what is anticipated on the Poplar Beach terrace and elsewhere in the Priority Area, and the more clearly that is expressed, the less room there is for the Schedule to be applied more restrictively than the Preamble intends.
6. Three matters remain. The first is visitor accommodation. My evidence at paragraph 103 supports limited capacity within areas of established rural living character, in addition to the agreed text. Ms Gilbert's 1 September markup records this as not supported by landscape

evidence. It is supported by my evidence. The Poplar Beach terrace is an established rural living environment with a settled and managed character that distinguishes it from the river corridor, and in my opinion small-scale accommodation associated with existing development is a different proposition from accommodation within the more natural parts of the ONF.

7. The second is farm buildings. My evidence at paragraph 115 supports some capacity, rather than limited, for modestly scaled farm buildings within those parts of the Priority Area characterised by pastoral land use. In my opinion farm buildings that are genuinely associated with productive activity reinforce the working character of those areas rather than detracting from it.
8. The third is earthworks. My evidence at paragraph 110 supports limited capacity for earthworks that support productive activities, trails, restoration and public access, provided they protect the naturalness and expressiveness values of the Priority Area and integrate with existing landform patterns. To be clear, that is a limited rating rather than some.
9. On rural living, the agreed text retains very limited capacity on the intermediate terraces. That is consistent with my evidence at paragraph 122. My evidence identifies that parts of the Horseshoe Bend peninsula have a degree of landform containment and vegetation cover that could absorb a small number of carefully integrated opportunities. I accept that this is a matter for site-specific assessment at the consent stage rather than a change to the capacity rating.
10. One further point on the 1 September markup. Ms Gilbert proposes replacing "Poplar Beach terrace" with "the lower river terrace accessed from Stevenson Road". I do not oppose that change, as it is more specific. I simply note that Poplar Beach is the name used locally, it is the name used in the ecological references in the Schedule, and it is the name I have used throughout my evidence and attachments.
11. In relation to the Pittaway Family Trust, I accept that the mapped extent of the Schedule is not to be revisited and I no longer pursue exclusion of the Pittaway Trust site. My remaining concern is with the description of the area. The Wānaka Airport Environs area adjoins and largely surrounds the Airport Zone, and in my opinion its character is strongly influenced by aircraft activity, large-scale airport buildings and the associated aviation, servicing and rural-industrial activities, in the same way that other Priority Areas are influenced by adjoining settlement. The Schedule should say so in the general description and in the naturalness and transient values sections.
12. I also consider that "green belt" is no longer an accurate description of the approach to Wānaka, given the airport, the consented film studio and the surrounding pattern of development, and that the references to tranquillity and quietness overstate what is actually experienced close to the airport. In my opinion "gateway" remains a fair description. "Green belt" does not.
13. In summary, my evidence seeks a Schedule whose capacity ratings are consistent with its own descriptions. The agreed text now acknowledges the Poplar Beach terrace and the Horseshoe Bend peninsulas as distinct parts of the Priority Area with an established productive and rural living character. The remaining differences on visitor accommodation, farm buildings and earthworks are about bringing three capacity statements into line with that acknowledgement. I am happy to answer any questions the Panel may have.



Stephen Skelton

Registered Landscape Architect