

Before the Hearings Panel appointed by the Queenstown Lakes District Council

Under the Resource Management Act 1991

In the matter of the Upper Clutha Landscape Schedules variation to the Queenstown Lakes Proposed District Plan

Summary of evidence of Dirk and Becky Venter

3 September 2026

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May it please the Panel

- 1 We bought 21 hectares of farmland on Stevenson Road. We didn't buy a development site. We didn't buy a resort. We bought farmland.
- 2 Land that has been farmed for more than 100 years, and when we bought it in 2018, it was Rural General. Within the space of 4 years, the land went from Rural General to ONL, and then ONF. The classification has changed twice. The land beneath our feet hasn't.
- 3 We accept that this is a valued landscape. We want those values protected. But Poplar Beach's Intermediate Terrace is working rural land. And we are asking for enough practical flexibility to keep it that way. Because we've already experienced what happens when ordinary rural decisions become subject to increasingly prescriptive landscape and ecological controls.
- 4 In 2019, we wanted to move our existing building platform just 30 metres to the south-east, away from a high fire-risk stand of kānuka. After the recent Albert Town fire, we don't need reminding how quickly fire can threaten homes, livelihoods and land.
- 5 It seemed like a sensible thing to do. But moving that platform triggered resource consent, a landscape assessment and an ecological assessment — all at our cost. And here's the irony. The assessments found cushion field, alpine moss and native herbage on the original building platform.
- 6 So, by trying to move our building away from the very real high fire-risk vegetation, we discovered that the original area contained ecological values that effectively took it off the table as well.
- 7 The very process intended to find a better place to build ended up identifying land that we now can't use. That experience has made us particularly concerned about the approach being proposed here.
- 8 We are told that buildings should be “nestled” into the landscape — using vegetation and landform to reduce their visual impact. That sounds entirely reasonable.
- 9 But on our property, the places where a building can be most effectively nestled are often the very places containing the native vegetation that Council wants protected. So we end up with a Catch-22.
- 10 Put the building in the open, and it may be considered visually intrusive. Put it amongst vegetation, and ecological and landscape assessments are triggered — which can result in that vegetation becoming another constraint

on the property. Not to mention leaving ourselves exposed to an increased fire risk. That isn't practical rural management.

- 11 Then there was our driveway. We wanted it 4.5 metres wide so two vehicles could pass without one having to drive into the ditch. We were restricted to 3.5 metres to protect rural character. And even our proposal to plant maples around the house became a landscape consideration, due to their leaf colour in autumn. In a town that hosts the Festival of Colour.
- 12 These sound like small things. But that's how regulation creeps. Common sense gets squeezed out. Rural General became ONL. ONL became ONF. Earthworks rights reduced dramatically, from 1,000 cubic metres per year to just ten.
- 13 And ordinary decisions about a driveway, vegetation or the location of a farm building become matters requiring specialist assessments, with the associated costs, which can often be more than the actual project.
- 14 We are not asking for a free-for-all. We're not asking to subdivide. We're not asking to build a resort. We're asking to live modestly and to farm. We have a permaculture orchard and a truffière. We manage vegetation, encourage native birds and actively care for the 21 hectares. And farming requires infrastructure.
- 15 We need some reasonable capacity for farm buildings. Sheds. Storage. Workshops. Irrigation infrastructure.
- 16 Buildings genuinely associated with productive rural use. And where you place them matters from a workflow and productivity perspective.
- 17 The Schedule itself recognises that Poplar Beach contains small farming, horticulture, rural living and farming infrastructure.
- 18 So our request is really quite modest: If farming is an acknowledged part of this landscape, there needs to be some reasonable capacity for the infrastructure required to continue farming.
- 19 We are not asking for landscape values to be ignored.
- 20 We are asking for proportionate protection.
- 21 Allow responsible landowners to make ordinary decisions about farming and living on established rural land without every decision becoming another planning or ecological battle.
- 22 We are not asking for less care. We are asking for less prescription.

- 23 We want a framework that recognises that farming and landscape protection can coexist. Because they already do.
- 24 This is farmland within a valued landscape — not a pristine landscape that happens to contain farmland.
- 25 We bought farmland. We love it. We want to look after it.
- 26 We want to farm it responsibly and live there modestly.
- 27 And we are asking you to recognise Poplar Beach's Intermediate Terrace for what it actually is: working rural land within a valued landscape.
- 28 Give us some reasonable capacity to continue to farm it, manage it and provide the modest infrastructure needed to do that.
- 29 Protect the landscape. Allow the farming to continue within it. And give responsible landowners enough room to do both.

Dated the 4th of September 2026

Dirk and Becky Venter