

LAY SUBMISSION

Upper Clutha Landscape Schedules Variation

Ben Trotter

Relief sought: Do not include the 12 non-Priority Area landscape schedules

Why I am making this submission

My name is Ben Trotter. My family has been farming in New Zealand since the late 1800s. My wife and I are now thinking about the future for our four children and what we will leave them.

We own and operate three farming businesses on the same land below Wānaka Airport. We want this land to remain productive and useful for our family for generations.

I support protecting the rural character of the Upper Clutha. I understand why the Council wants to protect the landscape. My concern is that these 12 new landscape schedules will add cost, uncertainty and red tape to a working farm.

Relief I am asking for

I ask the Hearing Panel not to include the twelve non-Priority Area Rural Character Landscape schedules 21.23.6 to 21.23.17 in the District Plan.

If the Panel decides to keep them, I ask that the rules clearly protect normal farming and allow farms to grow and change. In particular, ordinary farm buildings, earthworks, intensive farming and sensible diversification should not be unnecessarily restricted.

A working farm must be able to change

My biggest concern is the next 20-30 years. Nobody knows what farming will look like then. Machinery will change. Farming methods will change. Markets will change. New technology and new businesses will appear.

I do not want my children to inherit land that is effectively locked into what a farm is expected to look like in 2026.

A farm needs to be able to build new sheds, improve access, change enterprises, develop horticulture, install new technology and find new ways to make the land pay its way.

If farming becomes harder and more expensive, landowners will naturally look for other ways to make a return from their land. That could mean more pressure for development and subdivision. I believe that is the opposite of what these schedules are trying to achieve.

The best way to protect the rural landscape is to keep working farms viable.

Its also important to note that for many landowners including ourselves in this area we have NZFAP Plus Accreditation which is a far more rigorous, site specific, sustainability and biodiversity focused control of our land assets than the landscape schedules themselves. We also have a freshwater farm plan and are GAP Global accredited as a farm so adding in another layer of compliance is more duplication.

Real examples from our farm

This is not just a theoretical concern.

We have need to move three to four times more gravel than the proposed schedules allow. The reason is simple: We need to improve machinery access to our gateways on the farm to avoid pugging (an environmental reason). This is normal farm work, not development for its own sake.

Under the proposed approach, similar work in the future would require resource consent and possibly specialist landscape advice. A farmer should not need a planning process every time they need to make a gateway or farm track safer and more suitable for modern machinery.

Another example is our focus on local food production. We see an opportunity to grow and supply fresh greens to local hospitality businesses. To do that properly and for food safety, we need climate-controlled buildings where produce can be washed, cooled, handled and packed.

That is still farming. It is simply a more modern form of farming and food production.

I am concerned that buildings and earthworks needed for this sort of business will trigger extra consent requirements. In our case the schedules give landscape capacity ratings which in the near term will be very restrictive to food production. Over time, these small extra costs, particularly in time can become significant and can make good rural businesses less competitive. It ultimately just adds more cost to the food we grow for the community we live in.

Tourism and other future opportunities

Our land is close to Wānaka Airport and the wider tourism economy. In the future we may want to look at sensible farm-based tourism, staff accommodation or other activities that work alongside farming.

I am not asking for unlimited development. I am asking that my family keeps the ability to consider sensible opportunities in the future.

The proposed schedules include ratings for visitor accommodation, tourism and commercial recreation. Those ratings impact how future proposals are viewed. That creates uncertainty for a family making long-term investment decisions.

A decision made today could affect decisions my children make decades from now. I do not think that is a good planning outcome.

Cost to ratepayers

I also question whether this process is a good use of ratepayer money. While this a contentious topic, its not personal by any means. From a lay persons perspective looking from the outside in there is a large amount of council time, planning work and expert work has already gone into these schedules. If the schedules are then added to the District Plan, they will also need to be understood, applied and potentially updated in the future.

I am concerned that ratepayers are paying for another layer of planning when the existing rules already allow Council to assess the actual effects of development when a consent is needed.

I also accept that my submission will have very little effect on the final outcome. The process has been going for a long time and feels largely procedural. However, I believe it is still my duty as a father to have my say.

My children will live with the consequences of these decisions being made. If I do not speak up now, I cannot fairly complain later if those decisions make it harder for them to farm, invest in the land or build a future from it.

My request to the Panel

I respectfully ask the Panel to take a long-term view.

Please protect the landscape, but also protect the people and businesses that create and maintain the rural landscape.

My primary request is that the twelve non-Priority Area landscape schedules are scrapped and not included in the District Plan.

If they are retained, I ask that the provisions give working farms much greater certainty and allow normal farming, farm improvements and sensible future diversification without unnecessary cost and consent requirements.

I want my four children to inherit a working farm with choices. I want them to be able to farm it, improve it, change it and build new businesses around it as the world changes. The schedules in their current format do the exact opposite. That is why I am making this submission.

Ben and Rebecca Trotter

Red Bridge Berries, Alpine Fresh and Black Peak Farming