



HEARING OF SUBMISSIONS AND DELIBERATIONS:

**Draft Te Tapunui Queenstown Hill Reserve Forestry
Management Plan 2025**

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Minutes of a hearing of submissions and deliberations on the draft Te Tapunui Queenstown Hill Reserve Forestry Management Plan 2025 held in Council Chambers, 10 Gorge Road on 21 July 2025 at 10.00am

Present:

Councillor Matt Wong (Chairperson), Councillor Gavin Bartlett and Councillor Melissa White

In attendance:

Ms Briana Pringle (Parks and Open Spaces Planning Manager), Mr Dave Winterburn (Parks Manager), Ms Sophie Craig (Parks and Reserves Planner), Ms Jeannie Galavazi (Principal Parks Planner), Ms Kat Baynard (Senior Parks Advisor), (Mr Jon Winterbottom (Democracy Services Team Leader), Ms Georgia Pringle (Democracy Services Advisor), and members of the public as detailed below.

Election of Chair

It was moved (Councillor Bartlett/Councillor White):

That the hearing panel agree to appoint Councillor Wong to chair the hearing.

Motion carried unanimously.

Declarations of Conflict of Interest

Councillor Bartlett indicated that one of the submitters was his spouse.

Confirmation of Agenda

It was moved (Councillor White/Councillor Bartlett):

That the agenda be confirmed without addition or alteration.

Motion carried unanimously.

Summary by Reporting Officer

Briana Pringle spoke to the officer report on the submissions, and it was noted that:

- The report indicated that there were 91 submissions but there were in fact 92. The missing submission was strongly supportive, and the percentages (for/against) remained the same once taking this extra submission into account.
- There were key themes that officers were keen to discuss with the panel during deliberations.

Hearing of submissions

1. Catkin Bartlett

Mrs Bartlett said that the alpine aesthetic of the wilding pines is now a historic point of view. She suggested that the proposed plan is essential and desirable from the perspective of the ecosystem and environment. Other positives she noted related to community engagement and involvement. Mrs Bartlett queried the replanting of exotics, and whether the plan should identify actions if the planting of exotics had unforeseen consequences.

Mrs Bartlett noted that the densely forested area is lifeless (there is nothing growing on the forest floor). She asked if this could be captured as a demonstration of the impact of the wildings, suggesting that it is important to have and preserve this knowledge in the future. She also acknowledged the importance of the Time Walk as a valuable community asset.

2. Denis Behan

Mr Behan suggested that wilding pines are a large problem in the basin and the only way to address this problem is to prevent the seed source from spreading to surrounding areas. The Time Walk has changed dramatically in the last 10 years, and left unchecked it would get worse.

Mr Behan indicated that he was very supportive of the plan. He suggested that there would be negative commentary around removing the trees due to the visual impact, but that this is a short-term view.

3. Anabelle O'Meara, Coordinator for the Queenstown 2000 Time Walk Project (online)

Ms O'Meara indicated that it had been 26 years since the initial concept and first plans to install and construct the Time Walk on Queenstown Hill, which originally came about through the 1999 Queenstown Millenium Planning Committee. She represents the group that built the Time Walk and noted that the land was bare at that time. She indicated that her submission intended to highlight on the value of the Time Walk.

Ms O'Meara asked the panel about the proximity of the tree felling to the structures of the Time Walk; the panel agreed to respond to the query following the hearing. Ms O'Meara explained that she was concerned about the impact of the weather on the structures, i.e. the impact of the elements on the gate, the panels and the basket structure as following the tree felling these structures would be more exposed to the elements.

In response to a councillor question about the state of the forestry at the time of construction, Ms O'Meara noted that there were wilding trees present at that time. Photos from the construction showed the trees. She thought that it would be positive to have the regeneration create a similar forest effect, however, the replacement forest is more likely to attract wildlife.

In response to a councillor query about the origins of the Time Walk group and where they are now, Ms O'Meara noted that many people, including the Simpsons and Phillip Blakely are still in Queenstown. She also indicated that she is still in touch with Lorraine Cooper, although Ms O'Meara left Queenstown in 2002.

3. Richard Bowman, Wilding Conifer Group (WCG)

Mr Richard Bowman explained that his involvement with wilding conifer management goes back 25 years, including as biosecurity officer in Southland, a trustee on the Mid Dome Wilding Trust, Central Wilding Group and close supporter of the WCG. Mr Bowman fully endorsed the proposed plan. A recent national wilding conifer management conference had highlighted work that has been achieved in the Whakatipu Basin, and Mr Bowman acknowledged QLDC's leadership role on this progress.

Mr Bowman noted that in the 1900s the landscape was treeless, but that since the 1950s the spread of wildings the entire landscape has changed. He suggested that the seed source would eventually engulf of the whole hill, noting that these seed sources can blow for tens of kilometres into the surrounding landscapes. It is estimated that the cost of the removals so far to the district is \$26m. The community has been supportive of the removals so far due to the iconic nature of the surrounding landscapes.

Mr Bowman said that the wilding spread has a major impact on biodiversity, suggesting that the tussock land supports so much more life than people realise. He considered that the proposed plan is a vital long-term plan that would remove the seed source from the hill and reduce the cost of removal in the future. He also suggested that plans to replace with low-risk species are appropriate. Mr Bowman indicated that there will be negative views of this work but that his submission supports the Council being steadfast in its position, so that the district retains its unique and precious landscape and does not become a clone of America.

In response to councillor query over whether the wilding pines problem is being effectively addressed, Mr Bowman suggested that since the Jobs for Nature money has dried up (with only \$10m budget remaining), his view is that progress has stalled. He suggested that without further efforts to tackle the issue, it will worsen again. He acknowledged great progress in Skippers Canyon but noted that the Wilding Pine Network is trying hard to ensure it receives sufficient funding in order to finish that work.

4. Weiwei Miao

Ms Miao indicated she is a recent arrival to Queenstown and that she values the aesthetic of the (existing) trees. Her submission expressed concern regarding the large-scale removal of the trees. Recognising the presence of the trees as part of the local ecosystem, she suggested that the removal presents significant risk in terms of landslide and natural hazards, as evidenced by the cemetery landslide two years ago. The regeneration of the land will take a long time to establish.

Ms Miao proposed that there be a requirement on decision makers to sign liability agreements for these events, noting they should be comfortable to do this if they are comfortable with adopting the plan.

It was clarified that Ms Miao was presenting as an individual and not on behalf of an organisation.

5. Grant Hilton Hensman, as an individual and as Chair of the Whakatipu Wilding Control Group (WCG)

Mr Hensman noted that the final sentence of his individual submission was missing as he pressed the submit button early. He had wanted to note the final sentence of the closing statement in his submission was intended to say that QLDC had shown great vision in taking on the wilding issue and that he wanted to encourage the Councillors to continued work to finish the job on this legacy issue.

Mr Hensman suggested that district is on the brink of going backwards with the wilding management. The future in his view would be a closed canopy over the whole reserve. There is a need to take the necessary steps to remove the seed source, otherwise the next sites impacted would be Grants Hill and Slope Hill. He suggested that the seed rain is continuing and can leapfrog in the landscape. While the change is not sudden or visible in the short-term, it builds up over time. The bluffs that could be seen in his childhood are no longer visible. Without intervention, what would remain is the insurmountable task of removing a forest. Mr Hensman suggested that it will never be cheaper or easier to remove the wildings than it is at present and referred to an ORC report which shows a cost benefit ratio of 96:1 of removing wilding pines in Queenstown Lakes District¹. Nationally this ratio is 32:1, which Mr Hensman regarded as extraordinary numbers that should not be ignored.

Mr Hensman said that a legacy could be left for future generations and that this is a pivotal point when it comes to tackling the wilding pine issue. He suggested that it was frightening to think how the town would have looked had previous councillors not set up the WCG. He suggested that he continued control on the seed rain on Walter Peak is expensive and can be avoided by removing the seed source.

In response to a councillor query about the radius over which the seed source on Queenstown Hill can spread, Mr Hensman indicated that this depends on the wind of the day, but that experience from other areas suggests that the radius is up to 40km. This would extend to the Crown Range.

6. Helen McPhail (online)

Ms McPhail indicated that she is a volunteer with the Whakatipu Reforestation Trust. She explained that she first became involved with the wilding removal on Mid Dome and then

¹ *Benefits and Costs of Additional Investment in Wilding Conifer Control in the Otago Region* prepared for Boffa Miskell on behalf of the Otago Regional Council dated 12 October 2023.

with Southland Conservation Board to reverse damage to the landscapes and indigenous biota.

Ms McPhail suggested that the plan is a good basis for the future of wilding management. She suggested that wildings should be removed as soon as possible and that the seeds ignore boundaries. In 1959 there were no trees on Queenstown Hill as evidenced in a photo on the front page of the Otago Daily Times from the prior Saturday. Ms McPhail had seen the advance of the wildings, she loves the natural landscapes and the creatures that live there, and she suggested that the conifers do not provide habitat for these species.

Ms McPhail suggested that all follow up measures must proceed according to best practice, noting that this may include re-examining the exotics for replanting list from the perspective of wildfire risk and out-completing natives. She suggested that we can learn from other projects in the district, such as Project Tohu and private developments such as Mount Dewar. She stressed the importance of not losing the fight against the wilding pines.

In response to a councillor query about when the work started, Ms McPhail responded that it started in 1973 when, while farming, she started removing trees and selecting appropriate species for shelter belts. She indicated that she has been passionate about it ever since.

The hearing of submissions concluded at 10.50m.

The meeting adjourned at 10.50am and reconvened at 11.10am.

Deliberations

Officers suggested that the deliberation proceed via themes and the panel approved that approach.

Tree removal:

- There was discussion among councillors over whether to note that some submissions are recorded as opposed but were only opposed to elements of the plan i.e. revegetation and funding; ultimately it was decided not to do so.
- The panel agreed that no changes were needed related to this theme.

Name of Plan:

- Councillors considered the appropriateness of the current title of the plan and shared their views of several alternative names to reflect the full breadth of the plan.
- Proposed names included the “Te Tapunui Queenstown Hill Restoration and Biodiversity Management Plan” and “Te Tapunui Queenstown Hill Restoration Management Plan”, and the panel asked for officer advice, about requirement to include “forestry” in the name.

- Officers indicated support for both name options and noted there is no requirement to include forestry in the name. However, officers indicated that “biodiversity” is a subjective term and suggested that it may be better to avoid including this in the new name.
- After further discussion **the panel agreed to propose changing the name of the plan to “Te Tapunui Queenstown Hill Reserve Restoration Management Plan.”**

Fire Risk:

- No changes were recommended by the panel although it was proposed to include a note in the report which states that low flammable species will be planted on the Urban boundary.

Species Selection:

- Officers advised that there are two parts to species selection: the list of revegetation species, and consideration of the balance of the mix of native and exotic species used for revegetation.

List of revegetation species:

- Officers noted that four submitters had very specific recommendations on the species list for the panel to consider. Officers proposed to adopt all changes from the four submitters on the basis that they consider that they are suitably qualified to provide this advice. The original author of the plan is Dunedin based and therefore local expertise is very relevant.
- **The panel agreed to adopted suggested species changes.**

Consideration of the balance of exotics and natives:

- Officers noted that reasoning in the draft report was that exotics may have advantages over natives when competing with Douglas fir reinvasion; exotics allow for autumnal colour and fruit trees for future food resilience.
- In response to a councillor question on the position of expert submitters, what was their position, officers noted that there were differing opinions. Officers noted that if it was selected to plant some exotics as establishment trees then remove in future as a succession to natives, then this would need to be built into the plan.
- There was a question about the balance proposal, and officers referred to page 23 of the report and figure 9 in the plan, noting that the light green section proposed some pockets of exotics.
- It was noted that the draft did not detail the justification for the exotics being planted and suggested that more detail should be included in the plan. Text to support Figure 9 was recommended and Councillor Wong suggested that there was a need to establish more context on why the plan included planting of exotics.
- Councillor White indicated that she was happy to keep exotics in the plan but noted it looks like there is (or could be) a lot of exotics. Councillor White suggested: it should be made clear in the plan that exotics are limited and can only be planted for a specific

reason; to confirm we are not planning to plant an exotic forest; to provide reassurance regarding stability.

- Councillor White suggested that aesthetic reasons alone are not sufficient justification for planting exotic species; acceptable reasons would include nursery planting to help establish native species, and more operational reasons such as the suitability of the plants to the terrain or difficulty establishes natives or fire risk. **This approach was agreed by the panel.**
- In response to a query about whether fruit and nut trees contribute to pests, officers advice was high level but considered that the benefit of the fruit trees probably outweighs this potential impact.
- Officers noted that two submitters had submitted against sequoia and red wood species being included in the revegetation as they would eventually tower over the native forest and give the same aesthetic as the current trees. Officers requested consideration and decision on this submission point.
- In response to questions from the panel officers clarified that there are two species – giant sequoia and California redwood – both of which are large trees and clarified that these are fast-growing species that would assist with outcompeting the Douglas fir wilding seed sources.
- Information was requested on whether there are there areas where such trees make more sense, such as in gullies, so they aren't towering over the native forest. Officers indicated that they could only consider these species where there is strong justification - for example, for early establishment, and a future plan can consider removal – and noted that this would be more consistent with the submissions than to exclude them.
- Councillor Wong suggested exotics should be used with discretion and only when needed and they are the best species. Councillor Bartlett suggested that planting something to remove it in the future is creating issues for future management and he agreed he did not consider that the aesthetic is a good enough reason; he proposed instead to work towards changing the expectations around what the hill will look like, and indicated preference to move to a native forest, this is preferred.
- **The panel agreed to remove sequoia including redwoods from the list of exotic species, and that other exotics may be included and used where justification is provided. The reason for the change was that sequoia and redwood grow so large that they will dominate within the forest canopy.**
- Officers note that a large redwood has been retained on the front face of the Ben Lomond Reserve , considered that retaining existing trees is different from planting new trees. Officer also noted that there are two different species of redwood currently growing in previously felled areas along the access road on Ben Lomond.

Typo corrections:

- Page 4 correction: Change Typo – should be “not replanted as a production forest”. Add “exotic” ahead of wilding trees. **Confirmed by panel.**
- Page 5 correction: Change “control” to “eliminate.” **Confirmed by panel**

Planting (locations):

- It was noted that the impact of view shafts of a native forest is greater as the native canopy is denser.
- Councillors White suggested that it is important to consider existing houses differently to potential future houses that are not yet developed.
- Officers advised that residential view shafts are different from protecting existing (or former) view shafts enjoyed by the public from the Time Walk. For example, the Commonage land that is to be developed is located below 700 msl – so it is in a management zone that proposes restoration with large trees. This is consistent across the plan.
- The panel agreed that no changes to the plan were needed since they did not want to build in a requirement to protect view shafts into the plan. It is risky locking Council into this. However, it was proposed to address at the time of planting and take a common-sense approach in these particular locations.

Biodiversity:

- The panel recommended no changes to the plan related to biodiversity.

Recreation Opportunities/Future Recreation Trails:

- There were submissions on the Time Walk and particularly the protection of the structures on the Time Walk i.e. the gate, the panels and the basket.
- Officer advised that page 10 of the plan already refers to the Time Walk being protected. Noting also these structures are parks assets that are on a programme of renewal. Parks can account for the exposure from the tree removals in maintenance programmes.
- Regarding proximity of the forestry activities to the trail and structures as the question was posed by the submitter, officers confirmed that the forestry activities will be very close to the track and structures. However, officers highlighted the protection of the Time Walk in the operational plan and noted reference to this in the current plan.
- It was suggested on page 10 to separate out the Time Walk from the biking into two different paragraphs.
- Officers noted that the Time Walk will be protected, although access may be temporarily changed to account for operations.
- Offices indicated that the bike tracks would not be protected. Access for biking will be strongly discouraged. Clarified that the trails will be destroyed as a byproduct of the forestry activity.
- **Changes agreed by panel:**
 - **Amend wording to specify that the Time Walk will be protected, whilst noting that access may be temporarily affected.**
 - **Include a new paragraph to acknowledge that mountain biking trails are unauthorised and as such won't be protected and access will be removed during construction.**
 - **Remove the word 'walking' from page 10 to reflect trails are not just for walking but encompasses other uses such as biking; and**
 - **Refer to policy in RMP regarding Trail master plan – silent regarding walking and biking trails within forestry plan.**

Landscape and Visual Impacts:

- Referring to *Other Considerations: 50 to 10 years for the revegetation and growth*, on page 28 of the plan, officers indicated that this is a rough estimate which is dependent on funding and staging. Advised to refer to Coronet Forest replanting for reference. The shortest timeframe possible for the removal of the trees would be a 3 year impact and 10 years with planting.
- Councillor suggestion for a more conservative timeline for planting, but it was advised it is better to come under the timeframe and overdeliver. Officers noted it is all dependent on the operational budget.
- Panel discussion over Council messaging related to the plan given how big a change this will involve.
- **The panel recommended no changes to the plan related to this theme.**

Operational Considerations:

- It was proposed that additional wording could be added around some operational details that will be provided at a later date.
- Councillor suggestion to add next steps to the plan. Once this is adopted, the information will be found in the Harvesting Plan, EMP, Trail Master Plan and Pest Control Plan. Need to clarify that this document forms part of a suite of plans, as noted in the Statement of Proposal.
- Operational plans required:
 - Harvest Plan
 - Revegetation – detailed
 - EMP for any physical works
 - Trail Master Plan
 - Pet Control Plan
- Also need to include the process for getting funding allocation.
- **Changes agreed to by the Panel:**
 - **Page 28 of the Plan to include next steps and to insert wording proposed for page 27 (prepared by Ms Pringle and circulated at the hearing).**

Costs

- Need to add next steps clarifying that the Long Term Plan process is required.
- Note that there is a 5 year requirement to replant (Emissions Trading Scheme).
- Councillor noted that every time Council removes a tree, we are asked if there is money for revegetation. Advised to refer to other funding opportunities.
- Next steps: any removals must be accompanied by a budget that includes replanting and maintenance; plan for the regeneration element for all trees removed.
- WCG seed funding and the expectation that this removal work can get started straight away. Query relating how to manage this expectation with lack of budgeting for revegetation. Suggestion to create a caveat that they must go together (removal and revegetation).
- Councillor noted that the approximate cost of \$8 - \$12 million needs to be broken down between removal and revegetation.
- Need to prepare high level harvest plan, costings and procurement.

- Councillor noted a statement should be added regarding the funding process, creating a requirement to remove, replant and keep it high level.
- The outcome the panel requires is that regeneration happens quickly after the removal and there must be a plan.
- **Changes agreed by the panel:**
 - **Include more detail around the process for how funding will be obtained.**

Item from the Panel: Removal of Slash:

- Councillor commented that the wording should be strengthened to make it very clear that QLDC is aware that the removal of slash is a big issue.
- **Changes agreed by the panel:**
 - **Include more detail around the removal of slash in the next steps on page 28**
- *Question to ask the legal team regarding liability:* Contracts for forestry removal will include liability insurance and legal will provide further guidance on this.

Emissions Trading Scheme:

- Councillor suggestion that clarification needed around the 30 hectares of the 190 hectares that pre-date 1990, as anything pre-1990 has already been counted as Council's carbon sink, so these form the baseline. Any new plantings after 1990 could be credited.
- Officer note that Council got a one-off distribution of carbon credits at the time the scheme was set up, so the 30 hectares must be replanted but there is no requirement for the remaining 79 hectares to be replanted.
- It was noted that if Council cuts and replants trees, there is no liability as it is already covered by the plan.
- Previously, Council has not looked to join the scheme because the existing trees are a wilding species that self-seeded in the reserve.
- It was noted that there is an opportunity for the area outside the 30 hectares to enter into the scheme.
- **Changes agreed to by the panel:**
 - **On page 7 of the 'provided that the site is replanted in 4 years', clarification of the intention that Council will be replanting this and clarify that it will be carbon neutral/achieve the same sequestration in x number of years. Also need to confirm the new forest will meet the definition of a forest under the scheme.**
 - **Preference to stay silent on 'opportunities' for the remaining 79 hectares, to avoid creating any obligation.**

Page 15 of Report:

- Question around the District Plan requirements and designation - *'the current forestry plan shall address the following matters...for the establishment of production forestry and areas to be retired'*. Council needs to confirm we are retiring all areas from production forestry.
- Question raised around any obligations to meet the District Plan requirements to satisfy the above-mentioned conditions, in particular whether the retirement need to be specifically stated. It was noted that this is addressed in the key objectives.

Page 11 of Report:

- Final sentence has some typos.
 - **Officers agreed to check grammar.**

Page 22 of Report:

- Question around whether the dark lines relate to catchment areas.
- **Change agreed to by the panel: amend the map to clarify that the dark lines are catchment boundaries.**

Page 42 & Appendix 1:

- Query related to paragraph 10 – *‘batters must be rehabilitated as soon as possible and within 6 months’*.
- Wording is incorrect – “no less than” does not read well. It was noted that this was taken from the District Plan and that changing that text would require changing the District Plan.

It was moved (Councillor Bartlett/Councillor White):

That the hearing panel:

- 1. Note** the contents of this report;
- 2. Note** all submissions on the draft forestry plan and hear any submitters who wish to speak to their submission;
- 3. Recommend to Council** to amend the name of the Te Tapunui Queenstown Hill Reserve Forestry Management Plan 2025 to “Te Tapunui Queenstown Hill Reserve Restoration Management Plan 2025.”
- 4. Recommend to Council** a final form of the Te Tapunui Queenstown Hill Reserve Restoration Management Plan 2025 to be adopted with changes as an outcome of the consultation process (final forestry plan) subject to final review by the panel.

Motion carried unanimously.

Meeting concluded at 1.56pm