

ORAL SUBMISSION – UPPER CLUTHA LANDSCAPE SCHEDULES

Ben Trotter | Wanaka Airport Environs

Good afternoon, Chair and Commissioners, and thank you for allowing me to speak today.

I stand before you not just as a landowner or a farmer, but as a father. Every decision I make about this land is ultimately about what I we behind. Will my children inherit opportunity — or limitations? That is why I am here.

I am not opposed to protecting the landscape of the Upper Clutha. I live here. I farm here. My family has farmed in New Zealand for generations. This isn't just land I own. This is home.

My concern is simple: in trying to protect the appearance of our rural landscape, we must not make it harder for working farms that create that landscape to survive.

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

A working farm cannot be stuck in time.

Farming changes. Machinery changes. Technology changes. Markets change. The next generation will farm differently from this generation.

Our farm has already encountered practical examples of this. We have needed to move substantially more gravel than the proposed provisions allow simply to improve machinery access around gateways. Heavy machinery damages gateways and creates pugging. Improving access is about keeping the farm safer, more efficient and environmentally responsible not changing its character.

If a farmer starts thinking, 'Do I really want to spend the money if this means another consent, another report and another consultant?' eventually improvements won't happen. Those small barriers accumulate.

The same applies to horticulture and food production. We see opportunities to produce more fresh food locally. That may require growing structures, cool rooms, irrigation, dispatch, buildings or earthworks. It may look different from traditional pastoral farming, but it is still farming. It is still food production. It is still rural enterprise.

The Wanaka Airport Environs landscape assessment itself recognises the area's working rural character, pastoral farming and irrigated agriculture. That matters because the rural landscape we are talking about protecting exists because people work this land.

The working farm is part of the landscape.

There is also a very practical issue I want the Panel to consider - these schedules are unlikely to reduce the cost or time it takes for farmers to get to an appropriate outcome.

When we actually need a new resource consent for a significant change, we are likely to need a landscape assessment anyway. So I question what additional value the schedule adds in those circumstances. We could end up with a landscape assessment as part of the consent process, while also having a landscape schedule sitting over the property telling us broadly the same thing? That risks creating a redundant layer of process, rather than a more efficient pathway to a outcome.

I have also heard the comment that the schedules will not change the rules that apply to farming activities. I understand the intention behind that statement, but in all honesty I don't think that is the reality.

The type of food production we are developing requires things like earthworks, staff accommodation, rural living and supporting infrastructure. Those are not theoretical possibilities for us they are part of what a modern, productive farming business can require. If the schedule changes the assessment pathway or adds additional landscape considerations to those activities, then from our perspective it absolutely changes the practical rules we operate under.

And there is another problem. Farming practices will change much faster than landscape schedules can realistically be reviewed and updated. A schedule written around today's farming landscape may not properly anticipate what food production looks like in ten years. That leaves us trying to operate modern businesses under yesterday's assumptions, with additional bureaucracy sitting between a good farming idea and actually implementing it.

Take something as ordinary as a new shed. Under a straightforward farming/planning framework, I would expect a relatively simple process. But if the landscape schedule means we now need additional consideration of

earthworks, visual effects and landscape impacts and more consultants and reports than a very ordinary farming activity has become a much more complicated and expensive exercise. This is very real.

To me, that simply reeks of inefficiency. We should be designing a planning system that gets farmers to good environmental and landscape outcomes with the least unnecessary process not one that adds layers of bureaucracy which may ultimately duplicate work that will be required through resource consent anyway.

There is another issue that is deeply personal for my family - housing.

We want the ability to build a home on the farm one day not as a luxury, but because this is where we work, where we belong, and where we hope the next generation can have the choice to live and work.

We also need to think about our farm staff. Wanaka housing is extraordinarily expensive, horrific in fact. If we want productive farms and strong rural communities, people need somewhere they can actually afford to live. Providing appropriately located accommodation for essential farm staff can be part of keeping a farm operating.

I understand that the landscape has to be considered. But I ask the panel to recognise that a carefully located family home or modest staff accommodation is not inherently inconsistent with a working rural landscape.

We are already doing our part. Our farming businesses operate under significant environmental, sustainability and food-safety obligations, including NZFAP Plus, freshwater planning and GLOBAL GAP accreditation. We understand that we are custodians of the land.

I am not asking for unlimited development rights. I am not asking for more houses. I am asking for proportionate planning that recognise what a working farm actually needs.

I want to be able to build a shed when the farm needs one. Improve a track when machinery requires it. Adapt irrigation. Change enterprises. Grow horticulture. Adopt new technology. And, perhaps most importantly, I want my children to have those same choices.

So perhaps the question before us shouldn't simply be - How do we stop change? Perhaps it should be 'How do we make sure the right kind of change can happen?'

Because farming has always changed. A healthy rural landscape is one where productive farms can modernise, innovate and remain economically viable while respecting the landscape around them.

These schedules will undoubtedly in my mind have disastrous impacts on efficiency, local food production and overall farming viability. This is something the council are spending bug money on to try and accelerate and yet these schedules in the non priority areas do the exact opposite in a practical sense.

I want to leave my children more than a beautiful view. I want to leave them a viable farm. I want them to have the choice to come home.

So please protect the landscape but please also protect the people who make that landscape what it is.

A rural landscape without viable rural businesses is not really a working rural landscape at all.

Thank you.