

Before the Freshwater Hearing Panel

In the matter of the Resource Management Act 1991

And

In the matter of the Proposed Otago Regional Policy Statement 2021: Freshwater Planning Instrument

Statement of evidence of Simon Alexander Mason

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MC.

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Statement of evidence of Simon Alexander Mason

1 Introduction

Qualifications and experience

- 1.1 My full name is Simon Alexander Mason. I am the Infrastructure Operations Manager at Queenstown Lakes District Council (**QLDC**). I have held this role since November 2020.
- 1.2 I have a Bachelor of Engineering in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Auckland and a Post Graduate Diploma in Business Administration and Management from the University of Otago.
- 1.3 I have over 15 years' experience in engineering, mainly in infrastructure construction, management, and maintenance. I have worked as a contractor, a consultant and a client within the infrastructure environment.
- 1.4 I commenced my engineering career at AWT Ltd as a mechanical engineer. I then moved to Downer New Zealand holding a variety of project manager roles in water projects, major projects, and infrastructure projects. Upon my move to QLDC in 2017, I worked as a contract manager (leading the management of the Council's three waters operational contracts) before being promoted to my present role as Infrastructure Operations Manager. My responsibilities currently entail:
 - (a) leading the Maintenance and Operations team including both internal and external resources;
 - (b) compliance with relevant legislation in undertaking infrastructure activities;
 - (c) maintenance and operation of the infrastructure assets;
 - (d) supporting strategic planning for infrastructure assets through a business case framework; and
 - (e) supporting the preparation and delivery of the infrastructure components of the Ten Year Plan 2018-2028, He Mahere Kahurutaka under the Local Government Act 2002.

Purpose and scope of evidence

- 1.5 QLDC undertakes a wide range of activities in order to service the needs of its people and communities. The purpose of my evidence is to highlight key services that QLDC provides that are dependant on the freshwater planning framework.

2 Executive summary

- 2.1 The Queenstown Lakes district is a location of exceptional natural beauty, with pristine bodies of freshwater that compel people to want to choose the region as an area to visit and live.
- 2.2 In its provision of infrastructure services QLDC has a responsibility to provide essential services necessary for the community to thrive (across transportation, solid waste management, drinking water, wastewater and stormwater services), and do so in a manner that protects the environment from damage.
- 2.3 Increasing interaction between people and these once-pristine environments has inevitably led to some decline from their natural condition.
- 2.4 The policy environment needs to allow for local councils to provide services to meet the needs to the community in an affordable manner whilst managing effects on the environment sustainably.

3 QLDC and the freshwater planning framework

- 3.1 The Queenstown Lakes District is a high growth area and a high-profile tourist destination. The District includes both rural and urban areas, with large and small population centres and townships that are geographically remote.
- 3.2 Large areas of the District are either outstanding natural landscape or national park. Additionally, the District is characterised by freshwater bodies and headwaters catchments, all of which need to be protected to ensure the ongoing social, economic, and environmental health of the District and beyond. Water bodies are also valued recreational spaces in the District, contributing to amenity and economic activity.
- 3.3 QLDC bears the dual responsibilities of both protecting freshwater resources and using freshwater resources to provide essential services to the District's communities.

Water supply

- 3.4 QLDC is responsible for providing safe drinking water through reticulated networks to the urbanised communities. The Council currently owns and operates ten drinking water schemes, each of these include treatment, storage and reticulation.
- 3.5 As part of the provision of drinking water Council holds seventeen water take consents spanning the district.
- 3.6 The communities serviced utilise the drinking water network for all household and commercial requirements including drinking, hygiene, and irrigation.
- 3.7 The district is a high user of water on a per capita basis, driven largely by a significant demand for irrigation as a consequence of relatively large land parcels, free draining soils and a dry climate.

Wastewater management

- 3.8 QLDC provides wastewater servicing to the majority of the urbanised areas within the district. The wastewater system comprises of reticulated conveyance networks, treatment and disposal.
- 3.9 The Council currently owns and operates four public wastewater collection networks.
- 3.10 As part of managing the wastewater produced by the community QLDC holds eleven consents associated with discharges to land.
- 3.11 All four of the municipal treatment plants discharge the treated effluent to land. However, all discharges are in relatively close proximity to either groundwater or freshwater bodies. This is very difficult (if not impossible) to avoid due to constraints such as topography, soil suitability, climate, natural hazards, biodiversity and landscape values.

Stormwater management

- 3.12 QLDC provides for stormwater management across the district to varying degrees. In the more urbanised areas Council provides for a reticulated stormwater network which collects and conveys stormwater in a manner that protects communities from flooding. Council also manages stormwater associated with provision of the local transportation network and receives flows from the State Highways. In urban areas QLDCs stormwater systems generally receive flows from the transportation network, in rural areas the stormwater runoff is generally captured in an independent localised system.
- 3.13 At present the majority of stormwater discharges are directly or indirectly to freshwater bodies and include only rudimentary treatment in the form of roadside catch pits which act to prevent gross pollutants from reaching the receiving environment.
- 3.14 QLDC has recognised the contamination potential of stormwater discharges and has introduced stricter requirements for treatment and a preference for Low Impact Design (LID) solutions through changes to its Land Development and Subdivision Code of Practice, and has signalled a need to invest in stormwater treatment and conveyance improvements through the current Ten Year Plan (TYP).
- 3.15 At this time the Council only holds one consent with the Regional Council for the discharge of stormwater to a freshwater body, and at all other locations relies on the permitted activity rule within the existing Regional Plan – Water to authorise discharges to freshwater bodies.

4 Investment in three waters infrastructure

- 4.1 The replacement value of QLDC's existing asset base for drinking water, wastewater and stormwater networks was over \$1.58 billion as at 30 June 2022.
- 4.2 To keep pace with the demand on infrastructure driven by high growth in both population and tourism as well as changing quality requirements, it is essential

that QLDC continues to invest in expanding and upgrading the existing infrastructure.

4.3 Investment in three waters assets has been the primary focus of the last TYP, and will be an ongoing priority for the Council.

4.4 Notable investments in the last ten years include:

- (a) Project Shotover Wastewater treatment Plant (**WWTP**) Stage 1
- (b) Project Shotover WWTP Stage 2
- (c) Project Shotover WWTP Stage 3 (currently under construction)
- (d) Project Pure WWTP upgrade
- (e) Cardrona WWTP
- (f) Luggate wastewater connection to Project Pure
- (g) Hawea WWTP upgrade
- (h) Recreation Ground Wastewater Pump Station and Rising Main
- (i) Arrowtown Borefield
- (j) Shotover Country Borefield, Water Treatment Plant (**WTP**) and conveyance
- (k) Hawea Borefield Development
- (l) Glenorchy Reservoir
- (m) Beacon Point Reservoir
- (n) Lucas Place stormwater upgrade
- (o) Annual renewals.

4.5 QLDC's 2021-31 Long Term Plan has **\$778 million** programmed for such projects across that window. Other three waters infrastructure projects in which QLDC plans to invest include:

- (a) Luggate Borefield, WTP and reservoir
- (b) Two Mile WTP
- (c) Beacon Point WTP
- (d) West Wanaka WTP
- (e) Kingston WWTP and WTP
- (f) Glenorchy WWTP and WTP
- (g) Quail Rise reservoir

- (h) Shotover country WTP
 - (i) Hawea WWTP and/or conveyance.
- 4.6 QLDC wants to keep improving its infrastructure so that the impact on freshwater resources continues to be reduced, but this requires further investment
- 4.7 The magnitude of investment required for municipal scale infrastructure is significant and is typically funded through debt.
- 4.8 From QLDC’s perspective, it is essential that investment in improved infrastructure is matched by appropriate terms of consent as the infrastructure will be funded through debt and paid for across generations. Without confidence of consent duration it is possible that future generations are burdened with debt for services they no longer receive benefit from.
- 4.9 Significant changes to the regulatory policy framework can have substantial investment implications, especially where changes will affect and require modification/improvement to existing infrastructure to comply with new requirements.

Changes to policy need to be cognisant of the infrastructure implications as well as practical and financial constraints. Where necessary changes should be introduced in a manner that enables infrastructure investment to remain affordable for the communities served and provides sufficient time for the infrastructure modifications to be planned and delivered.

5 Freshwater priorities

- 5.1 The Proposed Otago Regional Policy Statement has to give effect to Te Mana o te Wai, as set out in the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management. This fixes a hierarchy of obligations:¹

There is a hierarchy of obligations in Te Mana o te Wai that prioritises:

- (a) first, the health and well-being of water bodies and freshwater ecosystems
 - (b) second, the health needs of people (such as drinking water)
 - (c) third, the ability of people and communities to provide for their social, economic, and cultural well-being, now and in the future.
- 5.2 QLDC appreciates and welcomes the clear prioritisation of the health and well-being of water bodies and freshwater ecosystems.
- 5.3 QLDC’s concern is to ensure that the freshwater planning framework recognises that the services it provides the community are essential, and therefore a consenting pathway must be preserved within the regional policy context.

¹ NPSFWM 2020, 1.3(5).

6 Conclusion

- 6.1 QLDC supports the prioritisation of the health and well-being of water bodies.
- 6.2 The infrastructure services provided by Local Council are essential to the function of our communities.
- 6.3 The magnitude of investment associated with municipal infrastructure is significant and as infrastructure is typically debt funded, the regulatory policy framework should preserve an ability to provide for consenting durations which are consistent with the funding horizon.
- 6.4 Changes to the policy framework must consider practical and financial constraints faced by local authorities, and where changes are necessary must provide for an implementation timeframe that is achievable based on these constraints.