

Speaking Notes for hearing on Cold Gold Clutha Dredge proposal

RM22.434 RC220255 RM220834

Submitter: Ngaio Hart on behalf of Central Otago Whitewater Inc

November 2023

Expanding on my written submission I would like to talk further about Safety, Environmental & Visual Impacts and Noise, and our observations when paddling the Lower Clutha to look at the dredge and understand these impacts.

1. I am not an expert, but these are my thoughts and opinions as a Hawea Flat local and someone who spends a lot of time in and around rivers. I kayak, river surf, drift dive and swim in the river. Mostly on the Hawea and Kawarau which both flow into the Clutha. So, the Clutha River catchment is a place I call home.
2. I have been a whitewater kayaker for 30+ years. I have previously been a member of the Wanaka Search & Rescue Swiftwater team, which involved training exercises in river safety and river rescue and risk assessment and have been involved in Search & Rescue river searches. This experience has given me a good awareness of the hazards on rivers for kayakers and other river users. I have also taught beginner kayakers on the stretch of the Clutha from the Red Bridge down to the big bend.

Safety

3. One of the most serious risks to river users is entrapment. A person in the water can get their kayak or themselves pinned or wrapped on an object in the river and the force of the water holds that person in mid flow. This will often mean the person is held in such a way that their head is underwater and so leads to drowning. The cables on the dredge are a classic case of an entrapment hazard. They are very low to water level and also extend below water level in the zone that could catch a kayaker or a swimmer. Add to that fact that the cables are very difficult to see until very close. A steel cable like this is impossible to cut through which would be the common way to release someone from a strainer or entrapment hazard.

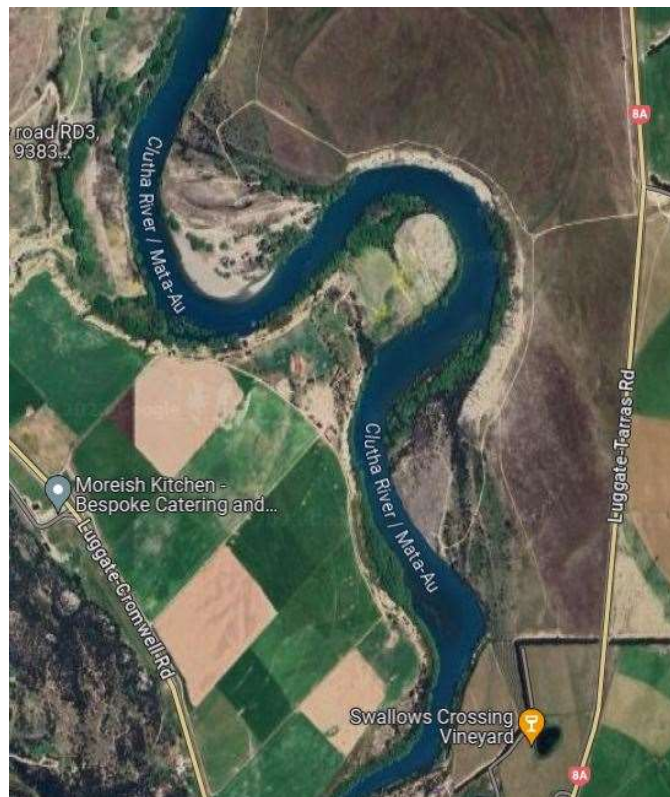


4. Another classic river entrapment hazard is willows. The Clutha has a lot of these along its banks. This can be a treacherous spot and therefore kayakers stick to the middle of the river in these areas, to stay away from this hazard.
5. It is important to understand that not all recreational river users are skilled or have the experience to navigate around these dangers. As well as beginner kayakers and multisporters in long boats that are difficult to manoeuvre, we also see people floating down the river on all sorts of objects – blow up mattresses, blow up swimming pools, blow up flamingos. Most of these people have little or no control and often have no buoyancy aids or helmets.

6. And there are also the jet boats which moving at speed have less time to react.

7. It is important to note that a river is not like a smooth road where you can navigate easily across the whole width. There are currents and swirlies that move in all sorts of directions and often there is one 'sweet spot' where you need to be in a kayak to avoid danger. Most of the current generally flows downstream in the middle of the river. At the sides there are eddies where the water is calmer and can flow upstream. Where it meets there is an eddyline of turbulent water and it is here that beginner kayakers will get tripped up or where swimmers will get sucked down the seam. The proposed dredge located in the middle of the river forces recreational users to the sides into this more turbulent water.

8. The Upper Clutha has a different character from the lower Clutha as it is windier and narrower, so the dredge would take up a larger proportion of the river width leaving less space for other river users to pass. The winding nature will limit sightlines so that people have less time to react, especially on blind corners. Someone on an inflatable with little steering power would have little or no chance of getting out of the main flow to avoid the dredge.



9. I also wonder about the ability for the dredge to safely navigate in this narrower and windier section of river. An accident with the dredge could lead to environmental disaster.

Environmental Impact

10. In terms of environmental impact I will restate from my written submission that I think it is crazy that we would risk the health of the river which supports all sorts of ecosystems and living creatures to extract a metal.

11. A river is bigger and more important than all of us. It has been here longer than we have and will continue on long after we have departed. It supports life and ecosystems. The health of our land and people and other creatures we share it with depends on the health of the river.

12. In the last 150 years we have used and abused the Clutha – it has been dredged and it has been dammed. You can no longer paddle the length of the river from source to sea and the eel can no longer swim all the way up to the Hawea. There are silted up lakes where there were river gorges, and we have lost beautiful rapids & whitewater. There are bridges and houses submerged down there. The fact that we have a history of abusing this river is not justification for continuing to do so. We are learning (very slowly) that nature is important and that we need to protect it. We need to change the way we treat rivers and protect them for the health of our country and future generations.

13. I cannot believe that sucking all the gravels off the bottom of the river, extracting the parts that might be valuable, and then spitting it all back into the water has little or no impact on the ecosystems that live in the river. It makes no logical sense. There must be all sorts of critters living down there, probably some we don't even know about yet. I am not a scientist. But common sense says when we treat the environment aggressively it has negative impacts.

14. It is hard to see what is happening in the water. However, when we paddled down to look at the dredge, we could see what was happening above the water, including the refueling station on the riverbank. Paddling into the eddy it smelt strongly of fuel. There was a petrol pump handle hanging on a rope in a tree directly over bare damp riverbank without vegetation only a couple of metres from the water's edge. The fuel hose was lying on the ground draped into the water. This looked like a very casual setup to me. Surely there must be drips onto the ground each time the nozzle is used? And with no plant roots to soak it up that fuel must be soaking straight into the water. I was quite shocked by this setup.



15. And this makes me wonder about the things we can't see...

On Saturday we paddled the Upper Clutha from Luggate Bridge to the DoC conservation reserve opposite Jolly Road. I would like to show you a short video to show you how beautiful this stretch of the Clutha is....

(Upper Clutha kayaking video)

Visual Impact & Noise

16. When I'm not kayaking I work as a registered Architect, so spend my days assessing visual impacts of design & structures in the environment. This industrial structure is completely out of context within this beautiful natural river environment. Painting an ugly object a colour to blend in with the background foliage does not alter the fact that it is an ugly object, nor make up for the fact that the structure is completely inappropriate in this setting. The noise draws attention and highlights the intrusion, destroying the peaceful river atmosphere.



In Conclusion

17. I believe that there are significant safety concerns for recreational users with the dredge located on the Upper Clutha. Particularly on the stretch from the Luggate Bridge to approximately 2km below Devils Nook. I disagree with the assessment that these risks are easily mitigated and less than minor.
18. I disagree that the environmental impact is less than minor. There are clearly pollutants affecting the riverbanks and therefore very likely the river. And the impact of aggressive suctioning of the riverbed must have impacts on the environment even if we don't yet fully understand these.
19. I think the dredge is a visual blight on the beautiful river corridor.
20. And for what? Some gold.

Decision requested

21. I ask you to make the decision to put the health of the river before the extraction of gold and decline the proposal.