

Date: 25-08-2023

Attention: John Maassen

Re: SPEAKING NOTES – Tararua Hearing - Solar Bay

Good Morning,

My name is Rory McLean Langbridge Landscape Architect and I have been providing landscape architectural advice to Solar Bay concerning the Tararua Site.

I have prepared a Statement of Landscape Evidence and graphic attachment which is now before the commissioner.

With the introduction of expert glint glare expertise there were a number of last-minute reviews in the testing that was done. A consequence of this is that it was pointed out to me that some of my references made, the detail interpretations that I had made, and the numbers stated were in places outdated, and at times I confused the labelling of sites considered under either 'existing' or 'potential'. As far as I am aware these errors have now been corrected.

I have subsequently provided Mr Maassen with a corrected version of my Statement of Landscape Evidence where I have highlighted all the amendments made, which included some deletions, that my review prompted.

I declare that with the amendments made to my Statement of Evidence, these do not change the conclusions that I have previously come to.

I have visited the site twice, the first in December 2021 with the second when we met with iwi representatives in July 2022.

As described in my statement of evidence, when visiting the site, the matters immediately apparent to me were the proximity the two sites have to the public roads of Mangamaire and Tutaekara Roads, the prominence and scale of the Mangamaire substation and due to the subtle contours involved, the limited zone of visual influence of the two sites.

The values of the receiving environment are considered to be the physically flat, expansive landscape that contributes high overall rural character values to the surrounding landscape with associated values of openness, expansiveness and huge sky, lack of built form, natural character and legibility. While the rural values were considered to be relatively high, they were also found to be regionally typical.

Wind is an influencing factor within this landscape. Most of the vertical elements within this landscape are either existing shelterbelts or are remnant shelter belts that have outgrown their function.

When meeting tangata whenua on the site, I was led to understand that there are wahi tapu in the area but the farms as proposed would not adversely impact them.

Due to the general absence of structures and the flat and monocultural expanse of the receiving landscape, the absorption capacity of this landscape for uncharacteristic development is considered to be very low.

The Mangamaire Substation, a primary reason for locating the farm in this area, is a prominent structure within the local landscape that adversely impacts on current local amenity values. That said, limited visual catchment of the facility due to the flatness of the surrounding landscape and the impact of vegetation screening, means the adverse impact only extends around 3-400m east and south.

Similarly, due to the visual screening provided by the riparian vegetation along the Mangatainoka River, the shelter belt planting north of Tutaekara Road and subtle gradients experience south of the site along Mangamaire Road, I found the zone of visual influence for both sites is equally constrained a distance of 1.4km along Tutaekara Road and 2.3km along Mangamaire Road, an approximate area of 3.2km² in a vast and open landscape.

With regards the visibility of the two sites and the exposure that existing residents have to them, it was assessed that 20 dwellings exist with some proximity to the two farms and of those 9 were considered to 'overlook' the site to some degree. In response to the Section 42A report, the effects on 21 sites were individually considered.

The significance of the visual effect is influenced by the visibility, distance and duration of the view, the scale, nature of the Proposal and its overall visual prominence, and finally, the effect, if any, the Proposal will have on the context in which it is seen. Where glare is present, this will exaggerate the visual effects of the farm in those instances.

Whether the proposal could be considered 'appropriate' in landscape terms, depends largely on the visual effects that the farms may have and the impact that these visuals may have on the existing values of the location and the ability that exists to mitigate any adverse effects.

In landscape terms and given the limited zone of visual influence that the farm has due to the flatness of the surrounding landscape, a critical factor is the permitted baseline that would apply to the site. This allows shelterbelt hedges to be used to screen the two farms from most neighbours in the short term. Hedges have a long association with this landscape. An added bonus are the constraints that the powerlines place on the boundary fences of the solar farm with significant setbacks required for both Mangamaire Road and Tutaekara Road. This will enhance the quality of the rural character values that will be retained.

Finally looking at the 42A report and in particular the report authored by Shannon Bray and wholly endorse his observation *“At its core, it is no different to other farming activity, utilising the environmental resource as efficiently as possible, with the exception of the retention of grass under the panels to help retain a pastoral connection. The Proposal also contains some positive landscape outcomes, including the wetland restoration.”*

To address what I consider to be the only disagreement that I may have with Mr Bray, would be his recommendation that the shelterbelts be established prior to the construction of the solar farm. It has been shown in the glint glare studies that in the absence of shelter belts, glare from the solar panels does not present a danger to vehicles in the short term. Secondly the use of deer fencing is a permitted activity in this rural location. Therefore as I have recommended, if the planting is undertaken at the time of erecting the fence and this then provides a secure enclosure in which to undertake the installation, that would be sufficiently advance to ensure that the shelterbelts are establishing themselves during the construction period and depending on the construction programme would be ‘established’ or near to when the farms are completed.

I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.

Rory Langbridge