

**BEFORE THE BOARD OF INQUIRY**

**IN THE MATTER** of the Resource  
Management Act 1991

**AND**

**IN THE MATTER** of applications for  
resource consent and  
notices of requirement  
by Transpower  
New Zealand Limited  
for the North Island  
Grid Upgrade Project

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**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF DR MICHAEL LAWRENCE STEVEN  
FOR TRANSPOWER NEW ZEALAND LIMITED  
(Landscape / visual effects peer review)**

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## INTRODUCTION

### Qualifications

- 1.** **MY** name is Michael Lawrence Steven. I am a practising landscape architect employed in the Wellington office of MWH New Zealand Limited (**MWH**). I hold a Doctor of Philosophy in Architecture (Environment-Behaviour Studies) from the Faculty of Architecture, University of Sydney (Australia); a Master of Landscape Architecture by research from the Faculty of the Built Environment, University of New South Wales (Australia); a postgraduate Diploma in Landscape Architecture from Lincoln College (University of Canterbury), and a Diploma in Horticulture (Distinction) from Lincoln College. I am an Honorary Associate of the Faculty of Architecture, Design & Planning at the University of Sydney, and an Associate of the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects.
- 2.** **MY** area of expertise is environment-behaviour studies, particularly landscape perception, and human factors in landscape design, planning and management.
- 3.** I have been in my current position with MWH since January 2006. Prior to December 2004, I was employed as an academic by the University of Western Sydney, Australia, where I taught in the field of landscape studies. I have some 25 years of experience in the landscape architecture profession, both in New Zealand and Australia. My professional practice experience includes a period spent with the (then) Ministry of Works and Development in the Auckland office, and in the Christchurch and Hamilton offices of the (then) Department of Lands and Survey. I am familiar with the landscapes of the Auckland and Waikato regions.
- 4.** I have been commissioned by Transpower New Zealand Limited (**Transpower**) to conduct a peer review of the landscape and visual impact assessment undertaken by Isthmus Group Landscape Architects Limited, and the expert evidence on the landscape matters presented by Mr Gavin Lister of Isthmus Group. I have not been involved in any other capacity in the assessment of landscape and visual impacts associated with the North Island Grid Upgrade Project (**Upgrade Project**).

5. I confirm that I have read and am familiar with the Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses in the Environment Court Consolidated Practice Note (2006). I have approached the preparation of this evidence in the same way that I would for the Environment Court.
  
6. I am familiar with the landscapes of the Upgrade Project area, having inspected many sections of the final alignment on 9-10 October 2007. To become familiar with the background to the selection of the final alignment, I have reviewed the Area Study, Corridor Study and Route Study (**ACRE**) reports (September/October 2004), the Final Route Decision reports (July 2005), and the Easement Report (January 2006) (**Common Exhibits**). I am also familiar with those sections of the Transpower Notices of Requirement (**NOR**) documentation pertaining to landscape and visual impacts.

#### **Scope of evidence**

7. **MY** evidence relates primarily to the proposed 400kV capable line (**proposed line**) sections of the Upgrade Project, but also includes comments on the proposed Whakamaru North and Brownhill substation sites. I also comment on mitigation measures proposed by Mr Lister. In preparing my evidence on the overhead sections of the route, I have proceeded on the basis of the following assumptions:
  - (a) I have assessed the route alignment as described in the Transpower NOR. While I am familiar with the ACRE process of route selection, I have not reviewed the corridor and route options considered at earlier stages of the Upgrade Project. I consider that the landscape aspects of the earlier stages of the Upgrade Project have been undertaken according to best professional practice and that the final route, as represented in the NOR documents, is the result of a rigorous and objective process of analysis and evaluation;
  
  - (b) I acknowledge that the final route selection necessarily involves many complex and often competing factors. Considering the complexity of the factors involved in the location of individual towers, my evidence does not address issues at this fine-grained level of analysis, but rather adopts a landscape scale of reference;

- (c) While a number of reports on landscape matters have been produced at different stages of the Upgrade Project, and while various sections of the NOR documentation refer to landscape matters, I have focussed upon the *Landscape and Visual Effects Assessment*<sup>1</sup> prepared by Isthmus Group Landscape Architects as the substantive reference on landscape matters;
- (d) I have read the evidence on landscape and visual impact issues prepared for the Board of Inquiry by Mr Gavin Lister of Isthmus Group Ltd. My own evidence provides a peer review of Mr Lister's evidence at the level of a high-level overview. I make particular comments on some of the potentially contentious landscape level impacts, but I have not considered site-specific issues relating to individual submitters and specific properties affected by the Upgrade Project; and
- (e) It is my opinion that, given the complexity of factors affecting route selection, the proposed alignment does not engender issues of landscape and visual impacts that can be considered fatal to the selected alignment by any reasonable analysis. However, I accept that the alignment passes through areas within which landscape and visual effects assume greater significance at a broad, landscape scale of analysis. I also accept that there are individuals whom are likely to be affected to a high or very high degree by the proposed transmission line.

8. **ACCORDINGLY**, my evidence focuses upon selected sections of the route where landscape issues have particular prominence as a consequence of either (a) the alignment of the route through, or adjacent to areas of landscape significance, such as outstanding natural landscapes (or their equivalent), or (b) the alignment of the route through areas of sensitivity in terms of residential density. These areas lie within the following sections of the route:

- (a) Sections 1-4, being that area between Whitford Valley and the Hunua Basin. This section includes land identified by the Auckland Regional Council (**ARC**) as outstanding natural landscape in Route Section 4;

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<sup>1</sup> Transpower New Zealand Ltd, Notices of Requirement, Documentation, Part X, Section 8: Visual Impact Assessment.

- (b) Section 7, immediately north of Tahuna Road, east of Te Hoe, where the proposed line passes adjacent to a Landscape Policy Area identified in the Waikato District Plan;
- (c) Section 10, in the vicinity of Morrinsville township, State Highway 26, and south to the existing HAM-WHU A transmission line;
- (d) Sections 12-13, in particular the two crossings of the Waikato River (Lake Karapiro, and north east of Arapuni village) and the intervening area of Special Landscape Character east of Maungatautari, identified in the Waipa District Plan; and
- (e) Section 15, in the vicinity of the Waikato River crossing at Whakamaru, the Whakamaru North Substation site, and views from State Highway 30.

9. **IN** addition to the matters identified in paragraph 7, above, I review the mitigation measures proposed by Mr Lister. In connection with the mitigation of effects, I make brief comment on the design of the Gas Insulated Switchgear (**GIS**) option for switching substations, such as is proposed for the Brownhill Road Substation at the northern end of the proposed line.

10. **MY** evidence finishes with summary comments and conclusions on the landscape and visual effects of the proposed line.

#### **GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

11. **HAVING** read the evidence of Mr Lister, and having read the various reports and inspected a large part of the proposed alignment, I am satisfied that the landscape and visual issues have been investigated and represented fairly and accurately, and represent a high level of professional and technical competence.

12. I confirm that consideration of the landscape attributes of *Natural Character*, *Landscape Quality* and *Landscape Absorption Capability* as selected for the evaluation of landscape and visual impacts of the proposed line represent a best practice approach to the matter of route selection and landscape and visual impact evaluation.

13. I confirm that the baseline visual variables relating to the towers and proposed line discussed by Mr Lister in his evidence represent a fair and realistic appraisal of the various factors affecting visual and landscape impacts.
14. I am generally in agreement with Mr Lister regarding the perceptual variables he discusses in his evidence, particularly the impact of the towers with distance. I understand that Mr Lister undertook literature reviews in search of guidelines on the visual impacts of transmission lines, but found published information on this issue to be very limited. This may indicate a real gap in the literature that researchers have failed to address.
15. **MR** Lister conducted his own empirical observations of existing transmission lines in New Zealand and Europe for the purpose of gauging visual effects. Mr Lister's table of viewing distance and visual impacts (**Table 1** of Mr Lister's evidence) is derived from his observations and has utility as a "rule of thumb". Mr Lister acknowledges that other factors influence the prominence of transmission lines in different contexts.
16. **MR** Lister has proposed a "5-point Scale of Degree of Visual Effect" in which the potential visual effects of the line on individual residents and communities is assessed according to the distance categories presented in Mr Lister's **Table 1**. Acknowledging that Mr Lister's scale of effects was estimated using aerial photographs, topographic maps and observations from public roads, I consider that within the closest distance category (0-150m) the effects may have been underestimated. I suspect that there is not a 'straight line' relationship between viewing distance and perceived impacts.
17. **IN** my opinion, visual impacts will increase markedly with diminishing distance from the transmission line, and visual effects may become compounded by more complex perceptual responses at diminishing distances. I anticipate that with decreasing viewing distance, the proposed line will assume a more complex and profound significance as a source of negative impacts upon individuals and communities, and that it should not be regarded as the object of aesthetic evaluations alone, or a visual "*blight on the landscape*". However, such complex perceptual responses fall outside the range of factors usually considered when evaluating visual effects and were not within Mr Lister's area of professional expertise to consider. In recognition of the likelihood of complex perceptual responses at close distances, I consider it may be necessary to re-calibrate the scale of degrees of visual effect, such that at the

closest distances (0-150m) the effects are potentially *Extreme*. Beyond this distance zone I agree with Mr Lister's estimation of the magnitude of effects, such that *Extreme* falls to *High* within the zone 150-500m.<sup>2</sup>

18. **IN** my opinion, proximity is but one of several factors that will bear upon visual and other perceptual impacts. Other factors are of a contextual nature and will vary from site to site, according to the characteristics of the landscape context, the viewing position, and where in the horizontal and vertical field of view the proposed line and towers are located.
19. **MR** Lister correctly acknowledges that definitive assessments of impacts for each property will require individual site visits.

#### **ASSESSING NATURAL CHARACTER & OUTSTANDING NATURAL LANDSCAPES**

20. **IN** addressing the issues outlined above, my evidence will refer to the matter of natural character, or naturalness - a key assessment variable applied in the landscape assessment. It is generally accepted by landscape practitioners and the Environment Court that natural character can be assessed along a continuum of states from pristine wilderness, where no evidence of human intervention is apparent, to wholly developed, where scant evidence of natural elements, patterns, and processes remains. It is important to emphasise that natural character is not an absolute quality that either exists or does not, but rather occurs across a continuum in matters of degree.
21. **IN** the interests of a clearer understanding of the matter of natural character, I consider it important to make explicit the scale of natural character I refer to in my evidence. I have adopted a scale of naturalness proposed by Van der Maarel (1975), which I reproduce below:

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<sup>2</sup> Hull & Bishop (1988) report that the relationship between viewing distance and scenic impact of transmission towers is represented by the form of a 'concave-up' curve, where visual impact increases significantly at distances closer than 500m. The authors note '[t]he level of impact which people consider acceptable may be dependent upon the purpose they have in viewing the landscape.' (Hull & Bishop (1988). Scenic impacts of electricity transmission towers: the influence of landscape type and observer distance. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 27, 99-108.



**Section 1, Whitford Valley through to Section 3, Ardmore Basin (including Section 2, Brookby Area)**

25. I offer comment on these areas as they are the route sections having the highest concentrations of significantly affected houses throughout the length of the proposed line. On this basis, it is likely that the level of viewer sensitivity will be highest throughout these sections.
26. **THE** landscape of the Whitford Valley is represented in **Figure 1** of my evidence (see my Appendices). Mr Lister has assessed the landscape as having a moderate degree of natural character and is attractive aesthetically. I agree with this assessment.
27. **THE** centre of the valley is traversed by the existing ARI-PAK A transmission line. However, the proposed line will be re-routed to the western periphery of the valley to avoid conflict with Ardmore Airport and minimise exposure to houses and public roads.
28. **MR LISTER** identifies the Brookby Valley as having a moderate degree of natural character, but nevertheless an attractive and picturesque landscape character generally, and an intimate scale. In terms of the naturalness scale above, it is a relatively densely settled agricultural landscape displaying a diversity of rural uses. The proposed line will be a prominent feature crossing Brookby Valley, and will adversely affect the valley's picturesque character, as Mr Lister acknowledges. This section also contains the highest concentration of significantly affected houses on the entire route – another point which Mr Lister acknowledges.
29. **THE** Ardmore basin (**Figure 2**) also has a mixed and intensive rural land use pattern. The landscape is assessed by Mr Lister as having a moderately low level of natural character. I agree with this assessment – natural patterns have largely been replaced by cultural patterns, and a strongly rectilinear subdivision and land use pattern is evident in **Figure 2**. As with sections 1 and 2, the valley is traversed by the ARI-PAK A line, with three other lines (OTA-WKM A, B & C) some 2-2.5 km further to the west. The ARI-PAK A line is visible in **Figure 2**.
30. I agree with Mr Lister's assessment of the landscape and visual impacts for each of these sections. The line will be particularly conspicuous in the Brookby area, but rather less so in the Whitford Valley and Ardmore basin,

other than to those in the immediate locality of the proposed line. Landscape and visual impacts within the Whitford Valley will be of a different nature to those in the Brookby area and Ardmore Basin, as in the Whitford Valley the proposed line will follow a 'greenfields' route on the periphery of the valley to the west of the current alignment of the ARI-PAK A line.

31. **WHITFORD** residents currently impacted by the presence of ARI-PAK A will gain some relief upon its removal, but for the few in the vicinity of the proposed line, the impacts will be new and may be substantial. Within the Brookby area and Ardmore Basin, the proposed line corresponds more closely with the existing ARI-PAK A line. Accordingly, the landscape and visual impacts of the proposed line in these areas will involve a proportional increase over pre-existing effects, as distinct from new effects.
32. **GIVEN** the density of existing (and planned) rural residential development, and the extensive network of roads within sections 1-3, I recommend that opportunities for mitigation through screen planting be investigated within road reserves as well as on the private land of affected landowners and residents.

**Section 4-5: Hunua township—Gelling Road (area identified in part by ARC as being Outstanding Natural Landscape)**

33. **THE** ARC has raised the issue of the routing of the proposed line through an area identified in Proposed Plan Change 8 of the ARC Regional Policy Statement as an outstanding natural landscape. The land is located on the northern margin and south facing slopes above the Mangawheau Stream, north of Gelling Road (**Figure 3**). It is a narrow, westerly extension of the considerably larger Hunua outstanding natural landscape<sup>5</sup>.
34. **MR** Lister states, in his *Landscape and Visual Effects Assessment*;

*"It is considered that this land does not meet the criteria for such a classification. It does not have a high degree of natural character given the presence of existing infrastructure, nearby buildings and patterned mix of second growth bush, pasture and plantation. It is not "outstanding" in the sense of it being "conspicuous, eminent, especially because of excellence", and has modest values for the range of criteria that would normally be taken into account in assessing landscape quality."*

35. **THIS** opinion is supported by an evaluation in terms of the accepted *Pigeon Bay* criteria which Mr Lister presents in his evidence. In Mr Lister's assessment, the land in question scores only modestly for each of the Pigeon Bay factors. I consider this to be a fair evaluation on Mr Lister's part.
36. I am familiar with the methodology applied in the landscape assessment that informed Plan Change 8. On behalf of Winstone Aggregates Limited, I provided evidence to the ARC hearing on the outstanding natural landscape classification of the nearby Area 60. I was particularly critical of the methodology used in the landscape assessment, and stated in my evidence;
- "...the findings of the study must be regarded as flawed, and the conclusions drawn regarding Auckland's ONLs are, in my opinion, invalid. The lack of validity stems from the fact that what is being assessed is not, in fact, outstanding-ness, despite the pretence that this is what the study does. The landscapes so identified do not meet the accepted tests for outstanding, nor can the method used adequately differentiate outstanding landscapes from other landscapes, including those of lesser but still significant value."*
37. **CONSEQUENT** upon the hearing of appeals on Plan Change 8, the ARC has given notice that a variation to the Landscape component of Plan Change 8 will be prepared.<sup>6</sup>
38. **HAVING** visited the landscape for a further assessment, I remain of the opinion that the land does not meet the criteria for classification as outstanding natural landscape. I consider that the land has a moderate degree of natural character, but that existing transmission line infrastructure (OTA-WKM A, B & C; and ARI-PAK A) and obvious cultural landscape patterns, including forestry and pasture, obviates against outstanding status. The base of the escarpment of the Hunua Ranges immediately east of the Wairoa River constitutes an unambiguous and logical boundary for the western extent of the Hunua outstanding natural landscape (Area 60), and in my opinion the westerly

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5 Area 60, Map Series 3A, Sheet 5, Auckland Regional Council Proposed plan Change 8.

6 The following text is taken from the ARC Regional Policy and Plans web site, (<http://www.arc.govt.nz/plans/regional-policy-and-plans/auckland-regional-policy-statement/proposed-change-8-landscape-and-volcanic-features.cfm>), accessed 27 January 2008:

*"Following consideration of matters raised in submissions and in evidence presented at the hearings, the Hearing Committee determined to undertake a variation of the Landscape component of Change 8. This decision was ratified by the full ARC Regional Strategy and Planning Committee on 17 September 2007. Until the variation is undertaken it is not proposed to make decisions on the submissions and further submissions that relate to the Landscape component."*

extension proposed in Plan Change 8 cannot be justified by any objective assessment.

39. **THE** ARC submission also raises the possibility that the proposed line is likely to be visible at a distance of some 1-2 km from a number of vantage points within the Hunua Ranges Regional Park. This possibility is acknowledged by Mr Lister. I agree with his assessment that from within the park, the proposed line will be seen as part of a rural landscape outside the park that includes, amongst other things, buildings, roads and existing transmission lines. In my opinion, one of the experiential benefits the park affords users is a sense of the naturalness of the park when considered in the context of the highly modified working landscapes of land beyond the parks boundaries. To minimise the impacts of views towards the park from outside the park boundary, the proposed line has been located away from the existing ARI-PAK A line.

#### **Section 7: Landscape Policy Area, Te Hoe**

40. **AT** the southern boundary of section 7, immediately north of Tahuna Road and east of Te Hoe, the proposed line encroaches upon the western margin of a Landscape Policy Area identified in the Waikato District Plan. Landscape Policy Areas are to be equivalent to outstanding natural features and landscapes in the Waikato District Plan. The policy area is primarily an elevated ridgeline upon which a number of pa sites are located. The policy area extends onto the plain where the alignment is located. The area is shown in **Figures 4 and 5**.
41. **THE** Waikato District Plan (Schedule 3A.3) states that Landscape Policy Areas have been selected according to an evaluation for visual quality and according to criteria developed in case law. I assume these criteria to be the *Pigeon Bay* factors. Specific information regarding the basis of the outstanding status of the Te Hoi Landscape Policy Area is not presented in the Waikato District Plan. On the basis of my own assessment, I suspect that factors other than visual quality and aesthetics were instrumental in its identification as an outstanding natural landscape. As reference to my **Figures 4 and 5** suggests, the land is not outstanding in the sense of it being "*conspicuous, eminent, especially because of excellence*".

42. **IN** my opinion, the landscape identified as outstanding is undistinguished in terms of visual quality and aesthetics, and only exhibits a moderate level of natural character. Vegetative cover is a combination of exotic grasses and exotic coniferous trees. The existing ARI-PAK A line is located just within the western boundary of the Landscape Policy Area. It may be the archaeological values associated with pa sites, pits and terraces that have been instrumental in assessing this site to be outstanding.
43. **ASSUMING** this to be the case, I do not regard the proposed line as being a significant threat to the identified values of this landscape. As **Figures 4 and 5** show, the existing ARI-PAK A line, while within the Landscape Policy Area, does not impact upon the biophysical or archaeological values of the ridgeline and other elevated parts of the landscape. As the proposed line will follow the line of the ARI-PAK A line very closely, the only impacts will be of a visual nature, deriving from the increased size of the new towers.
44. **Mr Lister's** evidence addresses this area in his discussion on Route Section 8, Te Hoe to Flaxmill Road. I agree with Mr Lister's assessment that *"[a]esthetically, the most distinctive feature is the bush clad peak 'Ngaraparapa' at the southern end of the Hapuakohe Range, approximately 6km – 10km east of the line"*. Mr Lister also identifies the proposed alignment as passing through the edge of the landscape management area under the Waikato District Plan at the toe of the hill.
45. **ACCORDINGLY**, I do not consider the proposed line will compromise the values attributed to the Te Hoe Landscape Policy Area.

#### **Section 10: vicinity of Morrinsville**

46. **MR** Lister notes that Morrinsville is the largest settlement passed by the proposed line. The proposed line passes the western outskirts of Morrinsville, an area characterised by light industry and the yards and utilitarian buildings of sales and service businesses, many associated with rural industry. In my opinion, the landscape flanking the road immediately inside the western entrance to the town is particularly unappealing, with an absence of amenity values and very low visual quality. In my opinion, it is relevant to consider the impacts of the proposed line in this context.

47. **CONTEXTUAL** factors aside, I do not consider the proposed line will have significant visual effects for road travellers entering or leaving the western entrance to Morrinsville. The existing ARI-PAK A line crosses State Highway 26 (**SH26**) at the same location as the proposed line, and my own observations indicated that the line is viewed only momentarily when approached from either direction, and generally at high speed, as the section of road over which the ARI-PAK A line passes is within a 100 kph zone. Landform, existing plantation trees, and the alignment of SH26, combine to create a situation in which the proposed line will have a low impact on the experience of road users.
48. **MR** Lister correctly identifies the ridgeline of a range of hills south of Morrinsville as being a sensitive location, upon which the proposed line will be visible from the wider landscape, including users of SH26. An existing line on the crest of these hills is clearly visible. As Mr Lister notes, the viewing distance will be approximately 3km or greater. At this distance, the impact of the towers will diminish markedly, in my opinion. As alternative alignments would have taken the line closer to roads and settled areas, I accept Mr Lister's statement that *"the advantages of avoiding the ridgeline would be outweighed by greater visual amenity effects in other areas"*.

### **Sections 12 & 13: Lake Karapiro—Arapuni**

49. **IN** discussing the landscape impacts within sections 12 and 13, I consider it salient to acknowledge the fact that the Waikato River, along a substantial distance between Lake Ohakuri and Lake Karapiro, has been the subject of significant modification as a consequence of hydro-electric power development. Given that we are considering the impacts on the landscape of a high voltage transmission line, there is some irony in the fact that to a large extent, the landscape of the Waikato River is the product of very significant human modifications for the purposes of electricity generation.
50. **BY** any objective analysis, Lakes Karapiro and Arapuni are by no means 'natural', in the sense that they are the product of nature, rather than cultural intervention. The landscape of the river may contain natural elements, but the patterns of the river and adjacent agricultural landscapes are cultural in origin, and the processes of the river are subject to continuing human intervention.

51. **WITHIN** sections 12 and 13, the line will pass through three areas identified as Special Landscape Character Areas<sup>7</sup> (**SLCA**) in the Waipa District Plan:
- (a) the northernmost crossing of the Waikato River (Lake Karapiro) and State Highway 1 (**SH1**) in the vicinity of the existing ARA-PAK A line, where the proposed line passes through a Special Landscape Character Area (**Figure 4**) flanking the north and south banks of the Waikato River. (The area is identified in the Waipa District Plan as "*Lake Karapiro Landscape as seen from State Highway 1*");
  - (b) the eastern margin of the Mt Maungatautari Special Landscape Character Area (**Figure 7**). (The alignment is just within an area identified in the Waipa District Plan as the Mt Maungatautari Hill Country Area); and
  - (c) a crossing of the Waikato River north-east of Arapuni, where the proposed line passes through a Special Landscape Character Area on farmland adjacent to the western bank of the river (**Figures 6, 7 & 8**) (identified in the Waipa District Plan as "*Waikato River south of Horahora Bridge*").

I discuss these three areas further below.

#### ***Waikato River crossing - Lake Karapiro***

52. **LAKE** Karapiro and adjacent farmland is identified in the Waipa District Plan as a SLCA.
53. **MR** Lister rates the natural character of the lake landscape as moderately high, but notes that it is still a modified landscape. In terms of Van der Maarel's scale, a moderate-high rating would place the lake landscape within the range Near-Natural to Semi-Natural. While Mr Lister has not been explicit as to the scale he has used to rate natural character of the lake landscape (specifically whether it is a 5-point or 7-point scale), I consider it falls within the Semi-Natural to Agricultural range, and thus I would rate the natural character of the area as moderate, rather than moderate-high. I consider it an understatement to claim, as Mr Lister does, that the naturalness of Lake Karapiro is "*somewhat*

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<sup>7</sup> Special Landscape Character Areas are equivalent to outstanding natural landscapes and features in the Waipa District Plan, section 2.1.1.

*modified*" — the lake only exists because the Waikato River has been dammed at Karapiro.

54. I question the equivalence of SLCA with outstanding natural landscape, particularly when considered in the context of the Lake Karapiro and lower Maungatautari landscapes. In general terms, Mr Lister also questions this equivalence and suggests that SLCA terminology, and the objectives, policies and rules relating to them are more in keeping with what would now be referred to as a visual amenity landscape.
55. **MR** Lister acknowledges that Lake Karapiro at the crossing point might be considered an outstanding natural landscape. I disagree with this assessment. In my opinion, the proposition that outstanding natural landscapes can be created through the act of damming natural waterways has significant implications for resource management generally and the protection of natural landscapes and waterways in particular.
56. I do acknowledge however (as does Mr Lister), that the river is valued for its high aesthetic qualities and amenity, for geomorphological significance, and for its significance to tangata whenua. However, I maintain that the lake and adjoining landscape are more in the nature of a visual amenity landscape. I cannot accept that an outstanding natural landscape can be created through the damming of a natural waterway.
57. I agree with Mr Lister that the main landscape issue concerning the line in section 12 is the aesthetic impact of the conductors crossing the lake. I understand that tangata whenua values are not compromised significantly by the crossing and the factors that constitute natural character (natural elements, processes and patterns) will not be impacted significantly in any way. As Mr Lister notes, the proposed line will not introduce new effects (the existing ARI-PAK A line crosses the lake in this vicinity), but rather will increase the scale of existing effects owing to the increased dimensions of the towers and conductors compared to the ARI-PAK A line.
58. **AS** I do not agree that the landscape at the crossing point of Lake Karapiro is an outstanding natural landscape, I do not consider questions of appropriateness arise. However, I agree with Mr Lister's comments in his evidence that were this landscape to be deemed outstanding, the proposed line would not be an inappropriate development (in terms of sections 6(a) and

6(b) of the RMA), given modifications to the natural landscape in the vicinity of the crossing point, including the existing ARA-PAK A line.

59. **IN** my opinion, the towers are the most visible elements of the proposed line, and are the elements that most impact upon the aesthetic qualities of the landscape. Within section 12, the towers have been located to minimise visual impacts from SH1 and the lake, and the number of towers has been reduced relative to the existing ARI-PAK A line. The possibility that monopoles might be used at Lake Karapiro instead of lattice towers is referred to in Mr Lister's evidence and I support this option. I consider the measures that can be taken to reduce the visual impact of the towers in this location will lead to an acceptable outcome. I agree with Mr Lister's assessment of visual effects.
60. **THE** conductors will span a distance of 750 m between the towers on the north and south banks of the lake. While the conductors will undoubtedly have a visual impact, I consider the magnitude of the impact will be only a marginal increase over that of existing conductors spanning the lake at this location.

#### ***Maungatautari Special Landscape Character Area***

61. **AGRICULTURAL** development and the presence of high voltage transmission lines do not appear to be fatal to the classification of the Mt Maungatautari Hill Country Area as a SLCA. The existing ARI-HAM A & B line and the ARI-PAK A line pass through the eastern flank of the Maungatautari SLCA area (**Figure 7**). The eastern boundary of the SLCA is very close to the existing transmission lines shown in **Figure 4** (and probably within the area depicted in the photograph), yet there is no discernable difference between land within the SLCA and land beyond it.
62. **ON** the western and south western flanks of Maungatautari, three transmission lines also traverse the landscape well inside the western edges of the SLCA, and with no apparent detriment to the experience or significance of the authentically natural area of Mt Maungatautari, higher up the mountain.
63. **IN** defining the extent of the Mt Maungatautari SLCA, it is apparent that a wide range of natural character states have been considered compatible with SLCA classification. The range of degrees of naturalness in the landscape can be understood with reference to the 7-point van der Maarel scale, reproduced earlier in my evidence. With reference to this scale, the upper, forested slopes

of Mt Maungatautari can be understood as spanning the Natural—Near-Natural range of the scale (natural does not necessarily equate directly with *pristine*, as it is generally acknowledged that there are few genuinely pristine landscapes left in New Zealand). The lower, farmed slopes are within the Agricultural range of the scale, which covers the range Moderate – Moderate-Low.

64. **THE** existing transmission lines, and the proposed line, are all within landscapes that fall within the Agricultural range of the naturalness scale. As Mr Lister notes, these lower slopes of Maungatautari do not share the same landscape qualities as the upper slopes, but rather are part of "*a rural landscape with houses, farm buildings and elements of infrastructure*". I agree with Mr Lister's assessment.
65. **MR** Lister's evidence is that Maungatautari is an outstanding natural landscape "*but the area traversed by the alignment should not be considered part of that feature...The area traversed by the line...comprises rolling foothills between the Waikato River and Maungatautari. It is a farmed landscape with houses, farm buildings, and elements of infrastructure including three existing transmission lines*". I agree with this analysis.
66. **GIVEN** that the proposed line is at the margins of the Maungatautari SLCA, within an agricultural landscape of moderate naturalness, and in an area currently traversed by transmission lines, I do not consider the proposed line to constitute a significant downgrading of either natural character or landscape significance. The landscape with the highest degree of natural character and landscape quality (the forested upper slopes) is at sufficient horizontal and vertical remove from the proposed line to ensure that visual impacts are kept to an acceptable level.
67. **MR** Lister acknowledges that there will be some effects on views towards Maungatautari, for people travelling along Oreipunga Rd and from Horahora Road. However, as Mr Lister notes, these views already include existing transmission lines, and within these views, the proposed line is quite separate from the mountain.

