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1 Dunorling Street
PO Box 122, Alexandra 9340
New Zealand

03 440 0056

Info@codc.govt.nz
www.codc.govt.nz



SUBMISSION ON NOTIFIED APPLICATION CONCERNING RESOURCE CONSENT

(Form 13)

Section 95A Resource Management Act 1991

To: The Chief Executive
Central Otago District Council
PO Box 122
Alexandra 9340
resource.consent@codc.govt.nz

DETAILS OF SUBMITTER

Full name: Suzanne Jean de Louw

Contact person (if applicable):

Electronic address for service of submitter: suzy.delouw@gmail.com

Telephone: 03-4449588

Postal address (or alternative method of service under section 352 of the Act):

11 Pery Street, Ranfurly 9332

This is a submission on the following resource consent application: RC No: **240065**

Applicant: **Helios OTA Op LP** Valuation No: **2828012800**

Location of Site: **48 Ranfurly-Naseby Road**

Brief Description of Application: **Land Use Consent to Construct, Operate and Maintain a Solar Farm (Maniatoto Plain Solar Farm) being a Renewable Electricity Generation Activity in a Rural Resource Area.**

The specific parts of the application that my submission relates to are:

(give details, attach on separate page if necessary)

Site Access; Routing and Traffic Volumes; Fire Safety Measures; Decommissioning;

Job Creation and the Construction Workforce; District Plan References; Landscape

Mitigation; and Monitoring, Non-Compliance and Penalties - details attached

This submission is: *(attach on separate page if necessary)*

Include:

- *whether you support or oppose the specific parts of the application or wish to have them amended; and*
- *the reasons for your views.*

as per attached

I/We seek the following decision from the consent authority:

(give precise details, including the general nature of any conditions sought)

as per attached

~~I **support** / oppose the application OR neither support or oppose (select one)~~

~~I wish / **do not wish** to be heard in support of this submission (select one)~~

~~I **am** / am not* a trade competitor for the purposes of section 308B of the Resource Management Act 1991 (select one)~~

~~I/We **am** / am not (select one) directly affected by an effect of the subject matter of the submission that:~~

~~(a) adversely affects the environment; and~~

~~(b) does not relate to trade competition or the effects of trade competition.~~

~~*Delete this paragraph if you are not a trade competitor.~~

***I/We will consider presenting a joint case if others make a similar submission**

**Delete this paragraph if not applicable.*

I request/do not request (select one), pursuant to section 100A of the Act, that you delegate your functions, powers, and duties to hear and decide the application to 1 or more hearings commissioners who are not members of the local authority. "See note 4 below as you may incur costs relating to this request."



Signature

(to be signed by submitter or person authorised to sign on behalf of submitter)

17-12-2024

Date

In lodging this submission, I understand that my submission, including contact details, are considered public information, and will be made available and published as part of this process.

Notes to submitter

1. If you are making a submission to the Environmental Protection Authority, you should use form 16B.

The closing date for serving submissions on the consent authority is the 20th working day after the date on which public or limited notification is given. If the application is subject to limited notification, the consent authority may adopt an earlier closing date for submissions once the consent authority receives responses from all affected persons.

2. You must serve a copy of your submission on the applicant as soon as is reasonably practicable after you have served your submission on the consent authority.
3. If you are a trade competitor, your right to make a submission may be limited by the trade competition provisions in Part 11A of the Resource Management Act 1991.
4. If you make a request under section 100A of the Resource Management Act 1991, you must do so in writing no later than 5 working days after the close of submissions and you will be liable to meet the additional costs of the hearings commissioner or commissioners, compared to our hearing panel. Typically these costs range from \$3,000 - \$10,000.
5. Please note that your submission (or part of your submission) may be struck out if the authority is satisfied that at least 1 of the following applies to the submission (or part of the submission):
 - it is frivolous or vexatious:
 - it discloses no reasonable or relevant case:
 - it would be an abuse of the hearing process to allow the submission (or the part) to be taken further:
 - it contains offensive language:

it is supported only by material that purports to be independent expert evidence, but has been prepared by a person who is not independent or who does not have sufficient specialised knowledge or skill to give expert advice on the matter.

The Chief Executive
Central Otago District Council
PO Box 122
Alexandra 9340
By email only: resource.consent@codc.govt.nz
Attention: Adam Vincent

17 December 2024

Dear Adam,

RC240065- Submission on Application by Helios Op LP to Construct, Operate and Maintain a solar Farm in the Rural Resource Area at 48 Ranfurly-Naseby Road

This letter provides supporting information to my submission form concerning the above proposal.

My submission covers key issues relating to Site Access, Routing and Traffic Volumes; Fire Safety Measures, Decommissioning; Job Creation and the Construction Workforce; District Plan References; Landscape Mitigation; and Monitoring, Non-Compliance and Penalties.

I oppose the development as per the current application but would reconsider my position if all questions listed in my submission are answered to my satisfaction and robust consent conditions, monitoring processes, and financial guarantees are in place.

Site Access, Routing and Traffic Volumes

Pg 23 - Site Access.

“c) Ensure the truck drivers are advised to stay on State Highway 85 (and travel through Ranfurly), so that they do not use Goff Road.”

What is the rationale for this decision? The Heavy Traffic Bypass within the township directs traffic along Thomas Street – a residential street whereas Goff Road is bordered primarily by industrial areas, farmland and a very small number of homes.

If the heavy vehicles are to travel through the township, could a curfew be put in place for the comfort of residents?

Pg 24 - Construction Traffic - volumes

This section cites numbers *“as calculated by Abley”*. The method used for these calculations According to Appendix 9, page 12, is not specific to this project. *“Abley has been provided with construction traffic generation data for a previously established 100MWp solar farm and have extrapolated this to assess the likely trip generation of the proposed 332MWp farm in Naseby.”*

Without having details of which 100MWp solar farm these calculations have been based on or who provided them in the first place, I am concerned that the extrapolation may not take account of the heavy traffic movements associated with the construction of the substation and battery storage area and the placement of twelve 25,000l water tanks for fire-fighting.

I ask Council to seek clarification that the information offered is comprehensive and has not been created by comparing 'apples' with 'pears'.

In addition, no mention is made of up to 250 construction workers travelling to and from the worksite 6 days a week for 2 years. It would be reasonable to assume many of these people will travel in private vehicles. Has this been considered? No provision appears to have been made for parking up to 200 cars. Perhaps this is not technically 'Construction Traffic' but it should be considered.

Fire Safety Measures

This section on Page 27 focuses on vegetation fires and water availability to deal with them. Page 16 states "*Twelve (12) 25,000L above ground water tanks for firefighting purposes are proposed within the substation area*". Where will the water to fill or re-fill these tanks come from? The Otago Regional Council Water Consents map does not show any consented water supply to the leased land.

Page 11 of The Bofa Miskell Landscape Effects Assessment states "*The perimeter of the facility (substation area) will be enclosed with a lockable security fence and a stock fence*."

Locating water tanks for firefighting behind a locked fence as part of the substation/battery storage area makes no sense to me as neither an electrical fire or a lithium-ion battery fire can be extinguished with water. If the water tanks are for the purpose of fighting vegetation fires would they not be better positioned at various locations across the whole of the site?

In very hot climates or under intense sunlight (a Maniototo summer) solar panels can reach temperatures as high as 65 to 85 degrees Celsius. Very hot solar panels can potentially cause a grass fire, especially if they come into contact with dry grass or other flammable materials. While this is not common, it is important to ensure that dry grass is kept under control. Is the applicant relying solely on sheep grazing around the panels to control this risk? Will the sheep do a good enough job?

There is no mention of Battery fires. Recent overseas experiences, including battery fires in Australia which have been left to burn themselves out, suggest we have a right to be concerned about what plans are in place for an emergency. As a COPD sufferer I am particularly concerned about the potential for smoke and toxic gases drifting over Ranfurly township and the possible need to evacuate.

A comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (EMP) is not currently part of this proposal. The proposal does include a statement that there will be a plan.

If it is not feasible, at this time, for the applicant to develop a site-specific plan that takes account of local conditions (including site layout and high winds and extreme dryness for extended periods), there must be sufficient information available to put forward a generic EMP that clearly identifies ALL health and safety risks associated with solar farm and battery

storage both during the construction and once it is operational. In my view this needs to be provided before consent is granted. How can it be possible to make a decision on an application when the full extent of known risks are not stated?

Then there is the question of who will activate such a plan. According to the Staff and Maintenance section on page 26 states *“No staff will live or permanently work onsite as the componentry is operated / monitored remotely.”* after commissioning. Who will put the EMP into action? How and at what point will emergency services be notified in the event of fire? Will Civil Defence be called upon if evacuation of populated areas is needed in the case of toxic fumes?

From my perspective, Fire Safety Measures is probably the most critical area of the application and must be properly addressed before a consent is granted.

As an aside, I can see the farm becoming a haven for rabbits with plenty of shelter from airborne predators. Shooting would be impractical amongst the glass panels. Will there be an alternate pest-management plan to protect neighbouring properties from being overrun?

Decommissioning

With solar developments happening so fast throughout New Zealand, I am worried that the ‘end of life’ scenarios are not being given enough thought. Case in point – this 483 page application by Helios appears to devote only 4 lines on page 28 and another 8 lines in Appendix 3 to this subject.

Dismantling/recycling the panels will be costly. Then there is the battery storage and substation areas to be dismantled. The de-construction process and associated noise and traffic movements to remove materials from site will be like déjà vu for the community. No energy will be generated during this time so the leaseholders will have no income from the site they will instead be incurring costs. I worry that without some sort of bond/financial guarantee, our community (and potentially the whole country) will be at risk of ending up with a once pristine landscape littered with abandoned solar farms. This is not a future I want for my grandchildren. We have seen in recent times just how easy it is for energy companies to go into liquidation when their investors walk away from their obligations.

If this happens who will clean up? Does the landowner have any responsibility to restore the land if the leaseholder fails to do so or can they walk away too?

Under <https://heliosenergy.co.nz/faqs> , *“Who pays for decommissioning?”*, Helios answer with *“We do. There’s no liability on the taxpayer or ratepayer. Our project land agreements ensure funds are set aside specifically to cover removal of the solar farm equipment and reinstatement of the site.”* This response immediately raises the questions of how much has been ‘set aside’, is it adequate, and what does ‘set aside’ mean?

In my view, Council should make it a condition of the consent for the applicant to provide a decommissioning bond as a financial guarantee to cover the costs of dismantling, removing, and recycling or otherwise disposing of all components of the solar farm and associated battery storage at the end of their life. The amount of the bond to be calculated by a suitably-qualified independent person. This ensures the site can be restored to its original condition,

protecting local landowners and communities from potential abandonment or environmental hazards from obsolete solar generation and energy storage infrastructure.

The filing of a decommissioning plan, backed by a financial surety at time of application is becoming common practice overseas and it would seem sensible for us to do the same.

Additionally, if a consent is being sought for development on leased land, do the assertions made by and any consent conditions placed on the applicant remain in place if the development is sold either pre- or post- construction. Case in point being the sale of the 127MWp Helios development in Edgecumbe to Genesis Energy. Would the purchaser be bound to carry out the decommissioning and remediation work and all other consent conditions agreed to by the original applicant including taking over any associated financial guarantee?

Job Creation and The Construction Workforce

Page 33 of the application refers to the creation of “200-250 jobs for the 24-month construction period and additional commissioning period” as one of the positive effects of the project. Unemployment is not a big problem in the Maniototo. It is likely most of these jobs will be filled by people from outside the area. Some may commute. The application makes no mention of providing accommodation for even part of the construction workforce. The assumption appears to be that these workers will be absorbed by the local communities which have a combined permanent population of less than 1,000 people.

Ranfurly and more particularly Naseby have quite a lot of accommodation primarily aimed at tourists. It could conceivably be used to house construction workers. There could be a short-term benefit to some individuals in the community, but my concern is that it could also effectively exclude new and returning visitors to the area for a period of two years. The flow-on effects may be significant and long-lasting.

The Naseby Adventure Park which incorporates the Maniototo International Curling Rink, the summer luge, winter ice luge (only one in the southern hemisphere) and Maniototo Ice Rink are huge drawcards to the area. The Curling Rink hosts a number of events each year involving teams from outside the area including Australia and beyond. Participants need to be accommodated. These facilities also benefit from Rail Trail cyclists staying in the area.

The Otago Central Rail Trail (OCRT) passes through Ranfurly which is, rather ironically, the Sun in the solar system display added to the trail a few years ago. Numbers have decreased in recent years due to several new trails in both Central Otago and the Lakes District and the cost of living crisis which seems to be coming to an end. Cyclists stay in Naseby as well as Ranfurly.

Making it difficult for tourists to book accommodation for not just one but at least two Rail Trail seasons may discourage people from bothering to try again when other trail options are available. If companies that provide package tours for the OCRT also have difficulty finding accommodation for their clients they may suggest alternate trails and stop promoting the OCRT.

The Maniototo is a fantastic community that is always looking for ways to promote itself and the natural beauty on offer here. Work has been going on to make the Maniototo a gravel cycling destination. A sustained accommodation shortage may adversely affect this initiative as well.

Photographers and artists flock to this area to capture the beauty of its skies and landscapes. Will they still come?

The Film industry is a regular visitor to the Maniototo which has been dubbed the Montana of the south. Large parts of the Power of the Dog were filmed here a few years ago. As I write, Netflix are preparing to shoot parts of the East of Eden remake here. Set building and site preparation took place during November and December. Retired locals have been employed as security guards, construction materials and props have been purchased from local businesses. The cast will be filming from mid-January to mid-February 2025 and accommodation will be full. The production company sought accommodation for 250 people. Some locals have even given up their homes for the peak 4-week filming period. This sort of short-term project comes with some temporary disruption but huge, immediate benefits to the community. Will the movie industry still be interested in the Maniototo?

District Plan References

Section 5.2 Positive Effects contains several bullet points towards the bottom of page 33 that refer to the District Plan.

- *Section 13 of the District Plan emphasises the importance of the transmission network for meeting community needs, while also recognising the need to address negative impacts like visual effects.*

By quoting this as a Positive Effect the applicant seems to be implying that by connecting their development to the transmission network they are providing a direct benefit to our community. Our energy needs are already met by the transmission network. Connecting this project to the transmission network will offer no direct benefit to us.

- *The Rural Resource Area chapter of the District Plan acknowledges that Power Generation Facilities can enhance rural environment values.*

How would this apply to the project under consideration and was large-scale solar power generation let alone associated battery storage systems even a thing when this chapter was written?

- *Section 2.3.1 of the District Plan acknowledges the role of "human endeavours" like mining, viticulture, and energy generation activities such as the Clyde Dam in shaping the landscape values of the district.*

It would be interesting to know what types of energy generation were taking place at the time Section 2.3.1 was written or last updated. The Clyde Dam was a government development for the good of the nation whereas this project will be privately funded for profit. It is hard to see how swathes of solar panels let alone large numbers of container-sized batteries can contribute to shaping the landscape values of the district in a positive way.

Landscape Mitigation

Although there is great deal of information in the Landscape Mitigation Analysis (Appendix 4) prepared by Boffa Miskell, it is unclear how large (effective at screening) these plants will be when planted and how long they will take to reach maturity (maximum screening effect).

In my 15 years living in the Maniototo I have come to understand how difficult it can be to establish plants, even those hardened for our environment, in a town garden that is watered regularly. Plants take a long time to establish and growth can be slow in the early years.

This area has one of the lowest annual rainfalls in the country and is prone to long, hot, windy dry spells. My concern is that the plantings mentioned will be difficult to establish without irrigation and there seems to be no plan or water to do this.

Monitoring, Non-Compliance and Penalties

If this application or a version thereof is consented, will the Council communicate directly with the affected communities on the following?

- The mechanisms in place for ensuring all assertions made in the application and all conditions offered by the applicant, together with any conditions placed upon them resulting from the application review process, are adhered to/carried out.
- The audit schedule for the project both during and after construction.
- The penalties available to Council in the event of non-compliance and how they are enforced.
- The process to be followed by members of the public to report non-compliance and what action Council takes when such a report is received.
- Cost-recovery measures available to Council to ensure ratepayers aren't burdened with the costs of extensive and complex monitoring and compliance activities for the up to 35 year period of operation.

In summary

The Maniototo is an isolated place. The closest port (Port Chalmers) is over 130 kms via the Kakanuis and we are 85 km from the nearest town of any size (Alexandra). We are regularly cut off from the outside world in winter by road closures or by occasional flooding which can occur at any time of the year despite being one of the driest places in the country.

We are hardy, resilient, resourceful people who have learnt to take care of ourselves. Our local medical centre, volunteer ambulance crew and volunteer fire brigades look after us well when things go wrong.

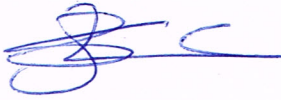
The proposed solar farm and battery storage project would be a huge development wherever it occurred but its size is overwhelming for us. It is reasonable to assume that the bigger a development the greater the likelihood of identified risks becoming reality and the greater the strain placed on local infrastructure and services.

Is this the right place for such a development, particularly one of this size?

In addition to addressing the gaps and inconsistencies in the application, I suggest that Council requests or commissions an independent Social and Economic Impact Assessment before granting consent. This will help better understand and, if necessary, mitigate the proposal's effects on our community.

Thank you for your time.

Yours faithfully



17-12-2024

Suzy de Louw
11 Pery Street,
Ranfurly 9332

suzy.delouw@gmail.com

Copy to:
Helios OTA Op LP
C/- The Property Group
L3 Craig Investment
26 Grant Road
Frankton
Queenstown 9300
Attention: Mishka Banhidi

By email only: mbanhidi@propertygroup.co.nz