

Before Gisborne District Council

Under the Resource Management Act 1991 (the **RMA**)

In the matter of applications by Gisborne District Council for resource consents to modify a stopbank at Te Karaka

Statement of evidence of Stefan Steyn on behalf of Gisborne District Council

Landscape and Visual Effects

14 September 2026

MC.

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1 Executive summary

- 1.1 I prepared the Landscape and Visual Effects Assessment (**LVA**) and subsequent Technical Memorandum for the proposed Waipaoa Stopbank Upgrade Project. In my opinion, the proposal is located within a highly modified and productive rural landscape where existing stopbanks, agricultural land uses, horticultural activities, shelterbelts, and rural infrastructure are already established and characteristic features of the environment.
- 1.2 Overall, I assess the effects on landscape character as **Low Adverse**, with more noticeable effects limited to locations where the proposed stopbank departs from the existing alignment. Across most of the project area, the stopbank will be perceived as a continuation of the established flood protection network and will remain consistent with the productive character of the Waipaoa Valley. Visual effects for the majority of viewers are assessed as **Very Low to Low Adverse**.
- 1.3 I undertook a more detailed assessment of 29 Morris Road, 54 Kipling Road and 59 Kipling Road in response to submissions to the resource consent application and the Landscape Peer Review. At 29 Morris Road, visual effects on the outlook are assessed as **Moderate Adverse**, reducing to **Moderate-Low Adverse** with mitigation planting. Additional shading effects are assessed as **Very Low to Low Adverse**, while effects on stock monitoring are assessed as **Moderate-Low Adverse**, reducing to **Low Adverse** with mitigation and alternative monitoring measures.
- 1.4 At 59 Kipling Road, visual effects are assessed as **Moderate-Low Adverse**, reducing to **Low Adverse** with screen planting mitigation. At 54 Kipling Road, visual effects are assessed as **Low Adverse**, reducing to **Very Low Adverse** with mitigation planting.
- 1.5 I also considered natural character, borrow sites, vegetation removal, and electrical infrastructure adjustments. These effects are assessed within the range of **Very Low Adverse to Low Adverse**, with rehabilitation and mitigation measures substantially reducing longer-term effects.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 My full name is Stefanus Lodewyk (Stefan) Steyn. I am employed by WSP International Consultants as a Landscape Architect, and currently hold the position of a Senior Landscape Architect.
- 2.2 I have been asked by Gisborne District Council (**GDC**) to provide evidence in respect of its application for resource consents to modify the stopbanks around Te Karaka (the **Stopbank Proposal**).

3 Qualifications and experience

- 3.1 I have a Bachelor's degree in Landscape Architecture from the University of Pretoria and am a registered member of the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects.
- 3.2 I have practiced as a Landscape Architect for nearly 24 years, the most recent 20 of which have been in New Zealand with WSP in Hamilton and now Napier. Prior to that I had just over 3 years' experience in the United Kingdom and one year in the Republic of South Africa.
- 3.3 During that time, I have gained experience in landscape planning, assessment, management and design for a diverse range of projects in both urban and rural contexts, having undertaken work for clients including Local and Regional Councils, Central Government agencies such as the Department of Internal Affairs, the Department of Conservation and the New Zealand Transport Agency, energy and infrastructure companies, educational institutions and private developers.

4 Code of conduct for expert witnesses

- 4.1 I confirm that I have read the Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses contained in the Environment Court Practice Note 2023 and that I agree to comply with it. I confirm that I have considered all the material facts that I am aware of that might alter or detract from the opinions that I express, and that this evidence is within my area of expertise, except where I state that I am relying on the evidence of another person.

5 Scope of evidence

- 5.1 In my evidence, I will address the following:
 - (a) A summary of the conclusions reached in my Landscape and Visual Effects report and subsequent Technical Memorandum, including a description of the existing environment, and of the Proposal;
 - (b) Discussion of the mitigation measures incorporated in the Proposal and/or secured by conditions of consent;
 - (c) Consideration of the Proposal's visual effects on the Property at 29 Morris Road, 59 Kipling Road, and 54 Kipling Road.

6 Involvement with the Stopbank Proposal

- 6.1 I was engaged by GDC to prepare an LVA for the proposed Waipaoa Stopbank Upgrade Project. The purpose of the LVA was to undertake a high-level desktop assessment of the potential landscape and visual effects of the proposal across the broader receiving environment and the range of residential, rural, and road-user viewing audiences that may be affected by the project.
- 6.2 As a high-level assessment, the LVA considered the potential effects on groups of properties and representative viewing audiences rather than undertaking a detailed assessment of individual dwellings. At the time the LVA was prepared, it

was not possible to undertake a site visit. I therefore established the landscape and visual baseline using desktop studies, Google Earth imagery, aerial photography, planning information, engineering drawings and site photographs supplied by the project team.

- 6.3 Subsequent to the lodgement of the consent application, Kenneth and Karen McLanachan, owners of 29 Morris Road, submitted concerns regarding the visual effects of the proposed stopbank on their property.
- 6.4 A separate submission was also received from Stephen and Valerie New, owners of 54 Kipling Road, raising concerns regarding the visual effects of the proposal on their property.
- 6.5 A Landscape Peer Review (**Peer Review**)¹ was also undertaken, which identified a number of landscape and visual matters requiring further assessment and clarification.
- 6.6 To address the matters raised in the submissions, I prepared a technical memorandum to supplement the original LVA (**Technical Memorandum**). The Technical Memorandum provided a more detailed assessment of the visual amenity matters raised in the submissions, and also addressed issues identified in the Peer Review.
- 6.7 The matters raised in the Technical Memorandum include:
 - (a) In relation to submissions:
 - (i) 29 Morris Road:
 - (A) Potential degradation of the visual outlook from the dwelling;
 - (B) Additional shading effects during winter months; and
 - (C) Reduced ability to observe stock from the dwelling.
 - (ii) 54 Kipling Road: one of the houses will have a very large flood bank beside it affecting the view and the quality of this property.
 - (b) In relation to the Peer Review:
 - (i) The consideration of any specific values to tangata whenua, as relevant to landscape matters;
 - (ii) An assessment of any natural character effects;
 - (iii) Confirm any effects of the borrow sites location, scale and proposed rehabilitation on landscape character, natural character and visual amenity;
 - (iv) Confirmation of extents of vegetation removal and effects;

¹ ISTHMUS, (19 August, 2026). Draft Landscape Peer Review of the Waipaoa Stopbank Improvements proposal, Te Karaka.

- (v) Clarify effects as a result of adjustments to existing electrical infrastructure, particularly with regard to neighbouring properties;
- (vi) Clarify any effects of shading to properties as a result of the height increase of the existing stop bank or proposed stopbank; and
- (vii) A review of any adverse visual amenity effects for the following properties:
 - (A) 29 Morris Road;
 - (B) 59 Kipling Road; and
 - (C) 9 and 11 Rangatira Road

- 6.8 As part of the preparation of the Technical Memorandum, I undertook a site visit on 28 August 2026. The site visit included inspections of the key residential properties identified through the submission and Peer Review process, together with a review of the wider receiving environment.
- 6.9 The observations made during the site visit informed the assessments contained within the Technical Memorandum and generally confirmed the baseline landscape conditions, landscape character findings, and visual effects conclusions reached in the original LVA.
- 6.10 I assessed the landscape and visual effects in accordance with the principles in Te Tangi a te Manu: Aotearoa New Zealand Landscape Assessment Guidelines. I considered the physical, associative and perceptual dimensions of landscape, together with the sensitivity of the receiving environment and viewing audiences and the magnitude of change resulting from the proposal.
- 6.11 I used the seven-point effects scale of Very Low, Low, Moderate-Low, Moderate, Moderate-High, High and Very High. Where relevant, I have also expressed the corresponding RMA terminology. My ratings address adverse effects unless I expressly identify an effect as beneficial.

7 Existing Landscape

- 7.1 In undertaking my assessment, I reviewed the broader landscape character and visual environment of Te Karaka and the surrounding Waipaoa Valley. In my opinion, Te Karaka is characterised by a contained rural valley landscape, where flat alluvial landforms, pastoral and horticultural land cover, and low-density rural settlement patterns combine to create a coherent and legible productive landscape. The township itself is relatively compact in form and is centred around State Highway 2, with residential, commercial, community, and rural activities closely integrated within the surrounding agricultural environment. The settlement retains a strong relationship with the surrounding productive landscape, with rural land uses extending directly to the edges of the township and contributing significantly to its character and sense of place.
- 7.2 I observed that an existing stopbank structure is evident along sections of the Waipaoa River corridor, broadly following the river alignment and delineating

the active river channel from the surrounding productive valley floor. This engineered landform introduces a subtle but continuous linear feature within the landscape, reflecting flood management measures while also reinforcing the separation between the river system and adjacent agricultural land. In my opinion, stopbanks are an expected and accepted component of the existing landscape character and are consistent with the modified nature of the river corridor and surrounding productive land uses.

- 7.3 The productive valley floor is strongly defined by a geometric pattern of agricultural and horticultural activities, with paddocks and lots clearly articulated by shelterbelt planting, hedges, and farm boundary vegetation. These linear vegetative elements provide visual structure and a strong sense of order across the landscape. As a result of the established presence of this stopbank, such engineered flood protection structures are perceived as an expected and accepted element within the landscape, consistent with the modified character of the river corridor and its long-standing relationship with surrounding agricultural land uses.
- 7.4 The river corridor and enclosing hill country remain key defining elements of the area. Together, the productive farmland, structured field patterns, and compact rural settlement reinforce Te Karaka's identity as an agriculturally based township embedded within a distinctive and well-defined rural landscape.
- 7.5 The visual catchment is generally contained and defined by the Waipaoa River corridor and willow planting along the river margins to the east, north, and west, and by State Highway 2 and the rising hill slopes to the south. The extensive use of shelterbelts, hedgerows, and horticultural planting throughout the valley further contributes to this contained visual environment. As a result, views from many locations are often limited to short viewing distances, with visual connections frequently framed or channelled between intervening vegetation. In many instances, views of the wider landscape, including the surrounding hills and ridgelines, are either fully screened or only available as glimpsed views above orchard blocks and through gaps between shelterbelts. This creates a landscape that is experienced predominantly at a local scale, with visual amenity largely derived from the immediate productive rural setting and its changing seasonal characteristics rather than expansive panoramic views.

8 Landscape and Visual Effects

Landscape effects

- 8.1 Based on my assessment, I consider that the proposed stopbank will introduce localised changes to landform and land use where it deviates from the existing alignment, including the loss of small areas of productive land and minor disruption to established vegetation patterns. However, the stopbank will remain modest in scale relative to the wider landscape and will read as a continuation of existing flood protection measures. In my opinion, the overall effects on landscape character are assessed as Low Adverse, with Moderate-Low Adverse effects confined to limited offset locations and Very Low Adverse to Negligible effects where the proposal follows the existing alignment.
- 8.2 In locations where sections of the existing stopbank are permanently removed, land will be reinstated and returned to productive use. This will restore rural land use patterns and, in some instances, open up views across adjacent

farmland. These changes are assessed as resulting in small and beneficial effects on local visual amenity.

Visual effects

- 8.3 In my opinion, visual effects on residential and rural viewers are generally limited due to existing screening, the incremental nature of change, and the consistency of the proposal with the surrounding rural environment. For most viewers visual effects are assessed as Very Low to Low Adverse. While the Rangatira Road and Kanakanaia Road modifications have the potential to result in greater visual change, I consider that the proposed mitigation measures are sufficient to reduce residual visual effects to Low Adverse.
- 8.4 Overall, the proposal is not expected to result in significant adverse landscape or visual effects.

9 Issues raised by submitters and peer review

- 9.1 I summarise the findings set out in the Technical Memorandum below, which addresses the concerns raised by submitters, and further issues raised in the Peer Review.

29 Morris Road

- 9.2 In my opinion, the proposed stopbank will alter the existing outlook by screening parts of the productive foreground, river corridor, and lower hill slopes that currently contribute to the property's visual amenity.
- 9.3 While the proposal will reduce the depth of the existing outlook, I consider that the wider rural character of the property will remain apparent and that the property will continue to retain a recognisable productive rural setting. I assessed visual effects on the outlook as Moderate Adverse, reducing to Moderate-Low Adverse should mitigation planting be implemented.
- 9.4 In relation to shading, I concluded that additional shading effects would be Very Low to Low Adverse. This is because the proposed stopbank would not materially reduce solar access for most of the day, with any additional shading largely confined to a relatively short period during late afternoon in mid-winter. No material shading effects are anticipated during the summer months. Furthermore, existing shelterbelt vegetation already generates substantial afternoon shade during winter.
- 9.5 I also concluded that effects on the ability to monitor stock would be Moderate-Low Adverse, reducing to Low Adverse when account is taken of alternative monitoring opportunities, including surveillance cameras and access to the stopbank crest.

54 Kipling Road

- 9.6 Based on my assessment, I consider that the property benefits from greater separation from the proposed stopbank and additional screening provided by existing orchard blocks, shelterbelts, buildings, and vegetation. These elements reduce the visibility and prominence of the stopbank, with the surrounding

horticultural landscape remaining the dominant component of the visual environment. Accordingly, I assessed visual effects as Low Adverse, reducing to Very Low Adverse following mitigation planting.

59 Kipling Road

- 9.7 I also undertook a detailed assessment of 59 Kipling Road. Based on my site observations, I consider that the proposal will become visible following the removal of sections of orchard vegetation; however, the property will continue to be experienced within a visually contained horticultural setting. The principal eastern outlook and wider rural character of the property will remain largely unchanged.
- 9.8 In my opinion, visual effects at 59 Kipling Road are appropriately assessed as Moderate-Low Adverse, reducing to Low Adverse following the establishment of mitigation planting.

Natural character effects

- 9.9 In response to the peer review, I considered the abiotic, biotic and perceptual attributes relevant to natural character. The proposal is located within a highly modified rural floodplain where agricultural land use, flood-protection works, rural infrastructure and settlement have already substantially influenced natural character.
- 9.10 In relation to abiotic attributes, the works will modify local landform through the raising, widening and realignment of stopbanks and through associated earthworks. These changes will not alter the broader geomorphological expression of the Waipaoa Valley, including the river corridor, alluvial plain and enclosing hill country.
- 9.11 In relation to biotic attributes, vegetation removal will mainly affect exotic trees, orchard planting and shelterbelts in a managed agricultural landscape. The proposal will not materially alter the wider vegetative structure of the valley or river corridor.
- 9.12 In perceptual terms, the proposed stopbank will remain consistent with the established relationship between the productive floodplain and flood-management infrastructure. While it will create noticeable local change, it will not materially alter the wider rural identity, coherence, legibility or sense of place.
- 9.13 Taking these matters together, I assess the overall effect on natural character as Low Adverse.

Borrow sites

- 9.14 The proposal includes temporary borrow areas to provide fill for stopbank construction. The main visual effects will arise from the removal of cropping, localised lowering of the ground surface and the formation of temporary stockpiles. These changes will temporarily interrupt the horizontal profile of the paddocks. Exposed soils, machinery movement and occasional dust will also create short-term colour, texture and activity contrasts.

- 9.15 In my opinion, these effects will remain broadly consistent with the working character of the productive landscape. Cultivation, ploughing, harvesting, machinery activity and the storage of silage or baleage already create temporary areas of exposed soil, dust, contrasting colour and localised mounding. The borrow activities will occur progressively rather than as a single large disturbance, which will moderate the extent of change visible at any one time.
- 9.16 Following construction, the borrow areas will be recontoured, topsoiled and reinstated to pasture or another suitable productive rural use. I assess the visual effect as Low Adverse during construction, reducing to Very Low Adverse after rehabilitation and vegetation establishment.

Vegetation removal

- 9.17 Vegetation removal will generally comprise exotic trees, small groups of exotic vegetation, shelterbelts within paddocks and limited areas of residential garden and orchard planting. I understand that none of the vegetation proposed for removal has been identified as having high ecological value. My assessment addresses its landscape and visual contribution rather than ecological effects.
- 9.18 The removal of short shelterbelt sections will not materially alter the wider vegetation pattern. The most notable effect will occur at Riverview Treks and Pinehollow Riding School on State Highway 2, where a substantial area of established vegetation is proposed to be removed. This vegetation contributes to local landscape character, visual containment, shelter and the avenue effect along the access track. Its removal may also increase the exposure of adjacent orchard trees to wind. I consider that this will result in a noticeable but localised adverse effect.
- 9.19 At 29 Morris Road, the removal of fruit trees will affect the immediate rural residential setting, reduce screening and remove part of the established orchard character. Although notable at the property scale, that effect will remain localised.
- 9.20 Overall, I assess the landscape and visual effect of vegetation removal as Low Adverse. Replacement planting on affected private land, including reinstatement of orchard trees, shelterbelts and other locally characteristic vegetation, would mitigate these effects over time.

Adjustments to electrical infrastructure

- 9.21 The construction of the proposed stopbank will require minor localised adjustments to the existing electrical network, including the repositioning of power poles and overhead lines over short distances. Replacement infrastructure will be of a similar design, scale and appearance to the existing network and will be viewed in the context of established rural utility infrastructure.
- 9.22 In my opinion, the adjustments will not introduce visually prominent new elements or materially alter the existing visual character. I assess the resulting visual effects as Very Low Adverse.

- 9.23 Overall, the memorandum concludes that landscape and visual effects are generally localised, can be mitigated, and do not fundamentally alter the character of the wider Waipaoa Valley landscape.

10 Response to section 42A report

- 10.1 The section 42A report prepared by consultant planner Jo Michalakakis concludes that:

“Subject to the construction being carried out in accordance with the approved design drawings and specifications, and the mitigation proposed, I consider that the actual and potential effects on landscape values are likely to be acceptable”

- 10.2 Notwithstanding the above, the s 42A report identifies that the effects on 9 and 11 Rangatira Road have not been addressed, and requires confirmation from landscape and architecture experts.
- 10.3 Gisborne District Council has advised that 9 and 11 Rangatira Road are proposed to be acquired as part of the Stopbank Proposal and that the existing dwellings will be removed. On this basis, I have not undertaken an assessment of the long-term visual effects on these properties, as they are not anticipated to remain occupied following implementation of the Proposal.

11 Conditions of Consent

- 11.1 I have reviewed and provided input into conditions as identified in the s 42A Report. In my opinion, the proposed conditions appropriately address the potential landscape and visual effects associated with the Stopbank Proposal and provide an appropriate framework to ensure that the proposed mitigation measures are implemented and maintained. Accordingly, I support the proposed conditions of consent from a landscape and visual effects perspective.

12 Conclusion

- 12.1 Based on my assessment, site investigations, and review of the submissions and Landscape Peer Review, I consider that the proposed stopbank works will not fundamentally alter the character of the wider Te Karaka and Waipaoa Valley landscape. The proposal will be experienced within the context of an existing productive rural environment where stopbanks and other flood management infrastructure are already established features.
- 12.2 While localised adverse landscape and visual effects will occur, particularly at a limited number of nearby residential properties and where vegetation removal is required, these effects are generally moderate or less in magnitude and can be appropriately mitigated through a combination of earthwork rehabilitation, reinstatement of productive land, replacement planting, and property-specific screen planting.
- 12.3 In my opinion, the proposal will maintain the overall landscape character, visual amenity, and natural character of the receiving environment. Subject to the proposed mitigation measures and conditions of consent, I conclude that the

proposal will not result in significant adverse landscape or visual effects and is appropriate within the context of the existing modified rural landscape.

Stefan Steyn

14 September 2026