

Crown Pastoral Land Tenure Review

Lease name: THE LARCHES

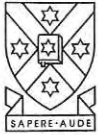
Lease number: PO 254

Public Submissions - Part 6

These submissions were received as a result of the public advertising of the Preliminary Proposal for Tenure Review.

November

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September 12, 2008.

The Commissioner of Crown lands,
c/o Opus International Consultants,
Private bag 1913,
DUNEDIN.

SUBMISSION ON PROPOSED TENURE REVIEW: THE LARCHES PASTORAL LEASE

Dear Sir,

Thank you for sending me a copy of this proposal for the tenure review of The Larches Pastoral Lease (1833 ha). I appreciate the opportunity to comment on this proposal based on my knowledge of the vegetation of the general area gained over many years of involvement with plant ecological research on the Pisa and Criffel Ranges and the Otago high country in general.

This preliminary proposal for tenure review achieves a reasonable balance between the area proposed for transfer to full Crown ownership and control (47% or 857 ha in one block: CA1), and that proposed for disposal as freehold (53% or 976 ha, with two proposed covenant areas; 18ha (CC1) and 180 ha (CC2) for protection of some inherent values of the lower and mid western aspect slopes of the Criffel Range. A locally serious weed infestation of tussock hawkweed, *Hieracium lepidulum* detracts generally from the present and likely future conservation management problems of the property, while also providing secure areas for the initiation of some long-term ecological research into this currently very serious problem species of both conservation and pastoral lands in the South Island high country.

Discussing detailed aspects of the proposal:

Proposed Conservation Area CA1 of 857 ha has some valuable and relatively natural wetland areas and associated meandering streams, as well as *Dracophyllum uniflorum*-dominated shrubland on cold-aspect slopes and high-alpine cushionfield on the more exposed sites, but much of the grassland here is now dominated by induced blue tussock, *Poa colensoi* with limited areas and scattered plants of the original cover, mostly slim snow tussock *Chionochloa macra*. Landscape values of this area are relatively high and the area clearly would contribute positively to the Pisa Conservation Area and proposed Pisa Conservation Park. This proposed conservation area CA1, is therefore strongly endorsed.

The adjoining proposed 180 ha covenant area CC2 contains the most extensive and intact stands of narrow-leaved snow tussock (*C. rigida*) grassland which, despite some areas of relatively dense tussock hawkweed, justifies full protection and associated conservation management and thus should be added to the CA1 area as an extension to this conservation area.

The remaining proposed 18 ha conservation covenant (CA1), on the lower western slopes of the property, is one of the several relatively discontinuous stands of mixed shrubland (dominated by kanuka, manuka, *Discaria*, *Olearia lineata*, and *Coprosma propinqua*, with some *Rosa rubiginosa*-sweet briar) which extends across the low- to mid-altitude slopes of the property. These are an

important inherent aspect of the property, the likes of which are now generally rare along the western slopes of the Criffel Range. Continued grazing, as implied by the proposal for covenanting (of the CC1 area) without fencing to restrict stock, will do nothing for achieving the ecological potential of these shrublands, even if future burning is denied by one means or another. Rather, the continued stock access to these highly visible (from the vicinity of Wanaka and the lower Cardrona valley) will prevent establishment of any palatable indigenous species and eventually will probably even lead to the demise of the existing indigenous woody species and the obvious landscape values of these woodlands. Ideally this entire face upslope from the lower elevation of the CC1 area should be formally protected and revert to full Crown management and control, and a stock-proof fence established on the lower boundary. This would be the only internal fence required on the property should these recommendations be accepted in full.

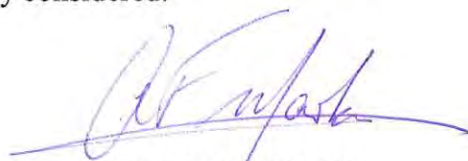
Both the area of the proposed conservation covenant CC2, as well as the Conservation Area One are very doubtfully able to be sustainably farmed by whatever means, the productive potential of the remaining western slopes between CC2 and the ~600 m line across the slope at the lower limit of the CC1 proposed area is also quite limited.

If these recommendations are accepted, this proposal would provide for the lowest slopes below ~600 m to be freeholded. This area would have a high potential for subdivision which predictably would be its fate, regardless of the fate of the slopes above ~600 m on this property. The only easement required, should this recommendation be adopted, would be the lower parts of what has been shown as b-d-e (for general public access, but note that this access is quite unsatisfactory, and there is also a need for adequate public access off the Mt Barker Road to point 'd' and also the a-b-c easement (for vehicles for management purposes).

One final (and over-riding) recommendation is that, given the several problems and uncertain future conservation management issues inherent in this entire proposal, the full review should be abandoned and the property continue as a pastoral lease (now stated as a clear option by the government), if **all** of the recommendations made in this submission cannot be implemented.

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on this provisional proposal and I trust my submission will be seriously considered.

Yours sincerely,



Alan F. Mark FRSNZ,
Emeritus Professor



**FOREST
& BIRD**

Royal Forest and Bird
Protection Society
of New Zealand Inc

12th September 2008

The Commissioner of Crown Lands
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Dave.payton@opus.co.nz

Dear Sir

Po 254 - The Larches - Tenure Review, Preliminary Proposal.

We thank you for sending us a copy of this proposal. As you will be well aware our Upper Clutha branch of the Royal Forest and Bird protection Society of New Zealand Incorporated has been involved with tenure review for many years now and are in a good position to make comment.

We have studied the Conservation Resources Reports, and we have inspected the property and wish to take this opportunity to thank Mr Jamie Robertson, one of the lessees, for allowing us to do so.

We comment as follows:

(1) General.

- The Larches at the lower end of the Cardrona Valley is one of six pastoral properties on the western faces of the Pisa-Criffel range .
- It lies well to the sun, and is very visible from the Cardrona Valley Road; the main tourist route between Wanaka and Queenstown, SH 89. Also a road which is much used in the winter by those travelling to the various ski-fields.
- Starting at the valley floor at about 480ms it rises to about 1350 at the highest point; passing from modified short tussock, brown-top sweet vernal grasslands; containing mainly matagouri, coprosma, kanuka, sweet briar and bracken fern, to reach at about 1000ms where increasingly hieracium lepidulum intrudes into the short tussock. Although noticeably, woody shrubs such as carmichaelia, porcupine shrub and aciphylla aura are still present. Then at about 1100ms this cover mostly ceases and the dominant vegetation is almost entirely hieracium lepidulum
- In the context of tenure review as with the other pastoral leases on the eastside of the valley its main conservation attribute lies in its landscape.
- There are several wilding pines scattered throughout the faces below the small lake which devalue the overall landscape.

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(2) Designations.

(2.1 in the Proposal)

CA1- An area of land of approximately 857 hectares to be returned to full Crown Ownership and Control.

We fully support this move to return the summit plateau to Crown control, as, although being overrun with hieracium lepidulum it has significant conservation values in its landscape, its historic gold-mining relics and some nationally endangered plant species; it will be a valuable addition to the proposed Pisa Conservation Park. It will fit in with the other land already returned to the Crown ex Lake McKay - Mid Run and Avalon.

Being relatively near to Wanaka it will be much visited by trampers, and others looking for a view of the Upper Clutha basin. Visitors could either return via The Larches if they came that way, or traverse south and exit via the route through Avaion, or even for the fit, exiting via Queensberry Ridges or Pack Spur. It will be an alternative to climbing Mt Roy with the added attraction; the historic goldfields.

In winter when there is a good snow fall the area is surely to be visited by cross-country skiers.

(2.2 in the Proposal)

Land to become Freehold - The area of approximately 976 hectares to be disposed of by freehold disposal to the present lessees, subject to two protective mechanisms.

This is the area of land, from the valley floor to the proposed boundary fence on the west side of (CA1) includes the covenanted area (CC2). Although modified over the years due to pastoral practices this area is typical of the Central Otago block mountain country and is a very visible part of the Cardrona valley landscape, and under the Queenstown Lakes District Council District Plan is zoned as an Outstanding Natural Landscape.

It appears to us as a little incongruous that in the proposal the upper area of the proposed freehold (CC2) should have its landscape values protected and not all the area below it, which is also to become freehold.

(Note - it is our experience that in a lot of cases in the tenure review process that too much use is made of fences already in existence and designed only for stock management purposes rather than erecting new or altering other fences to protect the conservation values that have been identified for protection).

The area still contains several good stands of kanuka and other woody species such as olearia, coprosma, bush lawyer, porcupine scrub, native broom, manuka, carmichaelia and matagouri. On the darker sides of the lower spurs right to the valley floor there is reasonably good short tussock (Photo # 6) among the exotic grasses. In the basins both above and below the duck

pond bracken fern is dominant.

On the lower slopes above the homestead there are patches of gorse, broom, and some boxthorne and elderberry.

We see that if appropriately managed and adequately supplied with fertiliser to replace the nutrients taken out in the shape of meat and wool, this area up to about 1000ms - the lower boundary off (CC2) - should be capable of being farmed in an ecologically sustainable manner.

The kanuka is the tree that is most visible. All these stands of kanuka contain some very old trees (Photo # 3) but there are a few younger plants coming on around their outer fringes (Photo # 4). Some of the trees, although not very tall could be upwards of a hundred years old. If the wilding pines were to be removed, the kanuka would be the dominant tree in the landscape. As it is old, is very visible, and the only place on the east side of the Cardrona Valley containing this indigenous landscape feature, every effort should be made to protect it for that value as well as its conservation value .

(3) Protective Mechanisms.

(i) Conservation Covenant CC1.

While we would agree with this area being protected for its shrubs, mainly kanuka, some olearia, coprosma and manuka as it would add considerably to the interest and enjoyment of those walking up to the proposed addition to the Pisa Conservation Area (CA1), we cannot agree that the area to be covenanted is the only area on the lower faces of the property that should be protected. All that country below the level of the duck pond containing much woody vegetation should also be covenanted to retain the indigenous vegetation and the visual appearance it gives to the lower end of the Cardrona valley. (See Photos #1, 2 & 5)

(ii) Conservation Covenant CC2.

This area being situated between about 950ms and about 1200ms at the very top of the Criffel face is the least modified on the property with regard to the landscape and is worthy of the protection being offered by this covenant. However having said that, there are also other values also very worthy of protection: there is the native broom, carmichaelia - which is very much chewed down, almost to ground level in places - the porcupine shrub, pimelea and coprosma; all present, especially around the rocky faces. Although the Conservation Resources Report states that this country once contained tall tussock From what we saw there is no evidence of this today

Also, the area has another problem with the top being dominated almost completely by heiracium lepidulum. This raises the question: is the area ecologically sustainable? Should it not be included in CA1 and be returned to the Crown for protection - we believe it should..

(As we have stated above we believe the fencing placed as it is, is being used more for stock management purposes than for protecting the values in the area).

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The Covenant itself. While we agree with: "..... **3. The Values of the land to be protected in SCHEDULE 1...**" of the covenant; we have some reservations in the wording of **SCHEDULE 2** of the document.

SCHEDULE 2, 3. THE OWNER'S OBLIGATIONS, Unless agreed upon in writing by the parties, the Owner must not carry out on or in relation to the Land:

Clause 3.1.5, in the covenant, the following is to be deleted; "any burning, chemical spraying, top dressing or sowing of seed", and replaced with the following:

Clause 3.1.5 (a) any burning or
(b) chemical spraying of shrub-lands located on boulder fields, bluffs or on the margins of water courses.

While we agree with this amended 3.1.5, we are concerned that burning and spraying would still be allowed in other than those places mentioned in the covenant on (CC2). We believe there should be no burning anywhere on this block.

Also, the original 3.1.5 also states; "top dressing or sowing of seed" It is not very clear if this would still be permissible on the block.

While seeding and the topdressing is one method of combating the hieracium problem, we are certain that it would not be economically viable at this altitude; around 1000ms being the proven upper limit of topdressing being of benefit.

Taking all these points into consideration by far the best solution for this proposed freehold covenanted area (CC2) is to return it to the Crown for protection and add it to (CA1)

(4) Qualified Designations.

(a) Public Access Easement. Using at the bottom where both access easements leave the Mt Barker Road the same colour, orange, on the designation map to define the route, of not only the public access easement and that to be used for vehicle access for management purposes, causes a little confusion

If the process of tenure review is signed off and the public become aware of the route to the Criffel Range, and its attractions, we can see it becoming popular and much used. The fitting of suitable gates for horses on the route is eminently appropriate.

This access up the eastern boundary if constructed as intended on a 150m wide strip should give reasonable access to the Conservation Area CA1.

The proposal saying it is intended to form a track gives us some concern. If it is not formed it will never be reasonable access for the public to enjoy, and will be contrary to the Act.

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The 10m wide easement where it starts at the top of the legal road (b), and heads east to the boundary, will also have to be so constructed that it can be negotiated around or across the steep sided gulch. The present proposed route on a 10m wide easement following the fence is by no means a good one, as there is not in places 10ms available between the fence and the gulch. (See photograph 1 and attached plan)

No mention is made of an area being set aside for parking cars. This must be rectified before finalizing the Substantive Proposal..

(b) Management Purposes Easement. We see this as being both necessary and reasonable.

(5) In Conclusion

This preliminary proposal as presented has not been very thoroughly thought out, but, if our concerns were to be heeded and modifications made to meet those concerns, as below, it should go some way in meeting the requirements of the Crown Pastoral Lands Act 1998.

(i) there must be created a suitable covenant to protect the indigenous landscape values, which include the dominant kanuka on all the land to become freehold below the fence running north and south across the property at about the level of the duck pond.

(ii) the land designated (CC2), should be returned to the Crown for protection and added to (CA1) as the proposed covenant is insufficient to protect the conservation values, as well as the landscape values in the area. Nor, is the land if farming is to continue on it going to be ecologically sustainable.

(iii) the properly opening up of the legal road for public access from where it starts at the Mt Barker Road and finishes at point "b" on the designation map must be absolutely assured before any substantive proposal is signed. NB. The proposed Queenstown Lakes District Council Plan Change No 28 (Tracks) should not affect this road.

(iv) also there must be a guarantee that the route starting from (b) is reasonable (See attached Plan) and is formed to and across the gulch to reach the northern boundary on which the proposed 150m strip is to be created.

(v) if the proposal cannot be improved on we see no harm in leaving it as a Crown Pastoral Lease.

We thank you for the opportunity to have this comment and input to the proposal and we look forward to seeing the final outcome.

Yours faithfully



Denise Bruns
Secretary - Upper Clutha Branch

Attached: Photos and Map

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