IN THE ENVIRONMENT COURT

CHRISTCHURCH REGISTRY

Under	the Resource Management Act 1991
In the matter	of appeals under clause 14(1) of the First Schedule to the Act
Between	**FEDERATED FARMERS OF NEW ZEALAND (INC) MACKENZIE BRANCH** ENV-CHC-2009-000193
	HIGH COUNTY ROSEHIP ORCHARDS LIMITED AND MACKENZIE LIFESTYLE LIMITED ENV-2009-CHC-000175
	MOUNT GERALD STATION LIMITED ENV-2009-CHC-000181
	MACKENZIE PROPERTIES LIMITED ENV-2009-CHC-000183
	MERIDIAN ENERGY LIMITED AND GENESIS ENERGY LIMITED ENV-2009-CHC-000184
	THE WOLDS STATION LIMITED ENV-2009-CHC-000187
	FOUNTAINBLUE LIMITED & OTHERS ENV-2009-CHC-000190
	R, R AND S PRESTON AND RHOBOROUGH DOWNS LIMITED ENV-2009-CHC-191
	HALDON STATION ENV-2009-CHC- 000192
	Appellants
And	**MACKENZIE DISTRICT COUNCIL**
	Respondent

STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF ANDREW WILLIAM SIMPSON

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9 September 2016

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 My Name is Andrew William Simpson.

1.2 I am currently the South Canterbury representative on the High Country Committee of Federated Farmers of New Zealand Inc. I am also on the MPI advisory board for both rabbits and wilding conifers, and have been appointed Chairman for the newly formed Mackenzie Wilding Tree Trust.

1.3 I have farmed in the Mackenzie Basin for 46 years and have farmed Balmoral Station for the past 41 years.

1.4 Balmoral Station is approximately 10,000 hectares and is located to the west of Lake Tekapo. It is predominantly a sheep station, but also includes deer, alpaca, a merino stud, forestry and a newly developed irrigation system. We have also set aside and manage a large conservation area on the property.

1.5 The key to Balmoral Station's success, despite the harsh conditions its subject to, has been its ability to adapt and diversify in response to market, weather and other variable conditions. Balmoral Station is truly a family-run high country station, involving all members of the family. It has been diversified and managed to ensure it can continue to provide both for the families and workers reliant upon it and for the conservation and environmental activities essential to the station's vision. A family goal is to leave the farm better than we found it.

2. SCOPE OF EVIDENCE

2.1 The evidence that I wish to submit today relates to the current and future farming activities on those areas of land that have been identified as scenic tussock grasslands in Plan Change 13 to the MacKenzie District Plan (PC13); both on our property and also the wider Mackenzie Basin.

3. SCENIC TUSSOCK GRASSLANDS

3.1 Plan Change 13 identifies a number of areas as Scenic Tussock Grasslands. These areas are valued in PC13 for their visual appearance as tussocklands, particularly as viewed from State Highway 8 (SH8). Large areas of identified of tussock grassland areas that have been identified within PC13 are not visible from State Highway 8 or any other tourist roads.

3.2 I understand PC13 proposes policies and rules to try and retain the visual appearance of tussock grasslands; in particular to protect them from changes in vegetation cover and colour, or the appearance of structures.

3.3 Plan Change 13 has provisions to prevent:

- Oversowing and topdressing;
- Shelter belts or fencing (though I understand the Council has suggested allowing for fencing);
- Irrigation or cultivation, including direct drilling;
- Structures including farm buildings and irrigators.

3.4 The tussock grasslands within the Mackenzie Basin are not a natural ecosystem. The MacKenzie Basin's vegetation has been modified through oversowing and topdressing, direct drilling and cultivation. This vegetation needs to be actively managed on an on-going basis to retain the present tussock cover where it exists, and to avoid pest infestation or re-infestation.

3.5 Tussock grasslands are highly vulnerable to infestation from wilding conifers and other woody weed species. Wilding conifers can produce thousands of seeds, and spread over 10 kilometres, particularly in open wind prone areas. They are also very difficult to get on top of once they're established, they compete with indigenous vegetation for sun and nutrients, and the tall trees severely alter the appearance of low-lying tussock grassland landscapes.

3.6 Grazing tussock grasslands is one way to reduce the risk of pest spread. To be able to graze tussock grasslands you need to be able to oversow and topdress them regularly. This ensures the vegetation isn't taken over by brown top and sweet vernal, which becomes unpalatable to stock.

3.7 In some cases, grazing in an extensive pastoral system is not sufficient to manage the spread of plant pests and the tussock grasslands need to be developed to mitigate this threat.

3.8 On Balmoral Station we spend approximately $4 per hectare per year on wilding conifers and other weed species. That is a total bill of around $40,000 p.a.

3.9 The work that has been undertaken on pasture improvement on Rhoborough over the last few years, along with the learnings from Nick Ledgard, a recognised wilding conifer expert who has spent a life time working for both FRI and SCION, clearly demonstrates the impact that pasture improvement is having on the wilding conifers in this area.

3.10 Nick Ledgard's work in particular, such as that attached as Appendix One to my evidence, illustrates that costs to control the spread of wilding pines would dramatically increase if pasture improvement on tussock grasslands was restricted, such as has been proposed through PC13. A lot of our conifer control work is carried out by being able to stock country at grazing rates that can remove an estimated 70% of the problem.

4 TENURE REVIEW

4.1 It is now becoming very evident on vast tracks of land that have been destocked through the tenure review process, that wilding conifers are spreading rapidly. For example, the Conservation Minister Maggie Barry advised in May 2016 that wilding conifers are now the single biggest pest risk to the Conservation estate, and currently cover more than 1.8 million hectares of land, with the costs to control the spread estimated to grow at rate of 20 per cent per year under current Ministry for Primary Industries modelling.

4.2 As chair of our newly formed Trust, it will be of real concern if those areas that are currently being farmed, and that have stocking rates high enough to mitigate the spread of wildings, were forced to go through a consenting process to both maintain existing and new pasture improvement.

5 NEED FOR VIABLE PASTORAL FARMING

5.1 One of the biggest allies we have to combat the problem of wilding conifer spread is the farming community. For the farming community to be in a position to continue to control this problem on their properties they need to be able to enhance their pastures, and also to have financially viable properties.

5.2 These days, the history of land and land management rests largely with the farming community. There is no Department of Agriculture or other central body that holds this sort of information any more. As properties change hands, a lot of this historic information and knowledge is lost.

5.3 To keep the community knowledge and extensive pastoral farming in the Basin, farming also needs to be viable. For farming in New Zealand this means having sufficient flexibility to be able to diversify farm income when required. In my time farming at Balmoral, we have expanded our merino operations and now operate a range of businesses that extend from and complement the core station activities, including forestry, merino clothing, horse-trekking, golf and accommodation activities.

5.4 Many of the areas identified as areas of tussock grassland reserves, whilst highly vulnerable to wilding conifer invasion, also have potential to be some of the most productive land on those properties, and are often the only areas where pasture improvements and diversification can occur. These areas are needed to maintain property viability.

5.5 The old saying that *you can't be green if you are in the red* is very real in this case. I believe there is scope to be able to manage scenic tussock grasslands to enable the continuation of pastoralism long-term, without destroying the tussock cover where it is healthy.

5.6 I also believe there are places where the development of some tussock grasslands may be the most appropriate way to avoid them becoming infested with plant pests, and to ensure the farming property has the income to afford management of plant pests elsewhere.

5.7 This may mean some change to vegetation cover and colour, but in my view this is more appropriate than losing the openness of the landscape and associated vistas altogether.

Andrew Simpson.