

Helios Energy Māniatoto Plain Solar Farm

Presentation of the Corporate Statement - Jeff Schlichting

- Tēnā koutou katoa. Good morning, my name is Jeff Schlichting and I am the Co-Founder and Managing Director of Helios Energy and director of Helios OTA OP LP, the Applicant.
- I have over 35 years' experience working in renewable energy across North America, in East Africa and more recently in New Zealand.
- My professional experience includes serving as either the lead developer or as a lead advisor on more than 4 gigawatts of renewable energy capacity now in operation, primarily wind and solar. The cumulative capital investment represented by these projects is approximately \$10 billion kiwi dollars. At Helios, over the last five years I have been leading the development of a 1 gigawatt portfolio of solar farms across Aotearoa New Zealand.
- I have been involved with the Māniatoto Project from its inception in 2021—it is one of the highest priority and most advanced developments in the Helios portfolio
- I have been actively engaged in all elements of the development, including identifying and evaluating specific site and connection options for the Project, meeting with Central Otago District Council, establishing the relationship with mana whenua, speaking with landowners and neighbouring property owners, and researching the history of the area.

Overview of Helios

- Helios is a leading Kiwi solar developer that seeks to create real environmental change by developing large-scale solar energy projects. Helios endeavours to create a positive legacy of a more sustainable future through our work, to contribute and accelerate a zero carbon future for Aotearoa New Zealand, and to be a leader in the energy industry by developing state of the art solar farms.
- Helios has pursued development of this Project guided by a strong set of values. Those values are represented by: **Tiaki**: to safeguard; **Whakarawe**: to provide; **Hononga**: to connect; **Kaitiakitanga**: to be guardians; and **Whakamanawa**: to inspire.
- Aotearoa New Zealand requires significant investment in renewable energy to ensure we have abundant and affordable electricity while also meeting national commitments such as net zero carbon emissions by 2050.
- Transpower forecasts that Aotearoa New Zealand will require 70% more energy by 2050, which is roughly the equivalent of a new Clyde Dam being built every year for the next 25 years. For context, the projected annual output of the Māniatoto Solar Farm equates to roughly one-third of the Clyde Dam's annual output. Given this need, it is clear that all regions across the country will need to accommodate renewable energy projects.

- Solar energy, and particularly, transmission connected projects of scale, will play a crucial role in phasing out current fossil fuel generation and providing the new electricity generation capacity that the country desperately requires. Solar energy has a range of benefits that sets it apart from other renewable sources. These include being:
 - most productive in the summer months which allows water to be retained in hydro lakes for use during peak demand periods (particularly in winter);
 - quick to deploy compared to other generation technologies;
 - complementary to agricultural activities; and
 - safe, quiet and easy to visually screen on sites with flat topography.

The Project

- Helios has surveyed the length and breadth of the motu to identify potential project sites that can accommodate solar farms that are then connected to the National Grid. This land at 48 Ranfurly-Naseby Road has been identified as one of the more favourable locations for large-scale solar in the country and, in my opinion, based on a combination of metrics, is the most suitable site for a project of this scale within the Central Otago District. These criteria include characteristics such as adequate solar resource, feasible and proximate grid connection on an unconstrained part of the National Grid, adequate and available flat land, suitable geology, and no mapped constraints. This Site on the Mānīatoto Plain stood out against these criteria as being one of the rare sites that meets all of these requirements, and is therefore an excellent option for solar.
- In addition, the Site layout, including additional boundary and internal planting, has been carefully considered to provide suitable setbacks from roads, internal wetlands and higher sloping, more visible parts of the Site. This has all been done with the aim of both screening and integrating the Project within the wider landscape. The site's current use as sheep grazing pasture will continue under the solar panels

Consultation

- I have had extensive involvement ensuring that we have consulted with mana whenua, stakeholders and the broader community. Once Site land rights were confirmed with the respective landowners and a preliminary Project design was prepared, the wider local community was invited to a drop in event at the Maniototo Golf Club.
- Throughout the development of the Project, we've sought to continue conversations with nearby landowners as I've detailed in my evidence. This included arranging for our landscape architects

Boffa Miskell to visit the four residential dwellings nearby the Project and incorporate their findings into the landscape and visual assessment, and the planting plan submitted to Council.

- Following public notification and receipt of submissions on the Project, I also made the decision to remove the Battery Energy Storage System from the scope of the application. The rationale for this is discussed further in my evidence, but I wish to highlight that Helios' desire to address the concerns and submissions of the public played a significant role in our decision to amend the application.
- I outline in my evidence a response to the submissions where they relate to development of the solar project as well as construction, operation, maintenance and decommissioning.
- In my evidence I spoke to the contractual obligations Helios includes in its landowner lease agreements for establishing a decommissioning fund. The fund covers decommissioning and reinstatement costs, based on initial estimates and regular updates by a qualified and reputable third party. Security will be provided via a corporate guarantee from an investment-grade affiliate or a performance bond from a registered bank. While typically established later in a project's life, Helios commits to establishing this security much earlier, from year 6 of operations, which is an industry-leading commitment.
- I am not aware of any other solar project in New Zealand being required to post a bond as a condition of resource consent.
- It is on this basis that a bond in favour of the council is redundant and unnecessary.
- In response to submitters concerns regarding the potential impact on the Naseby Dark Sky Reserve, I outline in my evidence our correspondence with the New Zealand Dark Sky Accreditation delegate and the moonlight reflectivity study Helios commissioned concluding reflected moonlight from solar panels has a negligible effect on light pollution.
- I consider conditions have been provided to adequately manage environmental effects for all stages of the solar project's lifespan.
- I also address questions in regard to Helios, which I confirm is a Kiwi company developing a portfolio of projects exclusively across New Zealand.
- The Project will generate 300 megawatts of clean and renewable energy – all of which will stay in New Zealand, increasing energy supply and resilience. It represents an investment in the Central Otago region of approximately \$450 million. The construction period will generate significant jobs and 5-6 Full-Time Equivalent local onsite roles during operation over a 35 year term. In addition, the Project landowner partners will be able to diversify their earning streams and secure long-term rental while still farming the land.
- While I generally support Council's proposed conditions as worded, I address in my evidence a number of changes that are requested to ensure the project can be practicably and viably brought to market and delivered. Importantly, a discrete number of amendments are requested to reflect the submission of mana whenua, Kā Rūnaka. Where condition amendments have been

requested, for example the duration of consent and in relation to a bond, these changes are requested to reflect the condition wording we see on other approved solar farm projects across the country.

Summary

- Helios considers that this is a robust and comprehensive application for a high-quality solar farm. The Project will support Aotearoa New Zealand's renewable energy goals with minimal impact on the environment. It is being advanced by a company that is passionate about the process and end result. I respectfully request that the application for the Project is granted, on the conditions attached to the evidence of Ms Mishka Banhidi.
- Ngā mihi nui, thank you for your consideration.