Submitter 132 - Stephen Goodlass.

1 - RC240065 – HELIOS OTA OP LP – Steve Goodlass, oral submission

12 min Version

Opening

I want to begin by saying I bear no malice to the landowners. Farming is tough in this region, and this project looks like a once-in-a-generation financial opportunity for them.

But this also highlights a deeper issue: our country's ongoing failure in strategic planning. Instead of securing energy sovereignty for New Zealanders, we are letting a multinational profit from something as fundamental to life as electricity.

This proposal is not about sustainability. It's about money and precedent. The "green" branding is window-dressing.

Is there another way? Absolutely

To put this into context: I'd say *"not in my backyard, but put it on our roofs."*

A worked example: a 6 kW rooftop solar system with storage costs around $13,500 retail. To match Helios' 300 MW proposal, you'd need about 50,000 rooftops. That's $675 million at retail prices. Compare that with the $400 million build cost quoted for this farm in 2023. Even with inflation, you can see the margin.

The difference is who benefits. A rooftop model keeps money and resilience in New Zealand homes. An industrial farm sends profits offshore.

And let's not forget: one of Helios' investors, BlackRock, tried to monetise household solar in New Zealand not long ago. That collapsed, leaving hundreds of workers unemployed and thousands of households uncertain. That's the track record we're being asked to trust here.

Key Policy and Planning Failures

This project fails against several critical planning tests.

1. Inappropriate use of highly productive land

The planner's own report admits this solar farm is an "inappropriate" use of highly productive farmland under the NPS-HPL. The policy says *avoid* these uses, not "minimise" or "mitigate."

There is no unique functional need for this site. Ports need the sea; airports need flat land. A solar farm can be co-located near where the electricity is actually needed. The national policy is clear: protect productive soils. Approving this would undermine that protection and set a dangerous precedent.

2. Loss of rural character and landscape values

Maniototo's landscape is defined by openness, vast vistas, and pastoral character. The Council's own report admits the proposal would "substantially change" that.

Let's be honest: planting a shelterbelt around an industrial facility is a visual band-aid, not a solution. Sheep grazing under two-point-eight-metre panels doesn't preserve rural ambience when those panels stretch for hundreds of hectares behind deer fencing.

This project industrialises our rural environment. The District Plan gives high weight to protecting open space and rural character. Approving this consent would override those values.

3. Fire risk: plan now or plan to fail

Fire risk is a major concern here. We live in a dry environment; Naseby has a forest plantation and a community that would be devastated by wildfire.

The application offers twelve 25,000-litre tanks for 660 hectares. A standard fire truck in our region can pump 2081 litres a minute and 2 to 3 units are dispatched depending on the plan. That means each tank is gone in about four minutes if three units were dispatched. There's no evidence of how close trucks can get, how long hose runs back to water would be, how toxic fumes would be managed (noting that these are local men and women who would be attending), or whether there's enough water to hold a fire until helicopters arrive.

Right now, there is no finalised fire plan signed off by FENZ. Approving a project of this scale without an ironclad fire strategy is reckless. If the applicants can't demonstrate safety today, the application is not ready for approval.

What about the BESS?

The battery storage system has been dropped — but only for now. If this consent is granted, what's to stop it being brought back later as an add-on?

If it was safe, necessary, and well-designed, why was it removed? If it wasn't safe, why should we trust the rest of the proposal? The community needs certainty. If consent is granted, it must explicitly exclude any battery facility, now or in future. On this site or any of the other sites that they are actively planning for.

Closing

The Section 42A report leans heavily on mitigation and speculation to make this project seem acceptable. But the evidence is clear:

- It misuses highly productive land.
- It industrialises and damages rural character.
- It exposes our community to unacceptable fire risk.
- It leaves the door open to a battery facility that has already been deemed unsafe.

Approving this would prioritise a multinational's profits over our productive land, wetlands, and rural community. Solar power can and should be developed in New Zealand — but not at this cost, and not in this place.

I ask the panel to recommend declining this consent