

**MOKIHINUI HYDRO PROPOSAL  
CONSENT APPLICATIONS  
REVIEW OF ASSESSMENT OF EFFECTS ON  
RECREATION AND TOURISM**

**JULY 2008**

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## **1.0 Introduction**

### **1.1 Background**

This report provides a review of the assessment of environmental effects (AEE) provided by Meridian Energy Ltd (Meridian) in support of resource consent applications RC07150 (01-26) and RC07/180 (A-G). These consent applications are part of the Mokihinui Hydro Proposal (MHP).

The Mokihinui Hydro Proposal includes a dam located on the Mokihinui River approximately 3 km upstream from the township of Seddonville and 11 km upstream from the river mouth, a new lake upstream of the dam extending to just below the Mokihinui Forks Ecological Area, a new transmission line to carry electricity from the power station to the existing Inangahua-Waimangaroa transmission line at Cedar Creek, and a new substation at Cedar Creek.

This report will provide the decision-maker with information and advice related to the effects of the proposed activities on recreation and tourism.

### **1.2 Qualifications**

My name is Stephen Espiner. My qualifications are Bachelor of Arts (social science) (University of Canterbury), Master of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management and Doctor of Philosophy (Lincoln University). Over a period of 15 years, I have developed specialist knowledge of the human dimensions of natural resources management, especially where this intersects with the tourism, leisure and recreation sectors. This knowledge is underpinned by a strong background in social science. I currently hold the position of Senior Lecturer at Lincoln University where my teaching and research emphases include the social dimensions of national park management, visitor risk management, outdoor recreation and heritage interpretation.

### **1.3 Scope of Report**

This report is prepared under the provisions of Section 42A of the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA). To carry out this review of the consent application I have considered the relevant sections of the AEE submitted by Meridian, and the following technical appendices and reports:

- Proposed Mokihinui River Hydro Electric Power Scheme: Recreation and Tourism Assessment of Effects
- Mokihinui Hydro Electric Power Proposal: Social Impact Assessment
- Mokihinui Hydro Proposal Resource Consent Application: Statutory Assessment
- Mokihinui Hydro Proposal: Construction Effects and Management Report
- Mokihinui Hydro Proposal Consent Application: Review Of Assessment Of Effects Of Aquatic Ecology And Water Quality

- Draft West Coast Tai Poutini Conservation Management Strategy (CMS) 2007-2017<sup>1</sup>

In addition, I have carried out a preliminary site visit on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> March 2008, and a further site visit on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> of June, which included tramping the Mokihinui River Track from the Forks to the dam site and spending one night in the Forks Hut. During the second of these site visits I was able to conduct a brief review of the Forks Hut “intentions book”. My review of the consent application also included a teleconference call with Rob Greenaway, who prepared the recreation and tourism assessment included in the applicant’s AEE.

I have also taken into account issues raised by submitters in relation to the effects on recreation and tourism.

The review has only considered the information that has been made available to date. It is possible that my conclusions will be altered in response to further investigation and/or new information that becomes available prior to, or during, the hearing of the applications.

## 2.0 Submissions

A review of submissions relating to recreation and tourism effects was undertaken. In total, 63 submissions were identified as relating to recreation and tourism effects. Of these, 11 per cent (7) were in support of the proposal, and 89 per cent (56) opposed the proposal.

The following issues were raised by submitters in relation to the effects on recreation and tourism in particular:

Issue	Freq / per cent <sup>2</sup>
Loss of white-water rafting and kayaking opportunity	23 (37%)
Loss of wilderness / remote recreation setting	22 (35%)
Loss of recreation and tourism benefits (general)	14 (22%)
Improved tourism and recreation benefits	6 (10%)
Loss of public access during construction	5 (8%)
Inadequate consultation	5 (8%)

<sup>1</sup>While the CMS does not form part of the statutory framework of the RMA, it is an important part of the wider context of natural resource management on the West Coast

<sup>2</sup>The percentages shown correspond to the 63 submissions identified as relating to recreation and tourism effects. Since submitters sometimes raised more than one issue, total issues exceed the number of individual submissions. Similarly, the percentages provide information about the proportion of submitters who raised each identified issue (and, hence, do not equate to 100).

The two most significant issues raised by submitters were concerns relating to the loss of white-water rafting and kayaking opportunities (37%) and the loss of a wilderness or remote recreation setting (35%). Submitters described the Mokihinui River as a “classic West Coast river trip”, of “mid-grade” difficulty, especially suitable for relative novices and intermediate users, and as a “stepping stone” for recreationists progressing to more challenging rivers. According to these submitters, the proposal represents the loss of a rare (1 – 2 day) “source-to-sea” opportunity. Submitters claimed that the proposed lake will not compensate for the loss of white-water, with many noting the gulf between “flat water” and their preferred white-water setting. Opportunities to raft and kayak the upper reaches of the Mokihinui were also thought to be compromised by the proposed scheme because of perceived complications at the “take-out” (increased time and cost commitments and dangers associated with hurrying to meet transport connections which do not currently exist).

Submitters also emphasised the MHP scheme’s likely impact on the existing “wilderness” setting of the Mokihinui River. These concerns related to i) loss of an unmodified remote landscape and associated recreation values; and ii) the likely impact of improved access on the remote recreation experience. Submissions referred to the integrity of the river and the spectacular wilderness experience being adversely affected by the flooding of the gorge, and the change in recreation setting from “backcountry wilderness” to more developed recreation experience. Submitters feared a loss of opportunities for the recreation values of challenge, solitude and quietude associated with fishing, hunting, tramping, rafting and kayaking. There were clear concerns among submitters about the effects of the proposed lake (and consequent increase in number and diversity of users) on the “natural quiet” available in the existing setting.

Submitters also raised more generic issues (22%) associated with the loss of recreation and tourism benefits currently available at the site. Concerns here related to the perceived loss of opportunities for mountain-biking, hunting, tramping, fishing and family recreation. Several submitters also raised the issue of the historic qualities of the Mokihinui River Track (as an old inland “pack track” linking Seddonville to other settlements in the north and further east). A small number (2) of submitters noted their concern about loss of income from tourism ventures in the area.

Support for the MHP among submitters primarily revolved around the perception of tourism and recreation benefits resulting from the scheme (10%). These submitters felt that the construction of new and improved recreation facilities (including a walkway, boat ramp and jetty) would increase public access to the backcountry, provide new recreation activity opportunities (notably recreational boating), and promote West Coast tourism in general.

A small proportion (8%) of submitters raised the issue of maintained public access to the Mokihinui River (and track) during the proposed construction period. Submitters described the proposal to restrict public access as “unacceptable”, and demanded that access to public recreation opportunities be available throughout the construction of the dam. Submissions also noted that the public use of the boat ramp should be guaranteed.

A small proportion (8%) of submitters reported that consultation over the recreation effects of the proposal was inadequate. This issue was raised in regard to the small number of kayakers (2) interviewed, and the legitimacy of assessing the effects of the proposed dam without developing a more comprehensive understanding of why anglers visit the area.

### **3.0 Assessment of Effects**

I have reviewed the assessment of effects on recreation and tourism, and have taken into account the mitigation proposed by the applicant. This is discussed below, with a focus on the key issues:

- Methods used
- Specific effects and potential mitigation
- Conditions for consent

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The assessment of recreation and tourism effects conducted by Rob Greenaway and Associates (RG&A) provides a mostly comprehensive analysis of the likely effects associated with the proposed Mokihinui River hydro electric power scheme. I am largely satisfied that the RG&A report identifies the main recreation and tourism activities in the affected zone, and that reasonable attempts have been made to evaluate the relative status and significance of these. There are, however, some relevant points I think are important to raise with respect to the methods used, and the significance of specific effects identified. These points are explained in the sections below (review of methods; assessment of effects).

#### **3.2 Review of Assessment Methods**

In order to collect data on the variety of current recreational and tourism activities undertaken within the Mokihinui River Catchment, a multi-method approach was used in which the report's author conducted interviews with stakeholders, reviewed literature (recreation research, previous river assessments, guide books and policy documents) and completed an internet search to ascertain the relative prominence of the site and its associated activities. While a more direct method of assessing the extent of recreational use of the Mokihinui River (such as an on-site visitor survey) might have provided a more comprehensive understanding of the nature and scope of recreation and tourism at the site, such a method is often considered impractical given the temporally dispersed nature of visitation to the site. In the absence of direct use data, the multi-method approach used has allowed a reasonable approximation of recreation use type and scale. Notwithstanding this acknowledgement, there are some aspects of the methods used that, in my opinion, are important to comment on as these have a bearing on the adequacy of the effects assessment.

### **On-line presence method**

The RG&A report documents the use of an “on-line presence” method in order to assess the relative prominence of the recreation and tourism activities in the Mokihinui catchment. There is good detail provided relating to the implementation of this approach, and, in accordance with sound research practice, the study’s limitations are identified. While, in my experience, the on-line presence approach is not widely used in the recreation, tourism or social science literature, the method described in this case does seem reasonable given the absence of available on-site data. It is important to emphasise, however, that the approach used is likely to suffer from the additional limitation of under-representing the casual or independent use of the recreation site. Some evidence of this is apparent in the calibration data provided in the RG&A report (Chart 1, p.91), my interpretation of which shows that non-commercial recreation activities such as swimming, picnics, and camping are heavily under-represented in the on-line presence assessments compared to the ‘actual’ use generated from on-site surveys.

Commercial and larger-scale organised users of the Mokihinui catchment have an obvious vested interest in a strong web presence that is of less value to independent and casual users of the site. This limitation is likely to have influenced the report author’s conclusions concerning the significance of the Mokihinui as a setting for tramping, hunting and fishing (non-guided). This limitation is compounded by the fact that the stakeholder interviews largely were limited to commercial users of the catchment (see below).

### **Stakeholder interviews**

The RG&A report includes good evidence of the interviews conducted as part of the applicant’s assessment of effects on recreation and tourism. The interview summaries provide sufficient relevant detail on the nature and scope of many existing recreation and tourism activities in the catchment area. In total, the RG&A report documents 16 interviews with stakeholders, comprising local accommodation and tourism services, professional rafting, kayaking, hunting and fishing guides, and a helicopter operator. According to the report, interviewees were selected on the basis of their “knowledge or recreational experience of the proposal area” (Appendix 17, p.68). A conversation with the report’s author confirmed that the selection process was dependent upon advice from locals (what is known as ‘snowball sampling’), and a web and literature search.

In my view, the interview data is limited to the extent that only commercial / professional users/operators of the Mokihinui catchment are included. While some of these stakeholders have sufficient knowledge of the area’s use to allow provisional judgements to be drawn on the relative levels of activity at the site, a more comprehensive approach would have included some independent or non-commercial recreation interests (local tramping clubs for instance). Submissions opposing the scheme suggest that the non-commercial stakeholders may be more significant than is apparent in the assessment of effects report.

### **Significance definitions**

The RG&A report makes good use of available literature in assessing the relative significance of the Mokihinui catchment and the recreation activities therein. Through my review of the information contained in Appendix 17, and subsequent data provided via the second of two section 92 requests for further information, I am satisfied that the significance of recreation and tourism opportunities in the Mokihinui catchment have been, for the most part, adequately assessed by the applicant. Where my opinion differs from that of the applicant, this is discussed in my assessment of effects (section 3.0).

The 'scale of effect' definitions on page 33 of the RG&A report appear to be sound, although I question some applications of these scales in the assessment of effects (see section 3.3).

### **Summary of evaluation of assessment methods**

In my opinion, the effects assessment methods are sufficient, although I think non-commercial use and significance is underestimated; and the importance of the remote backcountry setting to the regional West Coast context is under-stated.

## **3.3 Specific Effects on Recreation and Tourism**

In evaluating Meridian's assessment of effects (Appendix 17), I am in general agreement with the technical assessment in section 5.3 (effects below the impoundment) - with some qualification regarding the possible effects on recreational whitebaiting (see section 3.3.1) - and section 5.4 (effects of transmission corridor). To some extent, my opinion differs from the conclusions the applicant has reached in sections 5.1 (effects above the scheme) and 5.2 (effects within the impoundment). These differences are discussed below.

### **3.3.1 Effects on Whitebaiting**

The RG&A report acknowledges the likelihood that the Mokihinui River (below the proposed dam) is a nationally significant whitebait fishery. The activity of whitebaiting is carried out in the lower reaches of the river, below the State highway bridge. Given recreational access will not be affected below the proposed dam, and the understanding that Meridian will operate a 'run of river' system during the whitebait season, it appears that the effects on the recreational activity of whitebaiting will be determined by aquatic ecology issues. To this extent, it is important to note the concerns raised by Cameron (2008) in his review of the aquatic ecology effects of the MHP. According to Cameron (2008), while anticipated flow regimes, sediment transport and water quality associated with the MHP are unlikely to negatively impact the whitebait fishery, there is the possibility that the dam will hinder the upstream and downstream passage of juvenile and larval whitebait. To this extent, Cameron (2008, p.14) concludes that "...the applicant has not provided sufficient information to adequately assess whether the effect of the MHP on the Mokihinui River whitebait fishery will be minor or more than minor". Until these aquatic ecology issues are resolved satisfactorily, the likely effect on the recreational activity of whitebaiting cannot be fully determined.

### 3.3.2 Effects on Trout Angling

The effect on the Mokihinui trout fishery extends beyond the quality of the game fish available in the river, to include the other dimensions of the backcountry fishing experience. Outdoor recreation literature has consistently reported the motivations of such fishers as incorporating values closely related to attributes of the social and physical setting, rather than simply the quantity or quality of fish caught (see Manning, 1999). Hence it is relevant to consider the effects of the proposed scheme on matters other than the purely aquatic.

In section 5.0 of Appendix 17 (RG&A report p.33), the applicant concludes that “the nationally significant wilderness trout fishery in the North and South Branches will be unaffected by the MHP”. In my opinion, it needs to be acknowledged that the likely changes to the character of the recreation setting associated with the creation of the lake and the enhancement of the walking and mountain-bike access to the catchment, will reduce the ‘wilderness’ qualities currently available. Although the catchment has no official status as a Wilderness Area, the ‘remote’ and ‘wilderness’ character of the area was raised in a high proportion of submissions relating to the recreation effects of the proposal (see section 2.0).

In my view, the technical assessment also overstates the extent to which access improvement is likely irrespective of the MHP scheme in claiming that DOC (in its West Coast draft CMS) plans to “develop the Mokihinui River Track for mountain biking” (Appendix 17, p.35). From my reading of the Draft CMS, mountain biking is “authorised” in a number of public conservation areas on the West Coast, including the Mokihinui River Track (s 3.6.5.10), but is not specifically identified for development in the Mokihinui case<sup>3</sup>. On the contrary, under the sub-heading, *Recreation and tourism in 2017*, the CMS states: “The Mokihinui catchment is managed primarily to provide the kind of challenging remote backcountry opportunities enjoyed by experienced New Zealanders and is maintained accordingly. A marked route is provided to the Mokihinui Forks Hut” (DOC, 2007, p.372). The creation of a lake and associated facility developments are likely to impact negatively on the integrity of the remote fishery experience, through increasing the number of users and diversity of activities in the area (see also section 3.3.4).

In my view, the effect of the proposed scheme on the recreational activity of angling, given its recognised status as a nationally significant “wilderness fishery”, is likely to be more than minor. It is also important to note here, the conclusions drawn by Cameron (2008, p16) with respect to trout availability as a result of the proposed dam. He contends that the MHP “...could potentially have adverse effects on trout populations and the trout fishery...”, although he proposes monitoring and other measures to mitigate these effects. These trout mitigation measures are likely to be critical to the retention of a nationally recognised recreational fishery, the deterioration of which would represent a significant loss in recreation and tourism.

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<sup>3</sup> Consultation with technical staff in the Department of Conservation’s Buller *Kawatiri* and Hokitika offices confirmed that there is no specific intention to develop mountain biking at this site.

### 3.3.3 Mitigation of Effect on Trout Angling

The effects of the proposed scheme on the recreational experience of trout angling in the Mokihinui catchment will be difficult to mitigate (for mitigation of the effects on the trout fishery itself, see Cameron, 2008). The potential loss of a remote backcountry angling opportunity may be reduced through careful planning and management of the new environment, in a way that promotes the recreation and amenity values currently associated with the site (see section 3.4).

### 3.3.4 Effects on the Recreation Setting

The proposed scheme will alter the setting from a backcountry remote setting to a more developed recreation setting. My estimate of the number of users of the Mokihinui River catchment between the river mouth and the north branch (excluding whitebaiters) is in the low hundreds (200 – 400) of users per annum<sup>4</sup>. An upgraded track, leading to improved access for walkers, trampers, runners, mountain-bikers, hunters and fishers, and creation of a lake to facilitate canoeists, other (possibly power-assisted) watercraft etc., has the potential to increase recreation and tourism use of the area considerably. Using available visitor data<sup>5</sup> as a guide, and considering the range of activities that the developments might allow, I would not be surprised if the use increased to 1500 - 2000 visitors per annum in the first 5 years following the proposed developments. While it is important to acknowledge that the majority of this visitation would be focussed on the new lake, use levels of this magnitude are likely to transform the setting towards a more developed recreation experience, and as a consequence there will be additional social and bio-physical impacts at the site. As noted in section 3.3.2, the West Coast CMS (Draft 2007 – 2017) states: “The Mokihinui catchment is managed primarily to provide the kind of challenging remote backcountry opportunities enjoyed by experienced New Zealanders and is maintained accordingly” (DOC, 2007, p.372). Similarly, the CMS emphasises the Department’s intention to protect “..the opportunity for people to experience the remoteness, peace and natural quiet of the area and its natural, historical and cultural heritage values (ibid.). In this context, it is also important to acknowledge that in progressively acquiescing to demand for enhanced outdoor recreation facilities in settings where existing developments are modest or non-existent, there is potential for “...wilderness quality [to become] so diminished that this special characteristic of West Coast Te Tai o Poutini public conservation lands is no longer available for visitors (DOC, 2007, p. 220).

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<sup>4</sup> This estimate is based on my review of the Forks Hut ‘hutbook’, and consultation with technical staff at the Department of Conservation’s Buller *Kawatiri* office.

<sup>5</sup> According to data supplied by the Department of Conservation’s West Coast Conservancy, the numbers of people visiting the visitor centres at Westport and Karamea between 2006 and 2007 increased by 11% and 38% respectively. Similarly, the use of campsites at the Kohaihai River increased by 21% in the same time period, and has increased steadily over ten years to over 1000 visitors per annum. The Charming Creek Walkway visitation has doubled since 1998, and is approaching 7,000 visitors per year.

To more fully comprehend the significance of this effect, it is instructive to provide some brief commentary on the nature of outdoor recreation management and the frameworks typically used to determine objectives for specific sites and associated experiences. In outline, contemporary outdoor recreation management considers the provision of recreation opportunities as a continuum, or spectrum, of settings, ranging from highly developed, facility-oriented, through to unmodified and remote. Utilising a framework known as the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS)<sup>6</sup>, each of these settings (often management agencies differentiate between 5 and 7 discrete settings within a large park or other management zone) represents a set of distinct recreation opportunities consistent with the physical, social and management conditions maintained within that setting. Successful provision of a range of diverse recreation opportunities (activities, experiences and benefits) is dependent on the maintenance of such a spectrum of settings (locally, regionally and nationally). The integrity of the spectrum is inherently dependent on each setting within it. The loss of one setting can threaten the status of another by displacing users to the next most suitable setting available for their activity or experience. Hence, it is possible that, through enhancing the physical, social or management conditions at one site, a 'backcountry remote' setting may be altered in such a way that it no longer contains the character to satisfy its previous users. These users either lose the specific opportunity to experience that setting, or are displaced to a setting that previously exceeded their recreation needs in terms of wilderness 'purism' (Schultis, 1991). This may be particularly significant in the case of the current proposal given that, as claimed in the West Coast Draft CMS, "both in New Zealand and worldwide, remote opportunities are a rapidly shrinking resource" (DOC, 2007, p. 228).

It is also important to recognise that, in contemporary outdoor recreation research literature; there is a strong consensus that recreation activities are fundamentally connected to the settings in which they take place. Activities are the means through which individuals realise certain experiences, and in outdoor recreation, settings are critical to achieving these experiences. Hence, managers are able to manipulate dimensions of the setting (social, physical and management) in order to facilitate certain psychological outcomes. People choose their recreational settings on the basis of the experiences they seek; hence, quality outdoor recreation provision is dependent on an appropriate match.

### **3.3.5 Mitigation of Effects on the Recreation Setting**

The effects of the proposed scheme on the current recreational setting available in the Mokihinui catchment will be difficult to mitigate. The potential loss of a remote backcountry opportunity may be reduced through careful planning and management of the new environment, in a way that promotes the recreation and amenity values currently associated with the site. One possible mitigation strategy will be to actively plan for and manage a "buffer zone" between the more developed recreation setting surrounding the dam, and the (presently) remote settings associated with the Forks and the upper reaches of the Mokihinui River. Other mitigation measures that could help address the effects on the recreation setting include management restrictions on motorised users of the new lake to maximise natural quiet; track and facility standards consistent with the undeveloped setting; and limited management presence (also see section 3.4 Conditions).

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<sup>6</sup> Clark and Stankey, 1979; Manning, 1999

### **3.3.6 Effects on White-Water Rafting and Kayaking**

#### *Above the proposed lake*

The applicant's technical assessment of effects (Appendix 17 p.35) identifies i) loss of a two-day white-water activity; and ii) more difficult egress for the remaining activity opportunity. The applicant notes that for both rafting and kayaking above the proposed impoundment area, this represents an effect that is "more than minor". I agree with this conclusion.

#### *Within the impoundment*

The applicant's technical assessment of effects (Appendix 17 p.36) identifies the complete loss of the rafting and kayaking opportunities as a result of the proposed scheme. The applicant notes that for both rafting and kayaking within the impoundment area, this represents an effect that is "significant". I agree with this conclusion.

The applicant (Appendix 17, p.37) implies that this loss is compensated by the creation of flat water canoeing and kayaking opportunities, stating that "those who may have previously gone rafting may go flat water kayaking" (ibid.), although there is no evidence for this presented.

It is also important to emphasise that the creation of flat water kayak and canoeing opportunities is not *mitigation* in the sense intended in the RMA. From the perspective of the white-water recreationists, the replacement of one setting with another does not constitute mitigation (flat water is not closely linked to the experience of white-water). The offering of one setting as a substitute for another is more accurately described as "off-setting". Under the off-setting scenario, the assessment becomes one of weighing up the positive and negative attributes of different recreation activities.

### **3.3.7 Mitigation of Effects on White-Water Rafting and Kayaking**

#### *Above the proposed lake*

To partially mitigate the loss of white-water rafting opportunities in the lower reaches of the Mokihinui River (between the impoundment area and the head of the lake), egress from the remaining white-water opportunities in the North Branch should be facilitated through establishment of a kayak / raft transport service from the lake head to the road. This would necessitate the development of appropriate shoreline facilities to initiate such a service.

#### *Within the impoundment*

There is no apparent mitigation for the loss of the white-water opportunity between the Forks and the Mokihinui River mouth.

### **3.3.8 Effects on Other Activities (tramping, camping and hunting)**

#### *Above the scheme*

The applicant (Appendix 17, p.35) has assessed the proposed scheme's effects on tramping, hunting and camping as "minor or less". While the applicant acknowledges that "knowledge of the hydro scheme may have minor effects on perception of the setting as wilderness" (ibid.), in my view, this is under-stated. Unfortunately, there is insufficient evidence presented in Appendix 17 regarding the values held for the area by trampers, hunters and campers. In part, my view is informed by the relatively strong response among submitters opposing the scheme on the basis of the significance of the Mokihinui catchment as a remote backcountry setting (section 2.0) for tramping, hunting and fishing. It is also important to emphasise that the Mokihinui catchment is not typical of backcountry remote settings in the Buller region in that it is one of only two such settings offering hut accommodation to users<sup>7</sup>. This enhances the importance of the Mokihinui's present amenity value. To the extent that the setting's status may be compromised by the proposed development, this amenity value will be undermined.

As noted earlier in my report, the proposed scheme will substantially alter the physical, social and managerial dimensions of the recreation setting, potentially transforming the recreation experiences available. While this transformation may afford benefits to other (and new) recreation groups and tourism interests, these benefits, in themselves, do not mitigate the losses incurred by the current recreationists (or the loss of opportunity for future users).

#### *Within the impoundment*

The applicant (Appendix 17, p.37) has assessed the effects of the proposed scheme on terrestrial activities (tramping, hunting and mountain-biking) within the impoundment area as "positive". As noted above, this assessment is open to challenge. The current Mokihinui River Track (currently maintained as a "marked route" in the conservancy's draft CMS) fulfils a particular recreational opportunity along a continuum (see section 3.3.4) which is likely to be compromised as a result of the proposed track redevelopment, the enhancement of access and the likely increase in both number and diversity of recreation groups. That current use levels are described as "low", has limited relevance to the recreational significance of a site that is likely to be valued for its "remote" or "wilderness" qualities.

For current recreation uses above and within the impoundment, the effects of the proposal can be considered to be more than minor on the bases that some of the qualities of these activities will be reduced, and that the benefits of possible mitigation measures are likely to accrue to a different set of users (as per the 'scale of effect' criteria specified in the RG&A report p. 33).

### **3.3.9 Mitigation of Effects on Other Activities**

As noted in previous sections of this report, mitigation of the effects on other activities is related to the modification of the setting in which these activities are currently conducted. Mitigation may be effected through thorough recreation planning and management, and clear recognition of the setting qualities currently valued by users.

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<sup>7</sup> Advice from technical staff at the Department of Conservation's Buller *Kawatiri* office.

### **3.4 Conditions**

If the applications are granted, mitigation ability is limited (see section 3.0), and it would be necessary to manage a new environment so that as many of the current values as possible are retained. This outcome could be facilitated through:

1. The development of a comprehensive recreation management plan, prepared in consultation with relevant stakeholder groups (including recreationists and management agencies), to maximise the appropriateness of recreation opportunities facilitated at the site. The plan should adopt a regional perspective in determining recreation management objectives for the Mokihinui catchment, and be consistent with the planning principles enshrined in the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) and Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC). Such a planning exercise would be expected to collect data relating to the values held for the area by known and potential recreation groups (including casual/independent and commercial recreationists).
2. The maintenance of the current recreation setting and values to the greatest extent possible, especially above the Rough and Tumble Creek confluence (ie., controls on lake activities to maximise natural quiet; track standards appropriate to the remote setting; and limited management presence). Given that the Buller District Council (BDC) will control lake use and its effects, I recommend that Meridian work with the BDC to determine what measures might be put in place to govern appropriate use of the lake area.
3. Public foot access be developed/maintained during construction to ensure uninterrupted recreational access to the Mokihinui River catchment.
4. Egress from the remaining white-water opportunities in the North Branch of the Mokihinui River should be facilitated through establishment of a kayak/raft transport service from the lake head to the road. This would also necessitate the development of appropriate shoreline facilities to initiate such a service.
5. Public access to the proposed boat ramp and jetty should be guaranteed for recreation purposes. As noted above, given that the Buller District Council (BDC) will control lake use and its effects, I recommend that Meridian work with the BDC to determine what measures might be put in place to govern appropriate use of these proposed facilities.

### **4.0 Conclusion**

I agree with the RG&A report conclusions that the proposed infrastructural developments associated with the MHP are likely to maintain and perhaps even increase the level of recreation and tourism activity in the Mokihinui catchment. The report's author claims that the proposal "will maintain, and has the potential to enhance, public recreational enjoyment" of the area (Appendix 17, p.40). Where my opinion differs is in relation to the beneficiaries of the proposed changes, and the extent to which these changes are appropriate in the regional recreation opportunities context.

The main ways in which my opinion deviates from the conclusions reached by the applicant are as follows:

- i) Alternatives to white-water activities indicated by Meridian do not provide adequate mitigation for activities which will be lost and/or disrupted.
- ii) The applicant has not sufficiently considered the significance of the effects of the proposed scheme on the nature of the recreation setting which, in my opinion, will be more than minor, and will impact negatively on existing activities including tramping, hunting and fishing. The MHP proposal (and suggested mitigation effects) is likely to compromise the backcountry remote setting. This is especially important given the possibility that 'remote' recreation settings are declining, and the opportunities for future recreationists to enjoy remote backcountry settings need to be protected as far as possible.
- iii) The applicant underestimates the casual / independent use of the catchment for tramping, fishing and hunting.
- iv) The aquatic ecology report (Cameron, 2008) raises important concerns about the effects of the proposal on the sustainability of the whitebait fishery, and as such recreational whitebaiting may be threatened.

If consent is granted, new recreation experiences will be possible. These experiences will appeal to different user groups and will require specific conditions to help ensure that benefits are realised. Efforts should also be made to manage the area in a way that, as far as practicable, maintains the values that currently attract recreationists to the Mokihinui catchment.

## 5.0 References

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