



EVENT BRIEFING

Visit to the Mackenzie District, 17 April 2025

Date:	15 April 2025	Priority:	Medium
Security classification:	In Confidence	Tracking number:	0012382

Action sought		
	Action sought	Deadline
Hon James Meager Minister for the South Island	Visit Grampians Station Solar Project	17 April 2025
	Meet with representatives from Mt Cook Alpine Salmon Limited	

Contact for telephone discussion (if required)			
Name	Position	Telephone	1st contact
Karl Woodhead	General Manager Strategy, Planning and Performance, Kānoa – Regional Economic Development & Investment Unit (Kānoa)	Privacy of natural persons	
Cory Hagenaaars	South Island Lead Advisor, Kānoa	Privacy of natural persons	✓

The following departments/agencies have been consulted

Minister's office to complete:

Approved

Declined

Noted

Needs change

Seen

Overtaken by Events

See Minister's Notes

Withdrawn

Comments



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Purpose

To provide background and supporting information for your visit to the Grampians Station Solar Project, and meeting with representatives from Mt Cook Alpine Salmon Limited.

Recommendations

The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment recommend you:

- a **Note** the information in this briefing to support your visit to the Grampians Station Solar Project.
Noted
- b **Note** the information in this briefing to support your meeting with representatives from Mt Cook Alpine Salmon Limited.
Noted

Karl Woodhead
General Manager Strategy, Planning and Performance
Kānoa – Regional Economic Development & Investment Unit, MBIE

15 / 04 / 2025

Hon James Meager
Minister for the South Island

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Annexes

Annex One: Visit to Grampians Station Solar Project

Annex Two: Meeting with representatives from Mt Cook Alpine Salmon Limited

Annex One: Visit to Grampians Station Solar Project

1. On Thursday, 17 April 2025, you will meet with representatives from Grampians Station Limited (Grampians) and Helios Energy Limited (Helios) at Grampians Station, Whalesback Block, Tekapo, from 11.15am to 12.15pm.
2. You will be accompanied by Miles Anderson, National Party Member of Parliament for Waitaki. Biographies of attendees are included on page six.
3. Representatives from Grampians and Helios will brief you on their proposed solar project and how it will integrate with and support Grampians wider farming operation. You will also be given a tour of the proposed site.

Grampians Station

4. Grampians Station is a 18,293-hectare property that has been owned by the Hope family since 1914, that primarily focused on merino wool and angus beef production. Due to its altitude (the lowest point is 505 metres above sea level) the property has long winters, a short growing season, and there are limited diversification options given the harsh climate and lack of irrigation.
5. Since late 2020, Grampians has been working together with Helios to identify and validate a high quality large-scale solar project on Grampians Station. The proposed solar project would provide Grampians Commercial Information
[REDACTED]

Helios Energy Limited

6. Helios was founded in Auckland in February 2020 by Edmund Hillary Fellows, Jeff Schlichting and Tim Derrick. It is one of Aotearoa New Zealand's leading developers of large-scale solar projects and battery energy storage systems.
7. Helios's aim is to move Aotearoa New Zealand toward a zero-carbon future by creating a one-gigawatt portfolio of solar panels geographically dispersed across the country. Currently they have four other projects: the Karioi Solar Farm in between Waiouru and Ohakune, the Maniototo Plain Solar Farm in central Otago, the Ongaonga Solar Farm in the Hawke's Bay, and Greytown Solar Farm in the Wairarapa.
8. In 2024, Helios sold their 115-megawatt Edgecumbe solar project to Genesis Energy. They have also had their proposed solar farm in the Ruapehu District secured resource consent in early 2025.

Impacts of the project

Increasing demand for energy

9. Confidentiality [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
10. Confidentiality [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
11. Confidentiality [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

12. Total electricity demand across the country is projected to grow between 35.3 per cent and 82.0 per cent by 2050, with between 53.6 to 72.1 Trillion watt hours required¹. This demand is expected to be driven by the commercial and industrial sectors in the short term. From the late 2030s, electrification of transport will play a larger role with increased uptake of electric vehicles (EVs).
13. Increasing demand for energy has been putting strain on current generation methods, however one of the least costly renewable energy solutions is to increase solar generation. Subsequently, solar energy is predicted to increase from one per cent to 11.3 per cent of the energy mix¹.

Potential environmental impacts of solar

14. While in use, solar panels provide a safe way to produce clean energy, however after their approximately 25-year lifespan, solar panels need to be recycled. Some of the metals found in solar panels, such as lead and cadmium, are potentially hazardous to people and the environment as they begin to leach out of the panel at the end of the lifecycle.
15. To manage this environmental risk, Helios Energy solar lease terms include an obligation to decommission and remediate the site, returning the land to its original state at the end of the project's life.
16. There are also companies in New Zealand that can recycle the materials at the end of a solar panel's lifecycle. These companies can recycle up to 98 per cent of the aluminium, magnesium, silicon, iron, lead, cadmium, argentine, glass, fibreglass and polyurethane among other materials in solar panels².
17. It is worth discussing with Helios energy what their plan to decommission and remediate the site looks like, to ensure the safety of nearby communities and the local environment.

Similar solar projects and businesses in the South Island

Kōwhai Park

18. The Kōwhai Park Solar Farm is being developed by a partnership between Christchurch International Airport Limited (CIAL), Lightsource bp and Contact Energy. It is being built adjacent to Christchurch Airport, and when complete it will be a 170-Megawatt peak solar farm . Once constructed Kōwhai Park will have 300,000 panels across 230 hectares and will generate 290,000 Megawatt hours, equivalent to the consumption of 36,000 households³.
19. Once completed, the solar project will connect to Orion's 66 kilovolt distribution network. The electricity produced will assist the Christchurch Airport to achieve their electrification and decarbonisation goals and form the first stage of the wider Kōwhai Park Eco-system. The project is expected to cost \$300.00 million⁴ and be operational by mid-2026.

Lodestone Energy: South Island solar energy projects

20. Lodestone Energy is a 98 per cent New Zealand owned company focused on developing and operating large-scale solar farms.
21. They have nine solar farm projects around New Zealand under various stages of development. In the South Island, they are all in the Canterbury region and are in the planning stage. Their farms are Mount Somers, Clandeboye, Dunsandel and Haldon Station.

¹ Sourced from [Electricity Demand and Generation Scenarios: Results summary July 2024](#)

² Sourced from [Sustainable Solar Panel Recycling Services | Phoenix Recycling](#)

³ Sourced from [Construction to begin on one of New Zealand's largest solar farms](#)

⁴ Sourced from [Building begins on NZ's largest solar farm next to Christchurch Airport | RNZ News](#)

22. The farms in Mount Somers, Clandeboye and Dunsandel have a planned combined capacity of 115-Megawatt peak, and their construction is planned to start between this year and next. The Dunsandel farm will connect via Orion's new Norwood GXP, while the Clandeboye and Mount Somers farms will connect to the Alpine Energy and Electricity Ashburton networks.
23. The farm at Haldon Station has a planned capacity of 220-megawatt peak and stage one of its construction is set to start between this year and next. Once completed the farm will produce the energy equivalent to the consumption of around 50,000 homes⁵.
24. All four of these projects will be funded by a capital raise.

Government focus on energy

25. The Government has a goal of doubling renewable energy generation by 2035 and supporting the electrification of New Zealand's economy to enable growth and reduce emissions. These have been discussed in the briefing REQ-0012050 Local Government New Zealand Zone 5 and 6 Conference.

Renewable energy projects in the South Island included in the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 list for consideration

26. The Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 (the Act) aims to establish a permanent fast-track approvals regime for a range of infrastructure, housing, and development projects.
27. The Act includes a list of 149 projects which can apply directly for consideration. Of the 149 projects, four are solar projects in the South Island, all in the Canterbury region. A table of these is found below⁶.

Project Name	Description
Balmoral Station Solar Array	Construct and operate a solar farm of approximately 135,000 solar panels and connect and supply electricity to the national grid.
Black Point Solar Farm	Construct and operate a solar farm of approximately 380,000 solar panels and connect and supply electricity to the national grid.
Haldon Solar	Construct and operate a solar farm across approximately 320 hectares, and connect and supply electricity to the national grid.
The Point Solar Farm	Construct and operate a solar farm across approximately 670 hectares, and connect and supply electricity to the national grid.

⁵ Sourced from [Our Solar Farms](#)

⁶ Source [Projects | Fast-track website](#)

About the audience

28. Biographies of attendees are below.

	<p>Miles Anderson, National Party MP for Waitaki</p> <p>Miles Anderson is the National Party MP for Waitaki, elected in 2023. He has a background in agriculture, having run his family’s sheep and crop farm in Southburn, South Canterbury.</p> <p>Miles co-founded Animal Scanning Services in 1992 and later chaired the Federated Farmers’ Meat and Wool Industry Group (2017–2020).</p> <p>In Parliament, he serves on the Primary Production and Regulations Review Committees, focusing on rural and primary sector advocacy.</p>
	<p>Jeff Schlichting, Managing Director and Co-Founder Helios Energy</p> <p>Jeff Schlichting founded Helios Energy in February 2020 and has been the Managing Director since then.</p> <p>He has been an Edmund Hilary Fellow since August 2020. Prior to this he was an adviser for renewable energy projects in the United States of America and Africa.</p>

29. Unable to source the bios of Bob Simpson the Chairman of Grampians Station Limited and Lindsay Paton the Manager of Grampians Station Limited.

Risks and mitigations

30. No risks identified.

Communications / Media

31. Media have not been invited to attend the event.

Logistics

32. You will be met on arrival by Jeff Schlichting (Managing Director and Co-Founder of Helios Energy), Bob Simpson (Chairman of Grampians Station Limited) and Lindsay Paton (Manager of Grampians Station Limited).

33. Appropriate outdoor clothing is recommended as the visit will include a mix of driving and walking short distances on pastoral land. Due to Grampians farm’s remote alpine location, you should prepare for potentially more extreme weather.

Name	Position / organisation	Telephone
Jeff Schlichting	Managing Director and Co-Founder, Helios Energy	Privacy of [REDACTED]

Annex Two: Meeting with representatives from Mt Cook Alpine Salmon Limited

1. From 2.00pm to 3.00pm, you will meet with representatives from Mt Cook Alpine Salmon Limited (Alpine Salmon), at their offices, 4 Benmore Place, Twizel. Biographies of attendees are included below.
2. The focus of the meeting is to discuss a proposed Discovery Centre as a major tourist and educational experience for Twizel.

Background

3. Alpine Salmon farm freshwater king salmon on the three alpine lakes near Aoraki/Mount Cook, in the remote Southern Alps.
4. Alpine Salmon operate three hatcheries, six farms and two processing plants. Along with supplying the domestic market the company exports over 60 per cent of its production to markets around the world and have outlets in Australia, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, China, the United Arab Emirates and the United States of America⁷.
5. The company generates Commercial Informa million of revenue from its exports and is the largest employer in Twizel.
6. In 2021, Alpine Salmon became the first company in New Zealand to sell Salmon caviar. In 2024, they harvested around 500 kilograms and have had growing demand, particularly by Auckland restaurants⁸.
7. In October 2022, the company announced plans to develop New Zealand's first sustainable, land-based salmon farm. This \$16.70 million project received significant backing from the Ministry for Primary Industries' Sustainable Food and Fibre Futures (SFF Futures) fund, which committed \$6.70 million over six years⁹.
8. The Prime Minister, Rt Hon Christopher Luxon visited Alpine Salmon's Washdyke processing plant in July 2024.

Commercial Information, Confidentiality

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11. Commercial Information, Confidentiality
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⁷ Sourced from [Mt Cook Alpine Salmon to build innovative land-based salmon farm in Twizel region - Mt Cook Alpine Salmon - Freshwater King Salmon New Zealand](#)

⁸ Sourced from [Caviar: New Zealand's brief season under way, with all to be sold domestically - NZ Herald](#)

⁹ Sourced from [Search SFF Futures projects | NZ Government](#)



Commercial Information, Confidentiality

12. Commercial Information, Confidentiality

13. Commercial Information, Confidentiality

About the audience

14. Two people will be in attendance. Biographies of attendees are below.

	<p>David Cole, Chief Executive Officer, Mt Cook Alpine Salmon</p> <p>No Bio info available online</p>
	<p>Rick Ramsay, former Deputy Mayor of the Mackenzie District.</p> <p>Rick Ramsay stood down from his role as the Environmental Manager at Alpine Salmon in May 2024.</p> <p>Prior to this, he was Deputy Mayor and a councillor for the Mackenzie District.</p> <p>As the Deputy Mayor Rick has been a part of the Discovery Centre project from the beginning.</p>

Risks and mitigations

15. No risks identified.

Communications / Media

Media have not been invited to attend.

Logistics

16. You will be met on arrival by David Cole (Chief Executive Officer, Mt Cook Alpine Salmon) and Rick Ramsay.

Name	Position / organisation	Telephone
David Cole	Chief Executive Officer, Mt Cook Alpine Salmon	Privacy of