

**BEFORE THE HEARINGS PANEL
FOR THE PROPOSED TE TAI O POUTINI PLAN**

UNDER the Resource Management Act 1991
IN THE MATTER OF of a submission in a Plan Change under
clause 6 of Schedule 1 of the Act
BETWEEN **SKYLINE ENTERPRISES LIMITED**
Submitter

STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF GEOFF MCDONALD

Dated: 9 September 2024

Statement of evidence of Geoff McDonald

Introduction

- [1] I am the Chief Executive Officer of Skyline Enterprises Limited (**Skyline**). I have the relevant authorisation required to make this brief on behalf of Skyline.
- [2] The matters stated in this brief are true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Qualifications and experience

- [3] I joined Skyline in June 2017. Prior to this, I was Vice President and General Manager of global healthcare company GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) Australia.
- [4] Over the past 22 years I have worked in commercial roles across Australia, China, Singapore, Southeast Asia and the wider Asia-Pacific region.
- [5] I am a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors. I hold a Masters in Business Marketing from Monash University in Melbourne, as well as a Bachelor of Education and Psychology from Waikato University.

Scope of evidence

- [6] This brief will provide the corporate evidence for Skyline with respect to the Te Tai o Poutini Plan (**TTPP**), being the proposed combined District Plan for Westland, Buller, and Grey District Councils.
- [7] Skyline made a submission (S250) on the TTPP.
- [8] This evidence is prepared in advance of the hearing planned to be heard by the Commissioners on 8-9 October 2024 at 97 Cron Street, Franz Josef.
- [9] This brief will provide the basis for Skyline's corporate evidence as to its proposed development of an aerial cableway in the Franz Josef Glacier/Kā Roimata o Hinehukatere Valley (**Site**) and the interaction of

the development with the proposed TTPP. It will provide a brief history of Skyline and its operations in New Zealand and abroad, describe the aerial cableway project, the rationale for the cableway, and summarise the environmental and cultural considerations, and wider economic benefits to the region.

Brief history of Skyline

- [10] Skyline was incorporated in 1966 for the purpose of constructing and operating a gondola and restaurant on Bob's Peak in Queenstown. The company evolved from the original Skyline Tours Limited, which was incorporated in 1962.
- [11] Skyline Tours Limited built the original access road up to Bob's Peak in Queenstown and took groups of tourists up the hill in VW combi vans to enjoy the view. In 1963 works commenced to establish power and a permanent water supply for a small timber chalet measuring 40x22 ft on the peak, which opened in 1964. In the following years, afternoon tea and supper were served at the chalet, and as its popularity rose an extension was added to coincide with the establishment of the first gondola.
- [12] In 1966 a POMA gondola was purchased from Europe and installed by Skyline. A number of Skyline's shareholders (17 in total) were heavily involved in funding the venture and some in the physical construction of the gondola. It opened in November 1967 and in the first year of operation the gondola conveyed 56,000 people to the top of Bob's Peak.
- [13] In May 1971 a further extension was added to the chalet to accommodate the increasing visitors and diners, which at that stage had increased to 95,000 annually.
- [14] In 1987 the gondola was replaced with a new Doppelmayr 4 seat system. The bottom and top terminals were rebuilt, a souvenir shop was added, and the restaurant extended. By this time 200,000 guests visited each year.
- [15] The chalet and restaurant complex was then completely rebuilt and extended in 1994.

- [16] In 1997 the luge track was constructed and the lugging activities began operating. By this time, the site was receiving close to 400,000 visitors per annum.
- [17] Several internal/external refurbishments were carried out in 2004 and 2009. In 2017 a new luge lift was constructed. Recently, the gondola has been replaced with a state of the art new system utilising 10 seat cabins, and the top and base terminals have been replaced.
- [18] The above history shows how Skyline as a business has built itself from the ground up. Skyline applies this dedication to all of its development projects.
- [19] Skyline also offers similar experiences in a multinational capacity with aerial cableways and luge operations now established in Sentosa (Singapore), Mt Tremblant (Canada), Calgary (Canada), Tongyeong (South Korea), and Busan (South Korea).
- [20] Skyline is now looking to expand its operations within New Zealand. Therefore, it has proposed a new aerial cableway to be constructed at tourist-hotspot Franz Josef, enabling visitors to enjoy a unique and world-class experience by viewing the Franz Josef Glacier/Kā Roimata o Hinehukatere and surrounding environment from an aerial cable car. A concept design for the proposed aerial cableway is clearly shown in Skyline's submission S250.

Proposed development

- [21] Skyline envisions enhancing access to the Site into a world-class tourism destination that enhances both accessibility and appreciation of the area's outstanding natural landscapes. Central to this vision is the development of an aerial cableway designed to traverse the glacial valley, offering an environmentally sensitive and sustainable alternative to traditional glacier viewing methods, such as by helicopter or fixed-wing flights.
- [22] This cableway would allow visitors to experience the unique glacial and alpine environment up close, minimizing the ecological footprint typically

associated with more invasive tourism forms while providing unparalleled access to view the glacier.

- [23] The proposed Amenities Area within the TTPP would aim to provide a clear policy framework under which Skyline can apply for discretionary consent for a cableway, ensuring a public process which addresses sustainable tourism development and preservation of the natural and cultural landscape.
- [24] Unlike its existing operations in Queenstown and Rotorua, Skyline does not plan to add retail and commercial elements to the cableway experience at the Site. The proposal is not designed to replicate these experiences. Instead, it aims to provide an educational experience where visitors can enjoy the National Park from the safety and accessibility of a gondola. The gondola will enable access for all, instead of just those visitors able to pay for a helicopter ride or those fit enough to walk.
- [25] The proposed aerial cableway is likely to be restricted to the provision of basic but practical amenities that support the experience. Skyline emphasises that the proposal plans to minimise the building footprint as far as is practical and has no plans to compete with existing commercial retailers in Franz Josef township.

Design and placement

- [26] In developing the cableway concept, Skyline has engaged extensively with the community, to ensure the project positively contributes to the local needs and concerns.
- [27] The design and placement of the aerial cableway and its associated infrastructure have been carefully considered to minimize environmental impact.
- [28] The proposed cableway is at a conceptual design level and would be subject to further assessment. The concept however would begin at a base terminal located in the existing car park area of the valley, minimizing the need for new road construction and reducing the project's overall footprint. Mid and top stations would be strategically placed to

maximize scenic views while ensuring that any visual or ecological disturbances are kept to a minimum. The cableway towers and moving cabins would be constructed using low-reflectance materials and colours that blend with the natural surroundings, further reducing visual impact. The spacing of the towers would be optimized to ensure they are sited on exposed rock wherever possible, thereby minimizing the need for vegetation clearance.

- [29] Skyline is committed to a development approach that prioritizes environmental stewardship and sustainability. The construction of the aerial cableway would be limited to the immediate footprints of the station buildings and each tower, thereby protecting the biodiversity of the area. The cableway's design ensures that its built components sit lightly on the land, maintaining the dominant natural landscape and minimizing alterations to the existing environment.

Effects on visitors and the interaction with the visitor experience

- [30] Enhancing the visitor experience is a central tenet of Skyline's development philosophy. The aerial cableway is envisioned as an immersive, low-impact way for visitors to explore the glacier and its environs, providing an educational and visually compelling journey.
- [31] Skyline intends to incorporate educational opportunities throughout the cableway experience, such as interpretive displays and guided tours that explain the glacier's formation, its ongoing changes due to climate change, and the unique geological features of the region.

Cultural considerations and community engagement

- [32] Skyline is focused on minimising the environmental impact of the development. A comprehensive suite of planning provisions has been prepared which will ensure that any final proposal will include:
- (a) Sustainable building practices, the use of low-reflectance materials, and minimal vegetation clearance, aiming to keep the visual and ecological footprint as low as possible.

- (b) The route of the cableway being carefully planned to avoid sensitive areas reduce visual effects.
- (c) Minimising the extent of any indigenous vegetation clearance and ecological effects.
- (d) Cultural impact assessments and the consideration promotion of communication of mana whenua history and values to visitors.

[33] Skyline's proposal also places a strong emphasis on community engagement, as evidenced in the context of community engagement undertaken to date in Mr Greenaway's evidence.

[34] Skyline has undertaken community consultation since it first proposed the aerial cableway in 2016. Grant Hensman, a Director of Skyline, has led significant engagement efforts with the community and in particular local iwi. Notable meetings in Franz Josef township and the wider West Coast Region took place in or around February 2019, with the most recent meeting occurring with representatives of identified relevant stakeholders occurring on 15 April 2024.

Economic and community benefits

[35] Skyline's proposed aerial cableway development near Franz Josef Glacier/Kā Roimata o Hinehukatere Valley represents a major investment in the region's tourism infrastructure, aiming to enhance visitor experiences while safeguarding the area's natural and cultural heritage. The development aligns with sustainable tourism and generating significant economic benefits for the Westland District and the wider region.

[36] By introducing a new, iconic attraction that complements existing offerings, the cableway is expected to attract a larger number of tourists, encourage longer stays, and increase overall tourism spending.

[37] Skyline's approach includes integrating comprehensive natural hazard assessments and mitigation strategies into the project design, which would include procedures for evacuating visitors in the event of

avalanches, rockfalls, or other events, ensuring the highest standards of visitor safety and risk management.

- [38] Furthermore, Skyline supports the concept and development of a park-and-ride shuttle service to the base terminal be introduced. This not only reduces the need for additional parking and road construction within the National Park but also helps manage visitor numbers and the timing of cableway trips, thereby minimizing environmental impacts and ensuring a high-quality visitor experience.
- [39] Skyline's extensive experience with similar projects across various regions underscores its commitment to integrating commercial development with environmental conservation. The company's proven track record in balancing these elements will guide its approach to the aerial cableway project.
- [40] The aerial cableway is poised to deliver substantial economic and community benefits, including long-term local investment, job creation, and enhanced international recognition of the area. Skyline aims to create a world-class attraction that serves as a model for responsible tourism.
- [41] In addition to the long-term investment Skyline proposes to make, Skyline has already made significant investments in the region. For example, in addition to the studies and reports it has commissioned, Skyline installed a weather station to monitor and collect data for the aerial cable way, through a concession application.

Dated 9 September 2024

Geoff McDonald
CEO of Skyline Enterprises Limited