

29 July 2020

**Statement of Michael Wilkins Director of Greenvale Station Limited.**

1. My name is Michael Wilkins, and I am the Managing Director of Wilkins Farming Company Limited (WFC). WFC is a shareholder of, and the manager of Greenvale Station at Kingston.
2. WFC is a farming agri-business in based in northern Southland. As 5<sup>th</sup> generation New Zealand farmers, we manage land in a sustainable and responsible way for the generations who will follow. We proudly produce high quality livestock and crops and are internationally recognised for a number of the products we produce.
3. Greenvale Station is 1600 hectares in area and is located south of Kingston, with the northern most boundary adjoining the Kingston Golf Course. The Station stretches approximately 10 kms down the valley to Fairlight. The Station runs a mixture of sheep, cattle, and cropping.

**Interest in the Kingston Lifestyle Properties Ltd Submission**

4. As shown in the map on the right, the Kingston Flyer railway line (shaded blue) runs through Greenvale Station (shaded green). Adjacent to the railway line within the Queenstown Lakes District (QLD) we farm crops and livestock.
5. While I appreciate and enjoy the idea of the Kingston Flyer as a tourist venture because of its historic connection with our area, I have significant concerns about how it is operated and the fire risk it continues to create.



6. These concerns are not only based on very recent experiences from when the Flyer had trial runs, but also from incidents during previous owner's operations. It seems that the Flyer has caused many fires in the area over the last 15 years as various operators have tried to operate the train without starting fires. I recall one incident requiring multiple fire engines and a helicopter to contain and control the blaze.

7. On this occasion, which took place on the 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2020, I came upon the train and surrounding dry vegetation on fire. There were many people who had stopped to assist in

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the rapidly escalating situation therefore putting themselves at personal risk.

8. This trial was undertaken in the middle of a hot summer, the crops are dry and therefore more susceptible to fire during this time of year. The fire started by the trial train operation not only risked our dry crops but also the buildings on our land and the people who had kindly stopped to help. In addition, I was genuinely concerned that train itself would be lost due to fire.
9. Thankfully, thanks more to good luck than good management the fire was extinguished relatively safely with time.
10. After reflecting upon this incident, I decided to follow up with the owners to understand their future plans because I was concerned for the risk they were creating in the area (for all neighbouring landowners not just ourselves). During this call I expressed my concerns about the potential for fires being started on my property, and made it very clear that the field of wheat beside the railway line was nearing harvest (clearly a huge fire risk and potential financial loss for my business). I was told that there was a further test run planned for 1<sup>st</sup> February but I was assured that, to limit the risk to our crops, the train would only run as far as the boundary of QLD with Southland District (which would be well short of our crop location). I also was advised that the local Kingston fire officer would be present to ensure all precautions were being taken to prevent the risk of fires, and that they would be on hand to put out any fires because there was still risk in these very dry conditions for any fires to spread out of control.
11. After my call with the operators, I contacted Tony Wilson the local fire officer for Kingston to ensure that these procedures were actually in place. Chief Wilson had not heard from the Flyer operators and was therefore completely unaware that the train would be running on that specified day.
12. Frustratingly the trial still took place on the 1<sup>st</sup> February, and the fire brigade was not on standby as promised. I understand that the Flyer only travelled a short distance before the first fire happened which resulted in the trial ending at this point.
13. If these fires had not been contained our crops would have been damaged or destroyed, let alone the risk to our buildings and staff. Loss of the wheat crop alone could have lost us hundreds of thousands of dollars, if not millions of dollars' in the worst-case scenario. Understandably this is of considerable concern to me given the economic implications for Greenvale Station are significant. Similar fire risks could clearly occur throughout the planned route which includes the Kingston township, with the train running close to housing! What is particularly concerning is that these recent fire events occurred during a one-off test run, so understandably I am very concerned about the prospect of the train running more frequently.
14. I understand that over the last 15 years the Flyer has caused multiple fire issues in the area. Our business will face significant risks during the December to March period in particular given the dry conditions and the stage of our crop growth at this time. While it may be possible for the Flyer to run during Winter and Spring, Greenvale Station, like all the landowners in the affected area, I would need to be convinced of a

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comprehensive risk mitigation and fire management plan. Until further work has commenced in this regard, we remain strongly opposed to operation of the Flyer.

