

**BEFORE A HEARING PANEL
CONSTITUTED BY HORIZONS REGIONAL COUNCIL**

IN THE MATTER OF an application dated 21 December 2020
for regional consents by Grenadier
Limited to develop the Douglas Link
Golf Course at 765 Muhunua West
Road, Ohau

IN THE MATTER OF Part 6 of the Resource Management Act
1991

STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF DARIUS OLIVER

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Table of Contents

Section A – Introduction.....	3
Name, qualifications and experience	3
Expert Code	3
Role in Project.....	3
Scope and purpose of Evidence.....	3
Section B – Executive Summary	4
Section C – Evidence	4

Section A – Introduction

Name, qualifications and experience

1. My full name is Darius Edward Oliver
2. I am a Golf Course Designer, Author and Golf Publisher
3. I was the Course Designer of Cape Wickham Links in Tasmania, The Cliffs at Kangaroo Island in South Australia, The Farm at The Hills Golf Club in Central Otago and designer advisor at The Hills Golf Club in Central Otago, Thirteenth Beach (Beach and Creek Courses), The Dunes Golf Links (Championship and Cups Courses) and Mornington Golf Club in Victoria.

Expert Code

4. While this is not an Environment Court hearing I have met the standards in that Court for giving expert evidence.
5. I have read the Code of Conduct for expert witnesses issued as part of the Environment Court Practice Note 2014 (Part 7). I agree to comply with the Code of Conduct. I am satisfied that the matters addressed in this statement of evidence are within my expertise. I am not aware of any material facts that have either been omitted or might alter or detract from the opinions expressed in this statement of evidence.

Role in Project

6. I am the Golf Course Designer for Douglas Links, responsible initially for the routing (layout) of the golf course on the property in question. Ultimately, I will be responsible for the design of the 18 individual golf holes.

Scope and purpose of Evidence

7. To explain the routing (course layout) of the golf holes, and why key parts of the property, including the coastal margin, are necessary to achieve project objectives.

Section B – Executive Summary

8. Grenadier aim to build a coastal links golf course of a world-class standard, and to do so with minimal land disturbance in the style and character of old fashioned links like Paraparaumu Beach and the ancient courses of Scotland. The property in question has the potential to produce one of New Zealand's finest golf courses, and to attract both local golfers and overseas visitors to the Horowhenua District for years and decades to come. In order for Grenadier to build the dream links course at Ohau, it must incorporate a variety of landforms and showcase the beautiful natural scenery of the area regularly, and from all different angles. The land itself is ideal golf country, even though certain sections have been badly degraded and perhaps mistreated over a number of years by rural land use. Ultimately, if approval for the golf course is given, the finished 18 holes will appear on the landscape to have designed themselves. To the visiting golfer, it will seem as though the grasses of the area have simply been mown down, and holes/flags added for sport. The best golf courses in the world are also the most natural and, in my opinion, this particular property is one of the most naturally endowed golf sites anywhere in New Zealand, considering the research that Grenadier's project team have undertaken.

Section C – Evidence

9. Prior to establishing myself as a full-time golf course designer, I spent nearly two decades writing magazine articles and books about golf course architecture and world travel. I have personally visited in excess of 2,000 golf courses in close to 50 countries, and studied every single one of the world's elite 200-300 courses. While no two courses can ever be the same, and the beauty of golf is its inherent variety and diversity, there are certain elements and traits that all world-class golf courses share. These include natural beauty, variety of holes, originality of design and a genuine sense of place. Any golfer who travels to play the game they love experiences these elements to some degree, and is typically seeking to discover that truly memorable golf destination that is fun and challenging while at the same time both beautiful and unique. Those are the sorts of golf experiences that all golfers love, and the type of facilities that golfers will

yearn to return to. Golfers have been travelling to St. Andrews from all over the world for well over a century, and the same is true of golf courses like Pinehurst and Pebble Beach in the USA, and Gleneagles and Turnberry in Scotland. Each are unique landmarks with golf courses nestled in the natural environment.

10. New Zealand has established itself as a genuine International golf destination over the past two decades, and largely on the back of a handful of memorable modern coastal golf courses. Each of Kauri Cliffs, Cape Kidnappers, Tara Iti and Te Arai is built beside the ocean, and with sea views from most parts of the course. Although the Douglas Links aims to complement the golf at Paraparaumu Beach, more than compete with these modern courses further north, any developer attempting to bring golfers to the Horowhenua District needs to be conscious of local competition, cognisant of international golf benchmarks, and aspire to create a similarly world-class experience. Not all golf sites have world-class golf potential, but Grenadier's site for the Douglas Links certainly does.
11. Great golf course design is multifaceted and involves carefully extracting the best possible golf holes out of the natural landforms at ones disposal. The ceiling, or quality potential, of any new golf development is directly linked to the nature of the available land and the potential to work interesting landforms into fun and interesting golf holes. At Ohau, we are fortunate to have a site that features an array of lovely outlooks; from mountain and river to dunes, beaches, offshore islands and a stunning coastline. The views alone carry the potential for nice photographs, but what makes the site such an outstanding option for golf is that it ticks all of the necessary boxes to create an international calibre golf attraction. The best holes tumble across natural landforms with great diversity and with continued directional and elevational changes. No two holes are remotely the same, and the tee/fairway/green settings have an almost unprecedented level of charm and variety.
12. Compared to almost any other modern project in New Zealand, construction will be much easier as well, because the vast majority of holes are essentially already there in form and simply require subtle and

soft shaping of the sand into playable golf features. Most of the heavier earthworks needed to build the course will be on holes 5, 10, 11 and 13 through the middle of the property, where dune land that once existed was flattened by previous landowners. Our primary task through this flatter zone of the golf course, will be to restore lost undulations and to separate the golf holes with native plantings of shrubs and grasses.

13. While it would certainly be possible to build a golf course entirely within this agricultural land portion at Ohau, and to ignore the coastal margin, the quality potential would be much lower and the amount of earthworks required to build the course would be far greater. A golf course that costs significantly more to build, and is likely to be significantly less attractive to travelling golfers, is a hard sell for any provider. It would essentially become a golf course for the sake of being a golf course, rather than a genuine regional attraction that lures both domestic and international golfers to experience the underrated, and unfiltered, natural beauty of the Horowhenua District.
14. A course of that nature would not need to remove the invasive weed species on the western dunes and that area would be left in its current state of unnatural and largely monoculture species (Macrocopa trees). The Douglas Links proposal seeks to restore that part of the coastal environment and my shared vision with Grenadier is to implement the restoration activities set out by the project team to enhance ecological outcomes. That restoration is proposed to link from the west to the east of the property. I understand there will be specific evidence about the restoration activities from Dr's Boffa and Keesing and also Mr Dahm. Although the ecological and natural character aspects are outside my expertise, I have experienced the success of such initiatives elsewhere in the world. In my experience it is unusual to have one single patron of the activities such as proposed at Douglas Links, and this will add to efficiencies of decision making during course formation as opposed to a normal corporate or committee governance structure.
15. I have been fortunate to have worked on two of the most natural finished golf courses in the Southern Hemisphere, at Cape Wickham in Tasmania and The Farm near Queenstown. In each instance, my minimalistic

tendencies prevailed and we were able to build golf courses without major earthworks, and to appear as though the golf holes were “discovered” and native grasses simply mowed down for play. I have attached some before and after photographs (*see overleaf*) so the panel can see the results. The Douglas Links shares the same traits as these courses, and might have the most varied and spectacular outlooks from any golf course in the country. If permission is granted for its construction, I have no hesitation in suggesting that it should end up the simplest of New Zealand’s modern coastal courses to build, and ultimately be regarded (and ranked) as among the very best couple of golf courses in the entire country.

Dated 12 April, 2022

[D E Oliver]

Cape Wickham Links – King Island, Tasmania



Cape Wickham 7th Hole – Prior to Construction



Cape Wickham 7th Hole – Post Construction

Cape Wickham Links – King Island, Tasmania



Cape Wickham 14th Hole – Prior to Construction



Cape Wickham 14th Hole – Post Construction

The Farm at The Hills Golf Club – Otago, NZ



The Farm at The Hills 1st Green – Pre Construction



The Farm at The Hills 1st Green – Post Construction

The Farm at The Hills Golf Club – Otago, NZ



The Farm at The Hills 7th Green – Pre Construction



The Farm at The Hills 7th Green – Post Construction

The Cliffs Kangaroo Island, South Australia



The Cliffs Kangaroo Island 8th Hole – Pre Construction (2022–23)



The Cliffs Kangaroo Island 8th Hole – Post Construction (*Artist impression*)