

24 July 2025

The Panel
Fast-Track Approvals Act 2024
Environmental Protection Authority
Private Bag 63002
WELLINGTON 6140

Dear Panel

WAITAHA RIVER HYDRO GENERATION SCHEME Westpower Ltd

Development West Coast (DWC) is the economic development agency for the West Coast region with a core mission to generate sustainable employment and economic benefit for the region. DWC works alongside local business and industry and key regional stakeholders to support development, resilience, and long-term prosperity for the region.

A key part of our strategic focus is enabling infrastructure that underpins regional resilience and economic growth. The proposed Waitaha Hydro Scheme is consistent with several strategic documents that guide our work, including:

- The **West Coast Regional Energy Strategy**, which supports investment in local, renewable generation and specifically refers to the Waitaha Hydro scheme as a component of the strategy;
- The **Te Whanaketanga Te Tai Poutini West Coast 2050 Strategy**, which emphasises infrastructure investment and disaster resilience;
- The Government's **Renewable Energy Strategy**, to which this scheme contributes through clean energy generation.

The West Coast faces several energy supply challenges:

- A heavy reliance on electricity transmission into the region over the Southern Alps and from the North;
- A high risk of interruption due to rugged terrain, climate, and weather events;
- A current shortfall in local generation to meet existing and future demand. Westpower network maximum demand was 46.3 MW in 2024 which is forecast to increase to around 68.5 MW by 2034. The current generation capacity in Westpower area is 31.2 MW, of which 28.4 MW comes from hydro generation (including 7.6 MW generated by Westpower's Amethyst Hydro).¹

The Waitaha scheme directly addresses these challenges. The addition of approximately 23MW of renewable, run-of-river generation would provide sufficient electricity to cover the base load requirements of both the Westpower and Buller areas, improving energy security for the whole region. Importantly, it

¹ Westpower Asset Management Plan 2025-2035 [175e3bd4f3421229d9d3edf4f96862008cddcf25.pdf](#)

also enhances community resilience in the face of natural disasters that can isolate the region for days at a time.

The importance of local generation was demonstrated during significant severe weather events that impacted the West Coast region:

- In February 2018, Cyclone Fehi caused widespread transmission failure, leaving Hokitika and South Westland without power. Westpower restored partial electricity to Hokitika within six hours using the Amethyst Scheme—though this was not sufficient to maintain industrial operations, including Westland Milk Products and a local sawmill. Full grid restoration took three days, and the economic disruption was significant.
- Later that same month, Cyclone Gita struck, again knocking out power to many consumers. While less damaging than Fehi, it was a reminder of the region’s vulnerability, and the crucial role local generation plays in recovery and resilience.

The impacts of the above weather events would have been more severe without local generation. The Waitaha Scheme will substantially enhance this capacity.

During the 2024 winter, New Zealand’s electricity system came under pressure from record peak demand and limited generation, exposing vulnerabilities in regions like the West Coast that rely on long-distance transmission. Industry players, such as Westland Milk Products, faced elevated prices and operational risks.

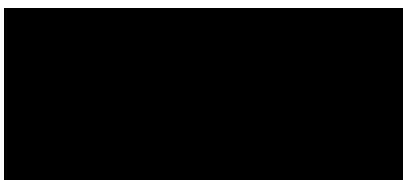
Reliable, local, and renewable power is not only essential for resilience but also for growth, and energy security is a key concern for potential investors. The Waitaha Hydro Scheme will enable:

- Expansion of existing industries;
- Attraction of new businesses to the region;
- Long-term energy price stability and reliability.

This project aligns with the Government’s climate and energy goals, contributing to the transition to a low-emissions economy, and clearly aligns with the intent of the Fast-Track Approvals Act 2024 to deliver national and regional benefit while enabling a more sustainable, self-reliant, and future-ready West Coast.

We view this project as a strategically critical piece of infrastructure that strengthens the West Coast’s economic platform and resilience and fully endorse the project.

Yours faithfully

A large black rectangular box redacting the signature of the Chief Executive.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE