
MINUTE 2 OF THE PANEL CONVENER
Post-conference decisions on panel appointment and decision timeframe
Ashbourne [FTAA-2507-1087]
19 September 2025

[1] On 16 September 2025 I held a convener conference in respect of this application. The conference was attended by the Applicant, the local authorities (Waikato Regional Council (WRC), and Matamata-Piako District Council (MPDC)), and the Ministry for the Environment (MfE). As an iwi authority and Treaty settlement entity identified in the section 18 report prepared by MfE, a Waikato-Tainui representative briefly attended but did not address the conference.

[2] The purpose of this minute is to:

- a. Summarise the views expressed by conference participants on the matters of panel composition and the timeframe required for the expert panel to deliver its decision; and
- b. Confirm my decisions on those two matters.

[3] In advance of the conference, I received written memoranda from the Applicant, WRC and MPDC.

[4] In relation to expert panel composition and expertise, the participants' views were aligned, as follows:

- a. The Applicant proposed a 4 member panel, with expertise in cultural matters, planning and infrastructure engineering, as well as a chair;

- b. The Regional Council considered that three experts in planning, cultural matters and an independent chair would be appropriate;
- c. MPDC gave no view on panel number, but sought appointment of an experienced chair, at least one member with expertise in te ao Māori and others with civil engineering/groundwater/land development expertise.

[5] In relation to the decision timeframe:

- a. The Applicant proposed 50 working days following receipt of comments (assuming a 22 September start date for the Panel), noting that it has some contractual pressures at the end of February 2026 that make it highly desirable for the decision to issue before then. Its proposal would see a final decision released at the end of January 2026;
- b. The Applicant accepted that it would need to work quickly and proactively to resolve the outstanding issues, particularly those identified by the MPDC in its memorandum, in order to meet that proposed timeframe;
- c. The WRC noted helpful engagement with the Applicant to date, with no major unresolved issues, though there is a difference of view about whether further consents need to be applied for. The Regional Council expressed no view on the decision timeframe;
- d. MPDC listed a range of issues that would need to be resolved (including the potential need for iterative drafting and refining of conditions) but expressed confidence that resolution was possible, potentially with the assistance of facilitated discussions. As a result, the Council considered that a slightly longer period of 60-65 working days might be more appropriate to allow time for those things to occur. The Council also noted that it expected a large volume of comments to be made on the

application.

[6] I record my thanks to all conference participants for their attendance and thoughtful participation.

Decisions

[7] I am appointing the following persons to the Expert Panel to determine the substantive application lodged for the Ashbourne Project:

- a) Sue Simons (chair);
- b) Richard Blakey (local authority nominee);
- c) Dr Nigel Mark-Brown.

[8] I am satisfied that, collectively, the Expert Panel will hold appropriate expertise and experience in relation to law, planning & policy, master planned development, te ao Māori and Māori development, civil engineering and stormwater management.

[9] There are other specialist technical disciplines that the Expert Panel may wish to engage to assist them in their task, and they will no doubt turn their minds to those matters once their work commences.

[10] The date on which the Expert Panel will commence work is **29 September 2025**.

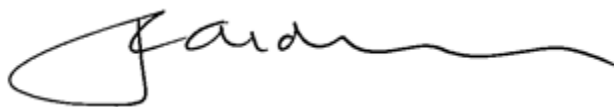
[11] I recommend that the Applicant continue its constructive engagement with the Councils in particular to identify or narrow issues in contention and confer on conditions, and to make arrangements for an Expert Panel briefing session and a site visit, ideally both to be undertaken prior to the invitation to comment being issued (which will be due on 13 October 2025).

[12] I consider that a timeframe of **60 working days** following the receipt of invited comments is appropriate. The Expert Panel decision will be due on **25 February 2026**, subject to the application being suspended for any of the reasons outlined in section 60 of the Act, and to comments on the application being invited on 13 October 2025.

[13] In setting this timeframe I have had regard to the following relevant matters:

- a) The nature of the application and the range of activities for which approval is sought, and the high number of technical documents filed in support of the main AEE (some 69 appendices);
- b) The participants' views that the application does not raise any novel issues for a master planned, mixed use development proposal of this nature and is not overly complex;
- c) The possibility that some mechanism to resolve focused issues, or to workshop conditions, may need to be provided for by the Expert Panel;
- d) The impact of the end of year holiday period, which may limit the Panel's ability to finalise a draft decision and draft conditions for circulation, as well as the ability of other participants to review and comment on those draft documents at that time.

[14] In terms of next steps, the participants will be contacted by the Ashbourne Expert Panel upon commencement.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Caldwell', with a long, flowing horizontal line extending to the right.

Jennifer Caldwell

Associate Panel Convener for the purpose of the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024