

Fast Track Approvals Act 2024

Contact Southland Wind Farm FTAA -2508- 1095

Environment Southland Response to Panel Convenor

9 October 2025

Environment Southland is grateful for the opportunity to provide a written response to the matters raised in the minute of 3 October 2025.

Environment Southland (Southland Regional Council) responds as follows:

Background:

Environment Southland has been involved in extensive and regular dialogue with Contact Energy and the EPA regarding the previous (declined) application that was made under the COVID-19 fast-track regime. That included a site visit for key technical staff involved in Environment Southland's inputs.

Environment Southland notes that the applicant has refined a number of important aspects from the previous proposal; while also noting that the overall nature and scale of the application, being up to 55 turbines up to 220 metres high, remains largely unchanged.

The applicant has engaged with Environment Southland, including providing advance visibility of the draft consent conditions included in the current substantive application, prior to lodgement.

Approvals Sought:

The application seeks the regional consents under the relevant regional planning documents/ framework as outlined in Table 2 (Pages 35-37) of the application document. For brevity, this table is not included here.

Complexity:

As noted above, Environment Southland was actively involved in the previous application under the COVID-19 fast-track framework. As articulated in Environment Southland's previous feedback in relation to the previous application referred to above, Environment Southland remains broadly supportive of the application. This is based on its potential to add significant renewable energy generation capacity of circa 1200 MWh / 150,000 household equivalents to Southland and New Zealand's renewable energy resources, which can also be a major enabler for socio-economic benefits for the Southland region.

It is noted also that wind farms are by no means unusual in the New Zealand context, and that a number have been considered under previous EPA processes and standard track consenting processes around the country. For local context, Environment Southland has recently dealt with consents for a medium scale wind

farm approximately 20kms north of the site of this application (the construction of which is now nearing completion). Another medium scale wind farm has been operational in Northern Southland for over 20 years, and there is a smaller scale wind farm near Bluff.

However, Environment Southland also notes that the Contact Wind Farm is of a significant scale located in an elevated position. The sites of the application cover a large physical area (circa 5700 hectares in multiple ownerships) and include some areas of high ecological values, particularly in relation to wetlands and habitat of flora and fauna such as bats.

Environment Southland considers that key issues requiring close scrutiny by the decision-making panel are:

- The effects of both construction and ongoing activities on the wetland complex contained within the sites of the application. While it is noted that the applicant has significantly refined its understanding of this complex since the previous application, it is considered that the effects on the wetland complex and wetland values still require careful assessment.
- The effects of the proposed bulk earthworks on ecological values, waterbodies and critical source areas. Environment Southland recognises that significant amounts of earthworks are required for large scale wind farms to provide for turbine foundation excavation, access roading construction and other ancillary activities. However, Environment Southland considers that it is important that the effects of these activities and the associated repositioning of large amounts of spoil material are given appropriate consideration. It is noted that again the applicant has further refined its supporting information on these aspects since the previous application.
- The efficacy of the applicant's proposed biodiversity offsetting package. Environment Southland is not opposed to the concept of biodiversity offsetting in instances where a proposal will have unavoidable effects on ecological values. Environment Southland considers that a robust biodiversity offsetting package has potential to provide greater protection for some ecologically important areas of the sites of the application than currently exists. It is further noted that the proposed offsetting package will enhance an existing wetland that Contact has acquired to the north of the site (albeit this wetland currently has lesser values than those where the construction work is proposed). It will also provide a funding stream for other ecological and community programmes in the Catlins area. Overall, Environment Southland considers this is an important element that requires consideration by persons with an appropriate level of ecological expertise.

- The effects of the proposed activities on cultural values. Environment Southland has been liaising closely with Te Ao Marama during this and the previous process, including a combined site visit.

Therefore, in terms of Schedule 1 Clause 2 of the minute, Environment Southland considers these are the key elements of regional council evidentiary complexity (Sch 1, Clause 2(d)) and factual complexity (Sch 1, Clause 2(e)).

Related to these points, while Environment Southland appreciates that decision about who to invite to make comment on the application is for the yet to be appointed panel, Environment Southland wishes to signal that the West Catlins Preservation Society and some individual landowners/ occupiers not part of this society have previously expressed strong concerns about the proposed activities. Environment Southland considers that it may be appropriate for the panel to allow parties to make comment under Section 53 of the Fast Track Approvals Act 2024, in order to ensure that the panel understands the local community perspectives, while recognising this is not part of this current discussion.

Timeframe for a decision:

Environment Southland notes the purpose of the FTAA and wishes to ensure that it is responsive to the panel's timeframes.

As referred to above, Environment Southland has also had considerable advance visibility around this proposal from the previous EPA fast-track process under the previous legislation, and ongoing dialogue.

However, delegations to relevant Environment Southland staff require that Environment Southland's elected representatives have input to Environment Southland's key substantive comments and comments on conditions. This process requires some additional time to organise (but has not created any issues with timeframe non-compliance for current or previous fast-track processes Environment Southland has been involved with to date).

Furthermore, relative to some other councils around the country, Environment Southland's internal resources to participate in fast-track processes are small, at circa 1 FTE equivalent. Environment Southland will make every effort to ensure that this does not cause delays for any party. Environment Southland does not anticipate any issue with the timeframe to provide substantive comments under section 54 of the FTAA. However, given the complexity of the project and related complexity of conditions, Environment Southland suggests that 10 working days are provided to provide comments on conditions under section 70 of the FTAA.

Panel Membership- suggestions on panel composition:

Noting Clause 7 of Schedule 3 of the FTAA, Environment Southland suggests that the panel be made up of:

- an experienced Making Good Decisions Accredited Chair with wind farm experience.
- A panel member with specialist expertise to ensure that tangata whenua perspectives are given appropriate recognition and consideration during decision making (noting that the Panel Convener will already be aware of and providing for Section 7(1)(b) of Schedule 3)
- a commissioner with major infrastructure and engineering expertise to consider the bulk earthworks elements.
- a commissioner with ecological expertise

In terms of Sch 1, Clause 4 (b) of the minute, Environment Southland does not consider that there are matters warranting the appointment of more than 4 panel members.

It is noted that the minute makes it clear (Clause 8) that the Panel Convenor is not seeking nominations via this Convenor's session process.

Procedural requirements

Environment Southland is willing to engage with the Panel as necessary to advance the progress of the application, including participating in expert conferencing, mediation or a hearing process if required.

Attendance at Convenor's Conference – 15 October 2025 via Teams

Environment Southland intends to be attend this Teams session, with attendees to be:

- **Lacey Bragg, Consents Manager, and**
- **Bruce Halligan, Strategic Regulatory Advisor**