

File ref: BRF-00535 / FTAA-2511-1128

18 March 2026

Dr Keith Turner, CNZM
Clutha Pumped Hydro Consortium Limited (the applicant)
Email: s 9(2)(a)

c/- Ben Farrell
Cue Environmental Limited (the agent)
Email: s 9(2)(a)

Dear Dr Turner,

Section 28 – Notice of Decisions on the referral application for the Clutha Pumped Hydro project under the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024

This notice of decisions is for a referral application received from Clutha Pumped Hydro Consortium Limited (the applicant) for the Clutha Pumped Hydro project (the project) under the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 (the Act).

Project details

The project is to construct and operate a large-scale pumped hydro energy scheme at Lake Onslow in Central Otago. The project would involve pumping water from the Mata-au/Clutha River via a tunnel to an enlarged Lake Onslow at a higher elevation and water would be released back down the tunnel to generate electricity when required.

The project would generate up to 1,000 megawatts (MW) of electricity, and if run for approximately six months that would produce around 4,000 gigawatt-hours (GWh) of electricity. The project would also provide firming for intermittent renewables and electricity system supports.

The project may include:

- a. creating an upper reservoir by enlarging Lake Onslow to store water for energy generation when required, with a new minimum operating level of 695 mRL (metres reduced level, a measure of elevation relative to sea level) and a maximum operating level of 769 mRL – the current lake level is approximately 684mRL
- b. inundating approximately 7,100 hectares of land
- c. constructing a new dam on the Te Awa Makarara/Teviot River to increase the size and storage capacity of Lake Onslow
- d. building structures to harvest water from the Mata-au/Clutha River and return water to the river

- e. constructing a buffer reservoir adjacent to the Mata-au/Clutha River to store water for pumping
- f. installing intake and outlet structures within Lake Onslow to transfer water between Lake Onslow and the buffer reservoir
- g. installing intake and outlet structures within the buffer reservoir to connect water between the buffer reservoir and the powerhouse
- h. constructing underground tunnels (waterways) to transfer water between the buffer reservoir and the powerhouse, and between the powerhouse and Lake Onslow
- i. constructing an underground powerhouse to connect the upper and lower water sources, generate electricity as water flows from Lake Onslow to the buffer reservoir and the Mata-au/Clutha River, and pump water back to Lake Onslow
- j. test drilling, borrow pits for construction materials, and deposition areas for excavated materials
- k. providing supporting infrastructure for construction and operation including: roading; access, safety and cable tunnels; rock crushing; hazardous goods storage including for fuel and explosives; concrete plant; construction equipment; accommodation; transmission lines; high voltage power, and communication systems; relocation of existing infrastructure as required; and water supply systems.

The project area encompasses multiple sites covering an area of approximately 290 square kilometres surrounding Lake Onslow in the Central Otago District of the Otago Region, including the Mata-au/Clutha River Valley, the Teviot Valley, and their associated river margins. A map illustrating the indicative project area is attached in Appendix 2 of this letter.

The applicant has identified the following approvals as being required under the fast-track approvals process to authorise the project:

- a. resource consents under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) as described in section 42(4)(a) of the Act, with the potential to include prohibited activities (to be confirmed by the applicant with the substantive application following further technical assessments)
- b. concessions under the Conservation Act 1987 as described in section 42(4)(e) of the Act
- c. a land exchange as described in section 42(4)(f) of the Act – the indicative area of the land exchange is illustrated in Appendix 3 of this letter
- d. an approval or a dispensation that would otherwise be applied for under regulation 42 or 43 of the Freshwater Fisheries Regulations 1983 in respect of a complex freshwater fisheries activity as described in section 42(4)(j) of the Act
- e. approvals under the Reserves Act 1977 as described in section 42(4)(e) of the Act
- f. wildlife approvals under the Wildlife Act 1953 as described in section 42(4)(h) of the Act
- g. archaeological authorities under the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014 as described in section 42(4)(i) of the Act
- h. an amendment to or revocation of a conservation covenant as described in section 42(4)(g) of the Act.

Statutory framework for referral applications

The purpose of the Act is to facilitate the delivery of infrastructure and development projects with significant regional or national benefits.

The project can only be accepted if the Minister is satisfied the criteria in section 22 is met, which includes being satisfied the project is an infrastructure or development project that would have significant regional or national benefits and referring the project to the fast-track approvals process would facilitate the project, including by enabling it to be processed in a more timely and cost effective way than under normal processes, and is unlikely to materially affect the efficient operation of the fast-track approvals process.

Under section 21(3) of the Act, the Minister must decline a referral application if:

- the Minister is satisfied that the project does not meet the criteria in section 22
- the Minister is satisfied that the project involves an ineligible activity
- the Minister considers they do not have adequate information to inform the decision.

Additionally, the Minister has the discretion to decline a referral application for any other reason, even if the project meets the criteria outlined in section 22 of the Act.

Decision on referral application

The Minister has decided to accept the referral application under section 21(1)(c) and refer the whole project to the fast-track approvals process under section 26(2)(a). The Minister is satisfied that the project meets the criteria in section 22 of the Act, for the reasons detailed below.

Reasons for accepting referral application

The Minister is satisfied the project:

- a. is an infrastructure or development project that would have significant regional or national benefits; and
- b. referring the project to the fast-track approvals process –
 - i. would facilitate the project, including by enabling it to be processed in a more timely and cost-effective way than under normal processes; and
 - ii. is unlikely to materially affect the efficient operation of the fast-track approvals process.

Specifically, the Minister is satisfied the project meets the criteria in section 22 of the Act because:

- a. it is an **infrastructure project** that would have **significant regional and national benefits** [section 22(1)(a)] as it:
 - i. will deliver new nationally significant infrastructure [section 22(2)(a)(ii)] by constructing and operating a large scale pumped hydro scheme at Lake Onslow that would materially increase New Zealand’s electricity storage and generation capacity. In particular, the enlarged Lake Onslow would be capable of storing sufficient water to enable generation of up to 1,000 megawatts (MW) for approximately six months, producing around 4,000 gigawatt hours (GWh) of electricity, and would represent New Zealand’s largest hydro development.

- ii. will address significant environmental issues [section 22(2)(a)(ix)] and support climate change mitigation [section 22(2)(a)(vii)] through the creation of new renewable energy generation, contributing to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions across the electricity system.
- b. referring the project would facilitate its delivery [section 22(1)(b)(i)] by allowing multiple required approvals under specified Acts to be considered collectively through the fast-track approvals process, resulting in a more timely and cost-effective process than under normal processes.
- c. referring the project is unlikely to materially affect the efficient operation of the fast-track approvals process [section 22(1)(b)(ii)] because the applicant is sufficiently advanced and supported by the necessary expertise, financial resources, and prior feasibility work.

The Minister is satisfied there is no reason they must decline the project under section 21(3) of the Act. The Minister is also satisfied there is no reason to decline the project under section 21(4) or (5) of the Act.

Specified matters for an accepted referral application

1. Clutha Pumped Hydro Consortium Limited, who lodged the referral application, as the person who is authorised to lodge a substantive application for the project under section 27(2) of the Act.
2. In relation to a substantive application for the project, pursuant to section 27(3)(b)(iii), the panel must invite comments from the following groups, in addition to those specified in section 53:
 - a. Transpower New Zealand Limited
 - b. Aukaha
 - c. Te Ao Mārama Incorporated.
3. Under section 27(3)(c)(i) of the Act, a deadline of four years from the date of issue of this letter applies for lodging the land exchange application.

Other matters

Under section 16(2)(c) of the Act, the Minister directs any panel that considers a substantive application for the project to comply with the following requirements:

- a. to have particular regard to the views of Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu relating to its association with Mata-au/Clutha River as set out in the deed of recognition for Mata-au (Clutha River), Otago (refer to Attachment 12.88B of the deed of recognition, as provided for under the Ngāi Tahu Claims Settlement Act 1998).

Under section 28 of the Act, the Ministry for the Environment must also give written notice of decisions made by the Minister on an accepted referral application to the parties specified in Appendix 1 of this letter.

If you have any queries about this notice of decisions, please email referral@fasttrack.govt.nz and include the name of the lead contact – Ashiley Sycamore. If you have any queries about the substantive process, please email contact@fasttrack.govt.nz, or phone 0800 FASTRK (0800 225 537).

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S Frame', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Stephanie Frame

Manager – Fast-track Operations

Appendix 1: Section 28 – Notice of Minister’s decision on accepted referral application

Section 28(1)(a) – The applicant	Clutha Pumped Hydro Consortium Limited
Section 28(1)(ii) – Anyone invited to comment on the application	
<i>Relevant local authorities</i>	Central Otago District Council Otago Regional Council
<i>Relevant portfolio Ministers</i>	Minister for the Environment Minister of Conservation Minister for Energy Minister of Climate Change Minister for Land Information Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage
<i>Relevant administering agencies</i>	Ministry for the Environment Department of Conservation Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga
<i>The Māori groups under s17(d)</i>	Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu Te Rūnanga o Moeraki Kāti Huirapa Rūnaka ki Puketeraki Te Rūnanga o Ōtākou Hokonui Rūnanga Waihōpai Rūnaka Te Rūnanga o Awarua Te Rūnanga o Ōraka-Aparima Aukaha Te Ao Mārama Incorporated
<i>Any other persons under s17(5)</i>	Chief Executive of Land Information New Zealand (LINZ) Chief Executive of Transpower New Zealand Limited Chief Executive of Contact Energy Limited Chief Executive of Aurora Energy Chief Executive of Pioneer Energy Renewables Minister for Regional Development Minister for Economic Growth Minister for the South Island
Section 28(2) – Other parties for an accepted referral application	
<i>The Panel Convener</i>	Including all the information received by the Minister as required by section 28(4).
<i>Any iwi authorities or Treaty settlement entities (other than those that must be notified as identified above) that the Minister considers have an interest in the matter</i>	No additional iwi authorities or Treaty settlement entities have been identified beyond those listed above.
<i>Environmental Protection Authority (EPA)</i>	Including all the information received by the Minister as required by section 28(4).
<i>Relevant administering agencies</i>	As identified above.

Appendix 2: Indicative project area



