

To the Fast-track Expert Panel

I write as a resident of Pāremoremo of 21 years to strongly oppose the proposed increase in Auckland Prison's designated capacity from 681 prisoners to approximately 1,220 under the Fast-track Approvals Act.

My opposition is not based on opposition to the prison itself. For more than two decades I have lived alongside Auckland Prison and accepted its role within our community. However, I do not consent to an almost 80% increase in the prison population, particularly through a fast-track process that has failed to provide meaningful consultation with the many people and organisations who will be directly affected.

The existing prison and its designation have formed the basis upon which residents have chosen to live, invest, raise families and build businesses in Pāremoremo. A proposal of this magnitude is not a minor operational adjustment. It fundamentally alters the nature, scale and impact of the prison on the surrounding community.

An increase of this size has implications that extend well beyond the prison boundary, including:

- Increased traffic movements on Pāremoremo Road.
- Greater demand on emergency services, policing and infrastructure.
- Increased staff numbers and associated transport impacts.
- Community safety perceptions.
- Effects on neighbouring rural properties and lifestyle blocks.
- Environmental impacts and pressure on local infrastructure.
- The cumulative effect of nearly doubling the operational scale of the prison.

These are matters that deserve proper public scrutiny, not an expedited process.

I am particularly concerned that the Fast-track process appears to have significantly limited genuine public engagement. While notification may satisfy legislative requirements, it is not the same as meaningful consultation. Residents who have lived alongside this facility for decades should have the opportunity to fully understand, question and respond to a proposal of this significance before decisions are made.

This proposal raises an important principle.

Fast-tracking infrastructure should not come at the expense of democratic participation. The purpose of planning legislation is to balance national interests with the rights of affected communities. In this instance, I do not believe that balance has been achieved.

I also question whether the broader cumulative impacts have been adequately assessed. Increasing capacity by almost 540 additional prisoners is effectively creating a substantially larger correctional facility than the one originally established in Pāremoremo. The surrounding community should not simply be expected to absorb those impacts without comprehensive assessment and genuine engagement.

The Department of Corrections has stated that this proposal is required because of increasing prisoner numbers. However, the burden of that policy decision should not fall solely upon one community without a transparent assessment of alternatives and without allowing residents a meaningful voice.

I am also concerned about the precedent this proposal sets. If a public facility can be approved for one scale of operation and, decades later, be expanded by almost 80% through a fast-track process with limited consultation, it undermines public confidence in the planning system itself. Communities rely on the certainty that major developments are subject to robust scrutiny and that significant changes will involve those most affected. If this proposal proceeds, it raises the question of what protections remain for communities when the scale of an existing development can be fundamentally altered without comprehensive public participation.

Furthermore, the effects extend beyond current residents. Future generations who choose to live, work and invest in Pāremoremo will inherit the consequences of today's decision. Planning decisions of this magnitude should not be assessed solely on operational need, but on their long-term social, environmental and infrastructure impacts over decades. Fast-tracking a decision with such enduring consequences risks compromising the very principles of sustainable planning that New Zealand's planning framework is intended to uphold.

I also respectfully ask the Expert Panel to consider several important questions before determining this application.

Why has the surrounding community not been afforded a full consultation process when this proposal represents an almost 80%

increase in prisoner capacity and fundamentally changes the scale of the prison that residents have lived alongside for decades?

What independent assessment has been undertaken of the cumulative impacts on traffic, road safety, emergency services, policing, infrastructure, wastewater, environmental effects and community wellbeing? These matters affect not only Corrections but every resident and business within the wider Pāremoremo community.

What alternative options have been explored before seeking to significantly increase the prison population at this site? It is reasonable to expect that options such as expanding capacity elsewhere, investing in alternative facilities, or distributing future growth across the corrections network have been fully considered before placing such a substantial additional burden on one community.

How has the Expert Panel considered the legitimate expectations of residents who have purchased homes, invested in businesses and built their lives in Pāremoremo based on the prison operating at its long-established designated capacity? A nearly 80% increase is not a continuation of the existing operation—it represents a fundamental change to the nature and intensity of that operation.

Finally, what precedent will this decision establish? If an existing public facility can almost double its operational capacity through a fast-track process with limited public engagement, what confidence can communities have that future significant changes to major public infrastructure will be subject to genuine consultation and appropriate scrutiny?

These are not merely questions on behalf of myself. They go to the heart of natural justice, sound planning, and maintaining public confidence in New Zealand's planning and consultation processes.

Recommendation

Should the Expert Panel be minded not to decline the application outright, I respectfully recommend that the application be referred back to the Department of Corrections with directions to undertake a comprehensive and transparent consultation process before any decision is made.

That process should include, but not be limited to:

- Consultation with all affected residents and property owners within Pāremoremo and neighbouring communities.

- Consultation with Auckland Council and relevant infrastructure providers.
- Meaningful engagement with mana whenua.
- Independent assessments of the cumulative impacts on transport, emergency services, policing, community safety, environmental effects, wastewater, stormwater and public infrastructure.
- A detailed assessment of alternative options and locations capable of meeting Corrections' operational requirements without placing a disproportionate burden on one community.
- Publication of all supporting technical reports to enable informed public participation.
- An assessment of the long-term social, economic and environmental impacts of increasing the prison population by almost 80%, including the cumulative effects over future decades.

Only once these matters have been properly assessed, publicly consulted upon, and independently evaluated should any decision be made regarding a proposal of this magnitude.

This recommendation is not intended to frustrate the operational needs of the Department of Corrections. Rather, it seeks to ensure that any decision is evidence-based, transparent, proportionate and consistent with the principles of natural justice and good planning that New Zealanders rightly expect.

The Fast-track process should never become a mechanism by which communities lose their voice. Projects of national importance still require public confidence, and public confidence can only be achieved through transparency, robust evidence and genuine consultation with those who will live with the consequences long after this decision is made.

For these reasons I respectfully request that the Expert Panel decline the application in its current form or, at the very least, require a full consultation process that properly engages with residents, community groups, mana whenua, local government and all affected stakeholders before any decision is made.

Pāremoremo has been my home for 21 years.

I accepted living beside the prison that existed.

I do not accept almost doubling its capacity without proper consultation, proper scrutiny, and proper consideration of the long-term impacts on our community.

Please confirm receipt of my submission on opposition.

Yours faithfully

Catherine Cooke and family
Pāremoremo Resident (21 years)