
MINUTE OF THE PANEL CONVENER

Seeking applicant views on common panel

FTAA – 2508 - 1097

(20 November 2025)

[1] This Minute is released for the purpose of case management.

[2] I am considering appointing a common panel to decide applications for solar farms lodged by Lodestone Energy Ltd (Lodestone) and Far North Solar Farm Ltd.

[3] The solar farms would be located on adjacent properties. When read together, the applications raise issues that may be best decided by a common panel. These include:

- (a) Whether Lodestone can connect to the National Grid transmission line network and implement its consent (if granted).
 - (i) if Lodestone is granted subject to a condition that defers its exercise until access to the transmission lines is secured, how should the cumulative effects of Lodestone's consent be assessed?¹
- (b) The actual and potential effects of the solar farms, including -
 - (i) the risk of avifauna collision and the management of the risk;

¹ Note: The issue of Lodestone's ability to connect to the National Grid was raised by Point Solar Farm and has a particular resonance around cumulative effects.

- (ii) the properties' ecological values and change in those values and the response to that change;
- (iii) the likelihood and management of habitat displacement for Threatened and At-Risk species including lizards, avifauna and invertebrates;
- (iv) the values of, and effects on, the Outstanding Natural Landscape; and
- (v) the values associated with taonga, including the nohoanga returned under the settlement agreement with the iwi authorities.

[4] There are risks in commencing these two applications around the same time, particularly if two different panels were to make different findings about the same environment and planning context. The opportunity for the second-in-time decision to consider findings made on the other is restricted. Under the RMA this would be managed by hearing the applications consecutively, but this approach is not indicated under s 10 FTAA.

[5] In light of this, I am considering appointing a common panel (except for the resource management consultants).

[6] I would stagger the commencement of each panel and the release dates for their decisions. I bear in mind that a suspension of an application would alter the timeframe for the release, presenting potential risks for panel time management. Haldon would commence on 1 December 2025. The Point Solar Farm would commence on or after 15 December 2025, with the latter date being indicative only.

[7] While common findings of fact and opinion are anticipated, the adverse impact of each application will be separately considered.

[8] This process will likely be more efficient, consistent, and cost-effective for the commentators. Both iwi authorities and local authorities have indicated that

their advisors will be engaged to provide comment on both applications.

[9] There are efficiencies gained for the panel because it is likely that common findings of fact and opinion can be made for both applications. However, there are also additional demands on the panel around case management. I am also mindful of the Act's requirements regarding decision-making, particularly those set out in Schedule 5 and sections 81 and 85.

[10] The advantage for the applicants is around managing risk that arises around differences in fact findings by two different panels.

[11] An application of this type is not complex.² A timeframe of 60 working days (after receipt of the applicant's response to comments) seems reasonable. If a common panel is appointed, I may extend this by an indicative 20 working days per application. No decision on time frame has been made, and I am not seeking a response about the same.

[12] The Point Solar Farm supports a common panel being appointed. I now seek Haldon's views on this proposal.

Direction

[13] Haldon Solar Farm is to file a memorandum by **Friday 21 November 2025** responding to this Minute indicating, with reasons, whether it supports the appointment of a common panel to decide the two solar panel farm applications.



Jane Borthwick
Panel convener for the purpose of the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024

² Complexity does arise in relation to management of the approvals through conditions and management plans. I anticipate substantial work is required here.