

BEFORE THE FAST-TRACK PANEL CONVENER

IN THE MATTER of the Fast-Track Approvals
Act 2024 (FTAA)

AND

IN THE MATTER of an application by Nova
Energy Limited under
section 42 of the FTAA for
the construction of a solar
farm

APPLICATION NO. FTAA-2604-1217

**Mackenzie District Council Response
Panel Convener Minute 3**

Dated: 23 July 2026

Introduction

- 1 The purpose of this paper is to provide Mackenzie District Council's (MDC's) response as directed by Minute 3 of the Panel Convener (dated 15 July 2026).

Appointment of Panel Members

- 2 The substantive application by Nova Energy Limited (Nova) is the third of up to five FTAA applications relating to the establishment of solar farms in the Mackenzie District, and more particularly within Te Manahuna/the Mackenzie Basin ONL.

- 3 The MDC previously nominated Mr Stephen Brown (Landscape Architect) to the FTAA Expert Panel. The MDC seeks that Mr Brown be reappointed to the Expert Panel for this Nova application.
- 4 Otherwise, the MDC sees merit in having continuity of Expert Panel members (where possible) from those convened to hear the Lodestone Energy and Far North Solar FTAA applications. These Panels contained specialist landscape, ecological and cultural expertise. For the avoidance of doubt, MDC considers that specialist landscape and ecological expertise would be required to decide the Nova application under the FTAA.

Timing of Panel Decision

- 5 The MDC understands that the timeframes are largely set out in the Fast Track Approvals Act 2024 (FTAA). The draft dates set out in Schedule 2 to Minute 3 are acceptable to the MDC.
- 6 It should be noted that previous FTAA experience is such that these timeframes largely depend on any requests for additional information and the ability of the Applicant to supply any such additional information. This is particularly so where ecological assessment is required, which can be restricted in terms of the time of year that it should ideally be undertaken.
- 7 A completed time schedule is set out below for further discussion at the Conference.

Task	Working days	Date
Panel commencement	N/A	31 August 2026
Invite comment from relevant parties	10 W/D later	14 September 2026
Comments close (ss 53 & 54)	20 W/D later	12 October 2026
Comments close for applicants (s 55)	5 W/D later	19 October 2026
Any other procedural steps, evaluation and decision writing	10 W/D	3 November 2026*
Draft decision is to approve		
Draft decision and conditions to Ministers (s 72)	5 W/D	10 November 2026

Response from Ministers. (s 72)	10 W/D later	24 November 2026
Applicant response to Ministers comments (if any)	5 W/D later	1 December 2026
Draft conditions and decision to participants (s 70(1))	5 W/D	8 December 2026
Participant comments on draft conditions (s 70(2))	5 W/D later	15 December 2026
Applicant response to participants on conditions (s 70(4))	5 W/D later	12 January 2027**
If not agreed, procedural step in relation to draft conditions.	10 W/D	26 January 2027
Evaluate and finalise decision	5 W/D later	2 February 2027
Decision release	5 W/D later	9 February 2027

* Includes Labour Day 26 October 2026.

** Includes RMA shutdown period 20 December to 10 January (inclusive)

Engagement

- 8 The Applicant has been pro-active in engaging with Council on this project, with an initial meeting with Council representatives occurring some time ago during the initial stages of the project.
- 9 The Applicant then provided MDC copies of some of the application and supporting technical assessment and management plans prior to lodgement of the substantive application for comment.
- 10 Engagement post lodgement has been limited, but will likely increase once the Council is in receipt of its technical peer reviews.

Technical Expertise

- 11 As with the two previous FTAA solar projects within the Mackenzie District, the MDC will be relying on the expertise of Environment Canterbury (ECan) in regard to the technical review and comment all ecological aspects of the proposal (vegetation, avifauna, lizard and invertebrates).
- 12 The MDC has engaged an external planning consultant and other technical expert advisors in relation to FTAA applications. The MDC does not have

sufficient 'in-house' resource to respond to an application of this scale and significance.

- 13 It should be noted that this application is located on State Highway 8 (SH8), which is controlled by the New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA). On that basis the MDC does not have jurisdiction over the transportation related aspects of this proposal. NZTA should be involved in terms of providing expert and technical comment on all access and transportation related aspects as they relate directly to the State Highway network.
- 14 The Mackenzie District Council can advise that Nick Boyes (Core Planning & Property Ltd) and Ben Espie (Vivian Espie Ltd), have been engaged to undertake planning and landscape peer review of the application.

Principle Issues in Contention

- 15 The substantive application document includes an assessment of the environmental effects of the project; as well as a description of the management and monitoring of the actual and potential environmental effects. That assessment is undertaken in accordance with the relevant requirements of Schedule 5 (clause 5(4), clause 6 and clause 7) of the FTAA.
- 16 The principle issues in contention relating to a solar farm proposal within this part of the Mackenzie District are now well understood given the recent experience of the FTAA process relating to the Lodestone and Far North applications. These include:
 - (a) Landscape, Visual Amenity and Natural Character (including Glint and Glare)
 - (b) Ecology (Vegetation, Avifauna – including collision, Lizards and Invertebrates)
 - (c) Natural Hazards (Geotechnical, Flood, Hydro-inundation, Fire)
 - (d) Contaminated Land / Hazardous Substances
 - (e) Transportation
 - (f) Construction Effects
 - (g) Noise/Acoustic
 - (h) Cultural and Archaeological (Papatipu Rūnanga can speak with authority regarding cultural effects)

- (i) Lighting (impacts on Dark Sky Reserve)
 - (j) Cumulative effects, particularly in relation to landscape and visual effects; and potential social effects during construction due to worker accommodation shortages.
- 17 The substantive application includes a set of draft recommended conditions. It is noted that the Expert Panels appointed to consider the Lodestone and Far North Solar applications have sought a consolidated condition set between the two project where possible, and parties have actively been working together to achieve that outcome.
- 18 The release of the Expert Panel's Draft Decision and associated conditions relating to the Lodestone solar farm proposal has provided further confirmation of that approach. The MDC considers that analogous conditions developed for these nearby solar farms via the FTAA should be adopted for this application. For particular example, the avifauna conditions with a compensation package proportionate to risk on the application site.
- 19 The matter of cumulative effects will be an important consideration for solar proposals within Te Manahuna/the Mackenzie Basin ONL, including the way the community perceive and value the Te Manahuna/Mackenzie Basin ONL landscape at a broader scale. Depending on final decisions relating to those other solar farm applications, the existing environment in terms of assessing this application may be different to that experienced today. Given the draft Lodestone decision, at least one other significant solar farm will likely form part of the existing environment.
- 20 The experience gathered through the previous FTAA processes for solar farms in the area is such that the key issues are likely to be capable of resolution through conditions of any approval.
- 21 Any potential adverse effects on vegetation, lizards, invertebrates and their habitat are able to be suitably mitigated using traditional habitat restoration and relocation methods; with a compensation approach where appropriate to offset any residual adverse effects that cannot otherwise be avoided, remedied or mitigated.
- 22 It is noted that the proposed draft conditions include the requirement to prepare an Avifauna Management Plan and an Avifauna Collision Management Plan. These would need to include additional details around population viability analyses in relation to, at least, the critically threatened avifauna species impacted by the proposal; as well as any offset and/or compensation package if monitoring finds that the project is having an

adverse effect on the mortality of Threatened and At-Risk bird species in the area.

- 23 The MDC expects to work with the Applicant to compile a full suite of revised land use consent conditions that Council may ultimately be required to administer should approval be granted. At present the proposed draft conditions do not provide details of any offset and/or compensation package most likely required to achieve appropriate indigenous biodiversity outcomes in proportion to the national benefit from increased renewable electricity generation. This assessment is made based on the experience from the recent Haldon Solar FTAA Draft Decision and associated conditions.

DATED 23 July 2026



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Mackenzie District Council