



FTAA-2605-1232: Application received for referral of the project under the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 – Stage 2 decisions

Project Name: Rangitikei Solar Farm Project

Date submitted	28 July 2026	Tracking	26-BRF-02105
Security level	In-Confidence	Priority	Urgent

To	Action sought	Response by
Hon Chris Bishop Minister for Infrastructure	Decisions on recommendations	4 August 2026

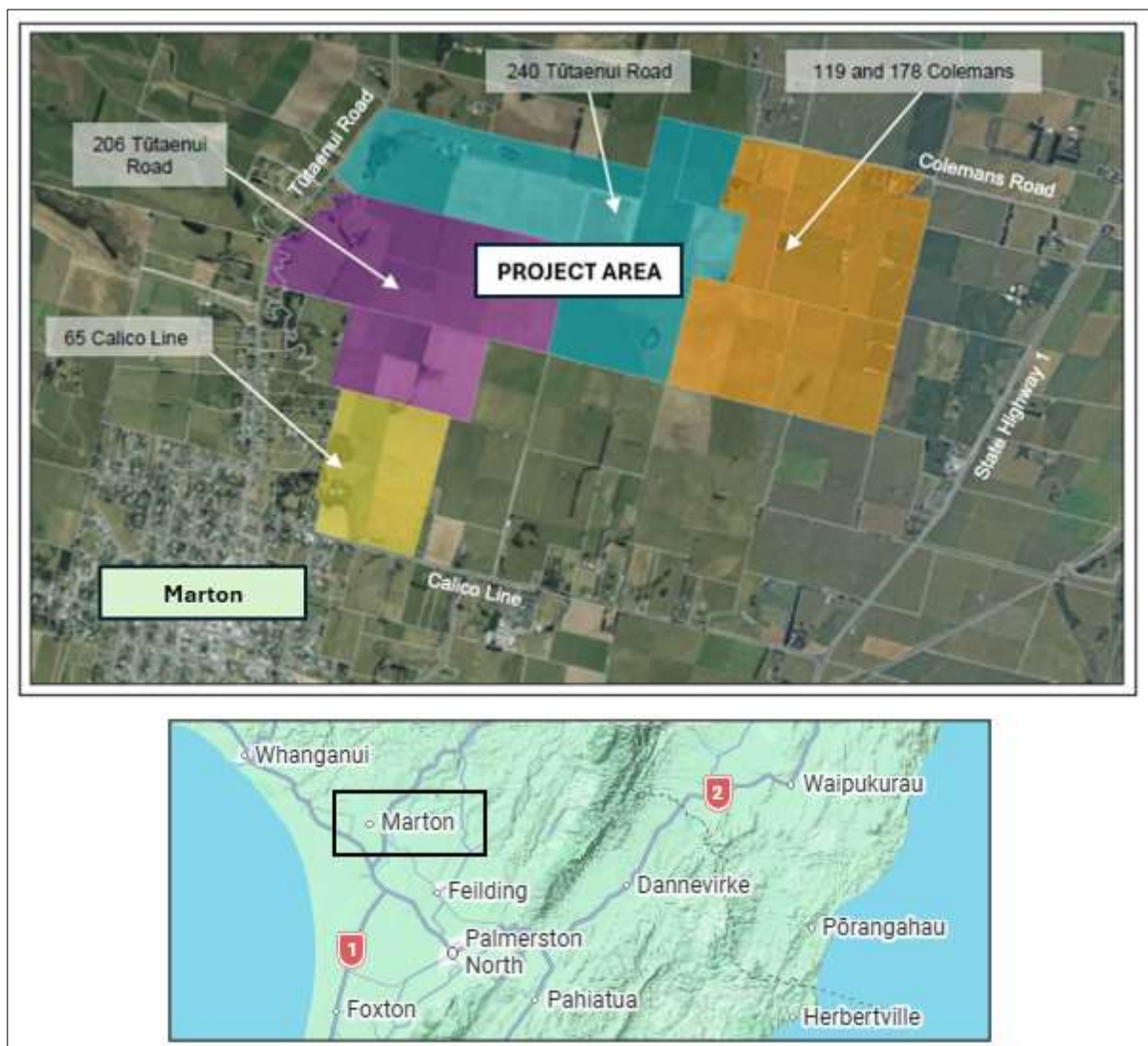
Actions for Minister's Office staff	Return the signed briefing to the Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport - email: FTAreferrals@mfe.govt.nz Send email to Ministers to invite written comments
Number of appendices: 6	Appendices: 1. Statutory framework for making decisions 2. Application documents for Rangitikei Solar Farm project 3. Stage 1 Briefing Note and decisions 4. Section 18 Report on Treaty settlements and other obligations 5. Written comments received from invited parties 6. Draft Notice of Decisions

Ministry contacts

Name	Position	Telephone	1 st contact
Stephanie McNicholl	Principal Author		
Stephanie Frame	Manager	s 9(2)(a)	✓
Ilana Miller	General Manager	s 9(2)(a)	



Project area



Key messages

1. This briefing seeks your decisions under section 21 of the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 (the Act) on an application from FRV Services New Zealand Limited (the applicant) to refer the Rangitīkei Solar Farm Project (the project) to the fast-track approvals process.
2. A copy of the application is in Appendix 2. This is the second briefing on this application. The first (Stage 1) briefing (BRF-01471) with your initial decisions annotated is in Appendix 3.
3. The project is to construct, operate and maintain a utility scale solar farm (including battery storage), and all ancillary activities, with a peak output of approximately 220 MWac (Megawatts Alternating Current), and connect and supply electricity to the National Grid, on a project area of approximately 400 hectares, located at 119 and 178 Colemans Road, 206 and 240 Tūtaenui Road and 65 Calico Line, near Marton in the Rangitīkei District, Manawatū–Whanganui Region.



4. The project includes infrastructure and ancillary activities to connect and supply electricity to the National Grid that will comprise:
 - a. solar arrays installed on a single-axis tracking system or fixed-tilt mounts, inverters and transformers, underground cabling
 - b. a battery energy storage system (BESS)
 - c. a new electricity transmission substation and associated connection to the Transpower overhead transmission lines running through the project site
 - d. ancillary infrastructure such as access, internal roads, roading upgrades, buildings for storage, maintenance and offices, water tanks and security fencing and lighting
 - e. landscape planting and ecological enhancement (screen planting, native riparian planting and pest control management) along watercourses and site boundaries.
5. The project will require the proposed approvals:
 - a. resource consents under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA).
6. We recommend you **accept** the referral application as the project meets the criteria set out in section 22 of the Act and does not appear to involve an ineligible activity.
7. We seek your decisions on this recommendation, any proposed directions to the applicant and expert panel, and the notification of your decisions.

Assessment against statutory framework

8. The statutory framework for your decision-making is set out in Appendix 1. You must apply this framework when you are deciding whether to accept or decline the referral application and when deciding on any further requirements or directions associated with referral of the project.
9. Before accepting the project, you must consider the application in Appendix 2, the section 18 Treaty settlements report in Appendix 4, the written comments from invited parties in Appendix 5, and any document that requires your consideration under section 16 and comply with any procedural requirements under section 16.
10. Following that, you may accept the application if you are satisfied that it meets the criteria in section 22 of the Act and if there are no reasons meaning you must decline the application. We provide our advice on these matters below.

Section 18 Treaty settlements and other obligations report

11. The section 18 report in Appendix 4 identifies five relevant Māori groups under section 18(2) of the Act. One group invited to comment on the referral application provided a response.
12. There is one Treaty settlement that is relevant to the project area, this is: Ngāti Apa (North Island) Claims Settlement Act 2010. No other arrangements have been identified as relevant to the project area.
13. The relevant principles and provisions of the Ngāti Apa (North Island) Claims Settlement Act 2010 that apply to the project area are that:



- a. there is a statutory acknowledgement over the Rangitikei River, of which a tributary, the Tūtaenui Stream, flows through the project area. We consider the process of inviting comment (including providing information about the application) to Ngā Wairiki Ngāti Apa Charitable Trust under the Act is comparable to the requirements for statutory acknowledgements under the RMA and the Treaty settlement.
14. Ngāti Parewahawaha comments indicate a neutral position and advocacy for potential economic development opportunities that reflect and balance the principles of kaitiakitanga in the planning, development, and long-term stewardship of the project.
15. We consider the section 18 report does not raise any matters that would make it more appropriate to authorise the proposed approvals under another Act or Acts.

Section 16 Effects of Treaty settlements and other obligations on decision-making

16. Based on the above section, we consider there are no relevant documents and/or procedural requirements under section 16 that apply to your consideration of the application.

Written comments received

17. Written comments were received from Manawatū–Whanganui Regional Council (MWRC), Rangitikei District Council (RDC), five Ministers, one Māori group – Ngāti Parewahawaha, New Zealand Transport Agency Waka Kotahi (NZTA), and Transpower New Zealand Limited (Transpower).
18. The key points of relevance to your decisions are included in Table A, with the full comments attached in Appendix 5.
19. A summary of the key points from the Māori group is provided above, all other comments are provided below:
 - a. MWRC identifies the project as regionally and nationally significant infrastructure, that provides important benefits regionally and nationally and will have economic benefits in creating employment opportunities. MWRC notes the referral application may be declined under section 21(5)(c) if there are potentially significant adverse effects on the environment that are not managed effectively.
 - b. RDC identifies that no grounds to decline under section 21(5) apply. RDC identify that a substantive application should cover a detailed assessment of effects including transport and roading, stormwater and flood management, wetlands and water bodies, landscape and visual amenity, cultural, construction, neighbouring properties and infrastructure servicing.
 - c. The Minister for the Environment – identifies the presence of long-tailed bats (threatened – nationally critical) and that removal of exotic shelterbelt areas could potentially have a direct effect on resident bats, if potential roosting sites are disturbed.
 - d. The Minister for Māori Crown Relations: Te Arawhiti and the Minister for Māori Development support the application progressing and encourages the applicant and the panel to have due regard to relevant Treaty settlement legislation and instruments and any feedback received from relevant Māori groups as set out in the Section 18 Treaty settlements and other obligations report.
 - e. The Minister for Economic Growth commented that the project appears likely to deliver significant economic benefits primarily through construction and longer term through



renewable electricity generation and storage capacity. These benefits are mainly national, while quantified construction impacts are concentrated in the Manawatū–Whanganui Region.

- f. The Minister for Regional Development commented on significant employment opportunities for the region during the build period, noting the average annual GDP during the build period may also be significant for the Manawatū–Whanganui Region. Also, an increase in electricity generation, particularly with a BESS, is generally beneficial to regional New Zealand, providing increased certainty of supply, increased generation and reduced prices and cost burden on regional communities.
- g. The Minister of Climate Change responded that the proposal promotes the benefits of renewable electricity generation, including reducing greenhouse gas emissions and contributing to sustainable development. The Minister provides broad support for projects which deliver positive climate outcomes for New Zealand, including the Rangitikei Solar Farm.
- h. Transpower responded that the project will support climate change mitigation and will deliver new regionally or nationally significant infrastructure. Transpower's 220kV transmission line traverses the project area and they seek to ensure the line is protected.
- i. NZTA commented on potential adverse effects from construction traffic on the state highway junction with local roads and glint and glare reflections from glass solar panels. NZTA supports the applicant's intention to investigate the effects to support the substantive application and has no concerns with the project being referred into the fast-track approvals process.

Reasons to decline

- 20. The statutory framework in Appendix 1 sets out the situations where you must decline the application for referral under section 21(3).
- 21. We do not consider you must decline this application.
- 22. You may also decline the application for any other reason under section 21(4). The Act gives some guidance on matters you could consider when deciding whether to decline an application and these are set out in Table A.
- 23. We have considered the matters in section 21(4) of the Act and this is discussed in Table A. We do not consider you should decline the project for any of these reasons.

Reasons to accept

- 24. The statutory framework in Appendix 1 sets out the reasons you can accept a project for referral.
- 25. Our assessment of these matters is summarised in Table A. We consider the project meets the requirements of section 22, as:
 - a. it is an infrastructure project that would have significant regional or national benefits because:
 - i. it would deliver new regionally or nationally significant infrastructure within the renewable energy sector
 - ii. it would deliver significant economic benefits by approximately 435 full-time equivalent (FTE) years of employment (approximately 218–290 FTE job years over the 18 to 24-month construction programme) and approximately \$69 million in GDP



- iii. it would support climate change mitigation by contributing to the renewable energy supply network at a utility scale
- iv. it is consistent with local or regional planning documents and is identified in the regional One Plan (2016) as being of regional or national significance.
- b. 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 because it precludes public and limited notification and appeals under the Act are to the High Court and limited to points of law.
- c. referring the project is unlikely to materially affect the efficient operation of the fast-track approvals process because the project is neither novel in the New Zealand context nor beyond the scope of what a panel would typically assess under the RMA.

Conclusions

26. We consider the project meets the section 22 criteria and you could accept the referral application under section 21 of the Act and refer the project to the fast-track approvals process.

Next steps

27. The Secretary for the Environment (the Secretary) must give notice of your decisions on the referral application, and the reasons for them, to the applicant and anyone invited to comment under section 17 and publish the notice on the Fast-track website.
28. If you decide to accept and refer the project, the Secretary must also give notice of your decision to:
- a. the panel convener
 - b. any additional iwi authorities or Treaty settlement entities that you consider have an interest in the matter other than those invited to comment under section 17
 - c. the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA)
 - d. the relevant administering agency.
29. You must also provide all of the information you received that relates to this application to the EPA and the panel convener, including:
- a. the referral application
 - b. any written comments received under section 17
 - c. the Treaty report obtained under section 18.
30. We will undertake this action on your behalf.
31. We have attached a draft notice of decisions letter to the applicant based on our recommendations in Appendix 6, that we will provide as required (on behalf of the Secretary for the Environment) to all relevant parties. We will provide you with an amended letter if required.
32. Our recommendations for your decisions follow.



Recommendations

33. We recommend that you:

- a. **Note** section 21(3) of the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 (the Act) requires you to decline the referral application from FRV Services New Zealand Limited (the applicant) if you are satisfied that the project involves an ineligible activity, or you consider that you do not have adequate information to inform the decision under this section or if you are not satisfied that the Rangitikei Solar Farm Project (the project) meets the referral criteria in section 22 of the Act.

Noted

- b. **Agree** that before deciding on the application for project referral under section 21(1) of the Act you have considered:

- i. the application in Appendix 2
- ii. the report obtained under section 18 in Appendix 4
- iii. the written comments sought under section 17 and provided within the required timeframe in Appendix 5.

Yes / No

- c. **Note** that in considering this application, and any directions to a panel, under section 7 of the Act, you have considered:

- i. Ngāti Apa (North Island) Claims Settlement Act 2010.

Noted

- d. **Agree** you are satisfied the project will meet the referral criteria in section 22 of the Act as:

- i. it is an infrastructure project that would have significant regional or national benefits because:
 - (1) it would deliver new regionally or nationally significant infrastructure within the renewable energy sector
 - (2) it would it would deliver significant economic benefits by approximately 435 full-time equivalent (FTE) years of employment (approximately 218–290 FTE job years over the 18 to 24-month construction programme) and approximately \$69 million in GDP
 - (3) it would support climate change mitigation by contributing to the renewable energy supply network at a utility scale
 - (4) it is consistent with local or regional planning documents and is identified in the regional One Plan (2016) as being of regional or national significance
- ii. 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 because it precludes public and



limited notification and appeals under the Act are to the High Court and limited to points of law

- iii. referring the project is unlikely to materially affect the efficient operation of the fast-track approvals process because the project is neither novel in the New Zealand context nor beyond the scope of what a panel would typically assess under the RMA.

Yes / No

- e. **Agree** there is no reason the project must be declined under section 21(3) of the Act.

Yes / No

- f. **Agree** 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) of the Act.

Yes / No

- g. **Agree** to specify FRV Services New Zealand Limited as the person who is authorised to lodge a substantive application for the project.

Yes / No

- h. **Agree** to specify under section 27(3)(b)(i) of the Act:

- i. the deadline for lodging the substantive application is two years from the date of the referral notice of decisions letter to the applicant.

Yes / No

- i. **Agree** that the Secretary for the Environment will provide your notice of decisions to:

- i. anyone invited to comment on the application including local authorities and relevant Māori groups
- ii. the panel convener
- iii. the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA).

Yes / No

- j. **Note** that under section 21 you **must** decline a referral application if:

- i. the application **may not** be accepted under section 21(1) (which relates to the criteria for assessing a referral application in section 22); or
- ii. you are **satisfied** that the project involves an ineligible activity; or
- iii. you are **satisfied** that you do not have adequate information to inform your referral decision.

Noted

- k. **Note** that you **may** decline a referral application for any other reason, whether or not the project meets the criteria in section 22, including (but not limited to) the reasons for decline set out at section 21(5) of the Act.

Noted



I. **Approve** the draft notice of decisions letter to the applicant in Appendix 6.

Yes / No

Signatures

Stephanie Frame
Manager – Fast-track Operations

Hon Chris Bishop
Minister for Infrastructure

Date:

Table A: Stage 2 analysis – FTAA–2605–1232 Rangitikei Solar Farm

Recommendation	Accept the referral application and refer the project to the fast-track approvals process		
Project details	Project Name	Applicant	Project Location
	Rangitikei Solar Farm Project (the project)	FRV Services New Zealand Limited (the applicant)	The project area is located at 119 and 178 Colemans Road, 206 and 240 Tūtaenui Road and 65 Calico Line, near Marton in the Rangitikei District, Manawatū–Whanganui Region.
Project description	The project is to construct, operate and maintain a utility scale solar farm (including battery storage), and all ancillary activities, with a peak output of approximately 220 MWac (Megawatts Alternating Current), and connect and supply electricity to the National Grid on a project area of approximately 400 hectares located near Marton in the Rangitikei District, Manawatū–Whanganui Region. The project includes ancillary activities and infrastructure to connect and supply electricity to the National Grid including: a. solar arrays installed on a single-axis tracking system or fixed-tilt mounts, inverters and transformers, underground cabling b. a battery energy storage system (BESS) c. a new electricity transmission substation and associated connection to the Transpower overhead transmission lines running through the project site d. ancillary infrastructure such as access, internal roads, roading upgrades, buildings for storage, maintenance and offices, water tanks and security fencing and lighting e. landscape planting and ecological enhancement (screen planting, native riparian planting and pest control management) along watercourses and site boundaries. The project will require the proposed approvals under the fast-track approvals process: a. resource consents under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA).		
Minister invites comments / requests information	Written comments from invited parties		
	Local authorities <i>Manawatū-Whanganui Regional Council (MWRC)</i> – commented: a. no competing applications lodged for the project, notes an existing water permit located on the site for a detention dam embankment for the management of floodwaters. No consents identified that are subject to section 124C(1)(c) of the Resource Management Act 1991. No ineligible activities identified as defined in section 5 of the Act b. no reasons to decline, except under section 21(5)(c) the project may have significant adverse effects on the environment if the potential effects are not managed effectively – specifically effects on wetlands, flora and fauna, cultural values and flood management c. the project is regionally and nationally significant infrastructure, provides important benefits to both the region and nationally, contributes to renewable energy generation and will have economic benefit in creating employment opportunities d. is neutral on the appropriateness of the fast-track process as renewable energy and regionally/nationally significant infrastructure is of importance, but due consideration is needed to ensure the environmental effects of the project are appropriately managed. <i>Rangitikei District Council (RDC)</i> – commented: a. no known competing applications. No activity identified that would constitute an ineligible activity under section 5 of the Act. b. no matters identified that would indicate any of the grounds for declining the referral application under section 21(5) of the Act may apply. c. limited on matters at referral stage but notes a substantive application should cover a detailed assessment of effects including transport and roading, stormwater and flood management, wetlands and water bodies, landscape and visual amenity, cultural, construction, neighbouring properties and infrastructure servicing. Ministers <i>Minister for the Environment</i> – commented: a. on the presence of long-tailed bats (threatened – nationally critical) is confirmed on the project site and removal of three exotic shelterbelt areas could potentially have a direct effect on resident bats, if potential roosting sites are disturbed. The referral application does not seek permits under the Wildlife Act 1953 and suggested you could use your discretion to specify information that is required to be provided with the substantive application and to specify that the expert panel must invite comments from the Minister of Conservation. We do not recommend a need to specify any requirements in your decisions because the applicant consulted with the Department of Conservation (DOC) prior to lodging the referral application and considers no approvals will be required. The ecological report supporting the application recommends that DOC’s bat roost protocols (BRPs) are implemented which involves pre-clearance monitoring to check whether bats are using the impacted trees and actions to ensure no harm, is to form part of the application and be offered as conditions of consent. We also note that, if required, the applicant can seek such approvals outside of the fast-track process. <i>Minister for Māori Crown Relations: Te Arawhiti and Minister for Māori Development</i> – commented: a. with support for the application progressing subject to the applicant and the panel having regard to relevant Treaty settlement legislation and instruments; and any feedback received from relevant Māori groups, as set out in the Treaty settlements and other obligations (Section 18) report prepared by the Ministry (on behalf of the Secretary for the Environment).		

Minister of Climate Change – commented:

- a. the proposal promotes the benefits of renewable electricity generation, including reducing greenhouse gas emissions and contributing to sustainable development
- b. broad support for projects which deliver positive climate outcomes for New Zealand, including the Rangitikei Solar Farm.

Minister for Economic Growth – commented that:

- a. the project appears likely to deliver significant economic benefits under section 22(a)(iv) of the Act, primarily through construction and longer term through additional renewable electricity generation, and electricity storage capacity. Wider benefits include generating around 400 gigawatt-hours annually (equivalent to powering approximately 57,280 households), supporting wholesale market competition, resilience, emissions reductions and battery storage dispatch when demand is higher. These benefits are mainly national, while quantified construction impacts are concentrated in the Manawatū–Whanganui Region.
- b. the project represents a capital investment of approximately \$300 million, with an estimated \$150 million of domestic expenditure after excluding imported components. Construction activity over an estimated 18 to 24-month period is projected to contribute approximately \$69 million in GDP (comprising \$20 million direct and \$49 million indirect GDP).
- c. construction is estimated to support approximately 435 FTE years of employment (including 121 direct and 314 indirect FTE-years), and generate approximately \$35 million in wages and salaries, including \$10 million in direct wages. This is equivalent to approximately 218 to 290 FTEs over the construction period.
- d. once operational, the project will support approximately 10 FTEs annually, contribute around \$3 million in annual GDP and \$1.1 million in annual wages through onsite operations, maintenance and related supply-chain activity.

Minister for Regional Development – commented:

- a. the proposed project is expected to offer significant employment opportunities for the region during the build period. The average annual GDP impact during the build period may also be significant for the Manawatū region, equivalent to around 0.4 per cent of the region’s GDP which was \$8.65 billion for year-ending March 2025 (based on Infometrics data).
- b. an increase in electricity generation, particularly with a BESS, is generally beneficial to regional New Zealand, providing increased certainty to businesses of supply which should encourage investment and increased generation helps reduce electricity prices reducing the cost burden on regional communities. Once operational, the regional GDP and employment impacts are expected to be small.
- c. any comment on the impact of the proposed project on New Zealand’s energy system should come from the Minister of Energy (*The Minister for Energy was invited to comment. No comments were received*).

Māori Groups

Ngāti Parewahawaha – commented:

- a. this project is proposed within the rohe of Rangitikei, an area with which Ngāti Parewahawaha has longstanding historical and cultural associations, we appreciate the opportunity to comment.
- b. acknowledging engagement has occurred with Te Rūnanga o Ngā Wairiki Ngāti Apa, and our hapū, Ngāti Parewahawaha, and our iwi, Ngāti Raukawa ki te Tonga, have historical connections to this area, alongside other iwi and hapū with enduring associations to the whenua
- c. supporting an approach to development that seeks to balance economic and infrastructure needs with the principles of kaitiakitanga.
- d. recognising the potential public benefits the project may deliver, including contributing to the resilience of Aotearoa, New Zealand's electricity supply, creating employment and procurement opportunities, and supporting broader economic development within our local communities
- e. on being neutral as to whether the proposal should proceed through the Fast-track Approvals process, however, encourage the applicant to also recognise and reflect the principles of kaitiakitanga as an important consideration in the planning, development, and long-term stewardship of the project.

Administering agencies – N/A

Any other persons or groups

Transpower New Zealand Limited (Transpower) – commented:

- a. the project relates to a utility scale solar development in Rangitikei. It proposes renewable electricity generation and will support climate change mitigation (section 22(2)(a)(vii) of the Act). The Project will also deliver new regionally or nationally significant infrastructure (section 22(2)(a)(ii) of the Act)
- b. the project is around Transpower’s 220kV Brunswick to Bunnythorpe transmission line (BRK-BPE A line). In this regard, Transpower is the occupier of land subject to the Project. There is insufficient information to indicate whether the project can occur without compromising the BRK-BPE A line. In particular, access to the line and its support structures will need to be maintained, and project structures (including the substation and solar infrastructure) will need to be appropriately setback from the line, and consideration given to earthworks near the BRK-BPE A line during construction. Provided appropriate conditions are imposed, the Project should be consistent with the National Policy Statement for Electricity Networks Activities.
- c. Transpower would appreciate the opportunity to comment on any substantive application, to ensure that the BRK-BPE A line is protected.

We do not recommend any need to specify any requirements in your decisions because the substantive application would need to satisfy section 6: Information required to assess environmental effects, under Schedule 5 of the Act. Also, the panel may invite any other person to comment.

New Zealand Transport Agency Waka Kotahi (NZTA) – commented that:

- a. their experience with other solar farms suggests the potential effects of the projects on the highway are, generally, limited to potential adverse effects from construction traffic using the junctions of state highways and local roads providing direct access to the site and adverse effects caused by reflections of the sun from the glass solar panels, noting the application indicates this project could have the same potential effects.
- b. the applicant’s preliminary information recognises the potential for effects from construction traffic and the need for full investigations to support the substantive application. NZTA supports the applicant’s intention to investigate and recommends an independent transport assessment, and a construction management plan.

	c. the terrain in the area suggests, as the project site is some distance from the highway, that adverse effects from glare may be unlikely. NZTA recommends an assessment of potential effects from glint and glare to support the substantive application and propose mitigation measures if necessary. d. NZTA has no concerns with this project being referred into the Fast-track Approvals process. We do not recommend any need to specify any requirements in your decisions because the substantive application would need to satisfy section 6: Information required to assess environmental effects, under Schedule 5 of the Act.
Minister must decline an application if the Minister is satisfied that the project involves an ineligible activity [section 21(3)(b)]	We consider you can be satisfied that the project does not involve an ineligible activity because it: a. <i>would not occur on identified Māori land, Māori customary land or a Māori reservation</i> – as confirmed by the relevant records of title and consultation with iwi authorities. b. <i>would not occur in a customary marine title area or protected customary rights area</i> – and is land-based. c. <i>is not an aquaculture activity or activity that is incompatible with aquaculture activities that would occur in an aquaculture settlement area and for which the applicant is not authorised to apply for a coastal permit</i> – because it will not occur in the CMA and will not occur in an aquaculture settlement area d. <i>would not require an access arrangement which cannot be granted under the Crown Minerals Act (including s61(1A))</i> – because it does not include an access arrangement and would not occur on Schedule 4 land e. <i>would not be prevented by section 165J, M, Q, ZC or ZDB of the RMA</i> – because it will not occur in the CMA f. <i>would not occur on Schedule 4 land</i> – as confirmed by the records of title referred to in the application g. <i>would not occur on a national reserve</i> – as confirmed by the records of title referred to in the application h. <i>would not occur on a reserve held under the Reserves Act 1977 that is managed by or vested in someone other than the Crown or a local authority and that person has not consented in writing</i> – as confirmed by the records of title and applicant's evidence of consultation i. <i>is not a prohibited activity or decommissioning activity under the EEZA, 15B or 15C of the RMA</i> – and as no such activities are proposed j. <i>is not for the purpose of an offshore renewable energy project</i> – and as no such activities are proposed. No comments raised by parties invited to comment have indicated that the project would be ineligible for referral.
Minister must decline an application if the Minister considers they do not have adequate information to inform the decision [section 21(3)(c)]	We consider you have adequate information to inform your decisions on the referral application.
Relevant considerations and procedural requirements in Treaty settlement, Mana Whakahono ā Rohe, joint management agreement, or the Marine and Coastal Area (Takutai Moana) Act 2011 or the Ngā Rohe Moana o Ngā Hapū o Ngāti Porou Act 2019 [section 16]	We have not identified any matters under section 16 of the Act that apply to your consideration of the referral application.
Section 22 assessment criteria	
The project is an infrastructure or development project that would have significant regional or national benefits [section 22(1)(a)]	You <u>must</u> consider a relevant Government policy statement (GPS) [s22(1A)] The only current GPS is the Government Policy Statement on Grocery Competition. As this project does not involve a supermarket development or grocery-related activities, there is no GPS relevant to your decision. You <u>may</u> consider any of the following matters, or any other matters you consider relevant: <i>Will deliver new regionally or nationally significant infrastructure or enable the continued functioning of existing regionally or nationally significant infrastructure [s22(2)(a)(ii)]</i> The applicant considers the project will deliver new regionally and nationally significant infrastructure within the renewable energy sector. MWRC identifies the project is regionally and nationally significant infrastructure, based on the regional One Plan. Based on the applicant's assessment and the comments received by MWRC, we recommend that the project satisfies the criterion and that you can refer the project on this basis.

	<i>Will deliver significant economic benefits [s22(2)(a)(iv)]</i> The applicant considers the project will deliver significant economic benefits by approximately 435 full-time equivalent (FTE) years of employment (an average of approximately 218–290 FTE jobs over the 18 to 24-month construction programme, on-site 250 FTE jobs during the 4 to 6-month installation phase) approximately \$69 million in GDP. The Minister for Economic Growth commented that the project appears likely to deliver significant economic benefits, primarily through construction and longer term through renewable electricity generation and storage capacity. Based on the applicant’s assessment and the comments received by the Minister for Economic Growth, we recommend that the project satisfies the criterion and that you can refer the project on this basis. <i>Will support climate change mitigation, including the reduction or removal of greenhouse gas emissions [s22(2)(a)(vii)]</i> The applicant considers the project will support climate change mitigation by contributing to the renewable energy supply network, reducing reliance on fossil fuels, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The Minister of Climate Change commented that the proposal promotes the benefits of renewable electricity generation, including reducing greenhouse gas emissions and will contribute to sustainable development. In consideration of the applicant’s assessment and the comments received by the Minister of Climate Change, we further consider the project would support climate change mitigation, by contributing to the renewable energy sector at a utility scale and consequently reduce reliance on fossil fuels in order to generate electricity. We recommend that the project satisfies the criterion and that you can refer the project on this basis. <i>Will support climate change adaptation, reduce risks arising from natural hazards, or support recovery from events caused by natural hazards [s22(2)(a)(viii)]</i> The applicant considers the project will support climate change adaptation and reduce risks arising from natural hazards (including flooding) through a design-led approach to avoid high-risk flood areas and maintain flood conveyance and storage capacity, and ensure infrastructure is located and resilient to natural hazard risks. We consider the applicant’s representations do not demonstrate that the project will support climate change adaptation, reduce risks arising from natural hazards, or support recovery from events caused by natural hazards to an extent that would result in significant regional or national benefits. On this basis, we consider the project does not satisfy the criterion and do not recommend that you refer the project under this criterion. We note the applicant retains the ability to provide further analysis on this with a substantive application to assist the expert panel in understanding the extent of the project’s significant regional or national benefits. <i>Is consistent with local or regional planning documents, including spatial strategies [s22(2)(a)(x)]</i> The applicant considers the project is consistent with the planning documents and strategies including Manawatū-Whanganui Regional Policy Statement and Regional One Plan, Rangitikei District Plan and Community Spatial Plan / Pae Tawhiti Rangitikei Beyond. MWRC comments identify the project is of regional or national significance under One Plan (2026) Policy EIT-P1. MWRC comments indicate nothing stands out that would make the project unable to be consistent with regional planning documents, subject to the management of potential adverse effects being demonstrated in the substantive application with a full assessment of environmental effects and supporting technical reports. Based on the applicant’s assessment and the comments received by MWRC, we recommend that the project satisfies the criterion and that you can refer the project on this basis. Conclusion Overall, we consider the project is an infrastructure project that would have significant regional benefits aligned with the criteria for accepting a referral application under section 22(1)(a) of the Act. If you agree with this recommendation and are satisfied that the whole project satisfies the criteria in section 22, you may accept the referral application and refer the whole project to the fast-track approvals process in accordance with section 26 of the Act.
Referring the project to the fast-track approvals process [section 22(1)(b)]	<i>Would facilitate the project, including by enabling it to be processed in a more timely and cost-effective way than under normal processes [s22(1)(b)(i)]</i> The applicant considers under standard RMA processes, the scale of the project would result in a hearing, risk of appeals and delays, and that the fast-track approvals process provides greater certainty and timelier decision-making. The standard RMA process could add two additional years to the timeframe and substantially increase consent-related costs. We consider that 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 because it precludes public and limited notification, and appeals to under the Act are only to the High Court and limited to points of law. We recommend that the project satisfies the criterion and that you can refer the project on this basis. <i>Is unlikely to materially affect the efficient operation of the fast-track approvals process [s22(1)(b)(ii)]</i> The applicant considers the project is not novel or complex and that as several solar farms have progressed through the fast-track approvals process, the issues are well understood. We consider that referring the project to the fast-track approvals process is unlikely to materially affect the efficient operation of the fast-track approvals process. We consider projects of this scale and nature are consistent with the types of regionally significant developments the fast-track approvals process was established for, noting the project is neither novel in the New Zealand context nor beyond the scope of what a panel would typically assess under the RMA. We recommend that the project satisfies the criterion and that you can refer the project on this basis.

Reasons to decline	
Minister <u>must</u> decline [section 21(3)]	You <u>must</u> decline a referral application if: a. <i>the application may not be accepted under subsection 1 (meets referral criteria)</i> – We consider the project meets the referral criteria. b. <i>the Minister is satisfied the project involves an ineligible activity</i> – We have not identified any ineligible activities included in the project scope. c. <i>the Minister considers that they do not have adequate information to inform the decision under this section</i> – We consider you have adequate information to inform your referral decisions. Overall, we do not consider that you must decline the application under this section.
Minister may decline [section 21(4) and 21(5)(a-h)]	You <u>may</u> decline a referral application for any other reason, whether or not it meets the criteria in section 22. Reasons to decline a referral application under subsection 4 include, without limitation: a. <i>the project would be inconsistent with a Treaty settlement, Ngā Rohe Moana o Ngā Hapū o Ngāti Porou Act 2019, Marine and Coastal Area (Takutai Moana) Act 2011, a Mana Whakahono ā Rohe, or a joint management agreement</i> – No inconsistencies have been identified, including within the section 18 Treaty report or from Māori groups invited to comment. b. <i>it would be more appropriate to deal with the matters that would be authorised by the proposed approvals under another Act or Acts</i> – No reports or comments received have indicated this is the case. c. <i>the project may have significant adverse effects on the environment</i> – The applicant summary of adverse effects concludes low-moderate significance, or minor and acceptable in RMA terms. Manawātū-Whanganui Regional Council comment that the project may have significant adverse effects on the environment if the potential effects are not managed effectively – specifically effects on wetlands, flora and fauna, cultural values and flood management. We do not consider the adverse effects significant enough to decline to refer the project and note these are matters that a panel is able to consider when presented with a comprehensive substantive application, if referred to the fast-track process. d. <i>the applicant has a poor compliance history under a specified Act that relates to any of the proposed approvals</i> – No such history has been noted. e. <i>the project area includes land that the Minister for Treaty of Waitangi Negotiations considers necessary for Treaty settlement purposes</i> – No such land has been identified. f. <i>the project includes an activity that is a prohibited activity under the Resource Management Act 1991</i> – The project does not include any such activity. g. <i>a substantive application for the project would have one or more competing applications</i> – No competing applications have been identified at this stage. We note the EPA is required to check prior to providing a substantive application to the panel convener. h. <i>in relation to any proposed approval of the kind described in section 42(4)(a) (resource consents), there are one or more existing resource consents of the kind referred to in section 30(3)(a)</i> – No such resource consents have been identified, including by the applicant and relevant local authorities. Overall, we do not recommend that you decline the application.

Appendix 1: Statutory framework summary

1. You are the sole decision maker for referral applications. If you accept a referral application, then the whole or part of the project will be referred to the fast-track approvals process.
2. If a Treaty settlement, the Marine and Coastal Area (Takutai Moana) Act 2011, the Ngā Rohe Moana o Ngā Hapū o Ngāti Porou Act 2019, a Mana Whakahono ā Rohe or a joint management agreement provides for consideration of any document or procedural requirements, you must, where relevant:
 - a. give the document the same or equivalent effect through this process as it would have under any specified Act; and
 - b. comply with any applicable procedural requirements.
3. You must decline a referral application if:
 - a. you are satisfied the project does not meet the referral criteria in section 22
 - b. you are satisfied the project involves an ineligible activity (section 5)
 - c. you consider you do not have adequate information to inform your decision.
4. You may decline an application for any other reason, including those set out in section 21(5) and even if the application meets the section 22 referral criteria.
5. You can decline an application before or after inviting comments under section 17(1). However, if comments have been sought and provided within the required time frame, you must consider them, along with the referral application, before deciding to decline the application.
6. If you do not decline a referral application at the initial stage you must copy the application to, and invite written comments from:
 - a. the relevant local authorities
 - b. the Minister for the Environment, the Minister for Māori Crown Relations: Te Arawhiti, and the Minister for Māori Development
 - c. any other relevant portfolio Ministers
 - d. the relevant administering agencies
 - e. the Māori groups identified by the responsible agency
 - f. the owners of Māori land in the project area (if applicable)
 - g. you may provide the application to and invite comments from any other person.
7. You can request further information from an applicant, any relevant local authority or any relevant administering agency at any time before you decide to decline or accept a referral application (see section 20 of the Act).
8. However, if further information has been sought and provided within the required time frame you must consider it, along with the referral application, before deciding to decline the application.