



FTAA-2607-1261: Application received for referral of the project under the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 – Stage 1 decisions

Project Name: Tauhei Solar Farm Extension

Date submitted	6 August 2026	Tracking	26-BRF-02221
Security level	In-Confidence	Priority	Urgent

To	Action sought	Response by
Hon Chris Bishop Minister for Infrastructure	Decisions on recommendations in Table A	13 August 2026

Actions for Minister's Office staff	Return the signed briefing to: FTAreferrals@mfe.govt.nz Send email to Ministers to invite written comments
Number of appendices: 3	Appendices: 1. Statutory framework summary 2. Application documents for the Tauhei Solar Farm Expansion project 3. List of the Māori groups referred to in section 18(2)

Ministry contacts

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



Project location

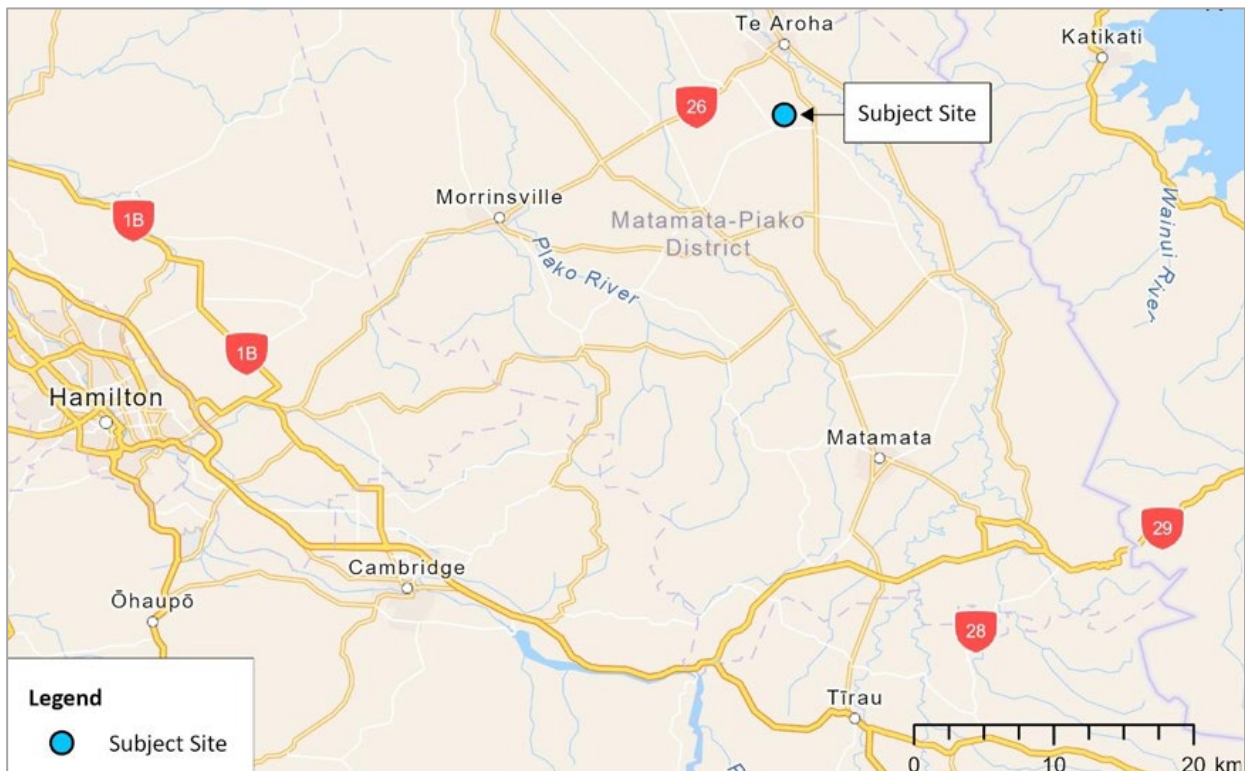


Figure 1: Approximate location of subject site (blue circle)

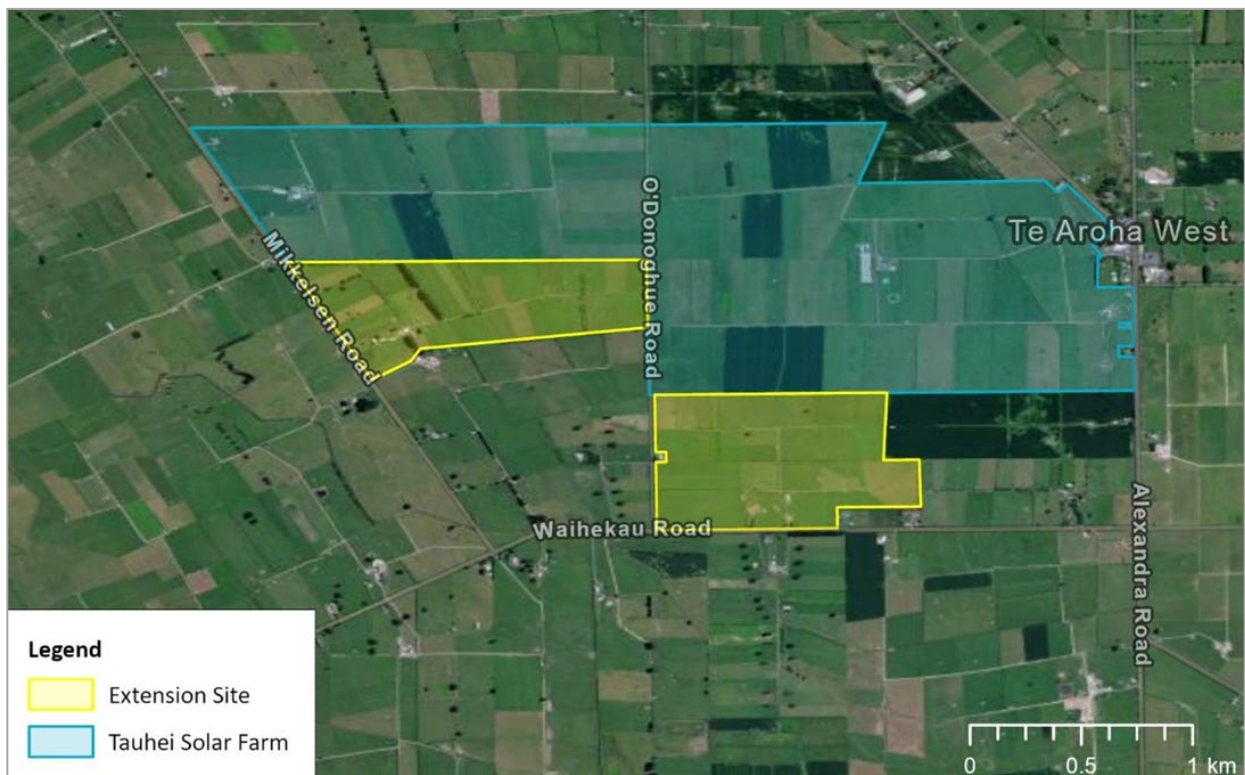


Figure 2: Project area (yellow) in relation to the existing Tauhei Solar Farm (blue)



Key messages

1. This briefing seeks your initial decisions on an application from Harmony Energy NZ Limited (the applicant) to refer the Tauhei Solar Farm Extension project (the project) under the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 (the Act) to the fast-track approvals process.
2. At this stage you can either decline an application for the reasons set out section 21, or provide the application to, and invite comments from, the parties identified in section 17. If you do not decline the application, you will receive a further briefing following receipt of comments, to inform your final decision on whether to refer the project.
3. The project involves the construction, operation, and maintenance of an extension to the existing Tauhei Solar Farm in the Matamata-Piako District, Waikato. The extension would generate up to 50 megawatts of alternating current (MW AC) renewable electricity, which the applicant states is sufficient to meet the annual electricity requirements of approximately 15,500 households.
4. The project area comprises approximately 95.6 hectares of rural land at Te Aroha West. The project area is located immediately south of the existing Tauhei Solar Farm and spans three land parcels across two titles. The project area is bounded by Mikkelsen Road to the west, Waihekau Road to the south, and is bisected by O'Donoghue Road.
5. The project comprises:
 - a. approximately 115,000 solar panels and associated electricity infrastructure with an installed capacity of approximately 50 MW AC
 - b. underground cabling and associated electricity infrastructure to connect the project to the existing Tauhei Solar Farm substation and the national grid via Transpower's Waihou Substation
 - c. internal access roads, vehicle crossings, earthworks, and stream crossing works primarily for the installation of culverts
 - d. security fencing, lighting, monitoring equipment and other operational infrastructure
 - e. temporary construction facilities and associated construction activities
 - f. landscaping, ecological restoration and planting, including riparian and wetland restoration works
 - g. ongoing agricultural activities, including sheep grazing
 - h. other ancillary works required to support the construction, operation and maintenance of the solar farm
 - i. minor consequential changes to the existing Tauhei Solar Farm consent as required.
6. The applicant seeks the following approvals via the fast-track approvals process to authorise the project, including wildlife approvals sought at this stage on a precautionary basis, subject to further investigations prior to any substantive application:
 - a. resource consents under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA), including standard freshwater fisheries activities (culverts)
 - b. a change or cancellation of a resource consent condition that would otherwise be applied for under the RMA
 - c. wildlife approvals under the Wildlife Act 1953.



7. We have undertaken initial analysis of the referral application, and this is presented along with our considerations and recommendations in Table A.
8. We have decided the application is complete and complies with section 14 of the Act, as the application complies with section 13 requirements, may be capable of satisfying the criteria in section 22 and does not appear to involve an ineligible activity. The applicable fee and levy have been paid.
9. We recommend you progress consideration of the referral application to the next stage of analysis (Stage 2) and invite written comments from the parties prescribed in section 17(1) of the Act being:
 - a. Waikato Regional Council and Matamata-Piako District Council as 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. the Minister of Conservation and the Minister for Energy as the other relevant portfolio Ministers
 - d. the Department of Conservation as the relevant administering agency
 - e. the parties in Appendix 3 as the other identified Māori groups.
10. We recommend that you invite written comments from the following additional persons under section 17(5) of the Act:
 - a. the Chief Executive of Transpower New Zealand Limited – as the electricity generated by the project is proposed to be exported to the national grid via existing overhead and underground lines to Transpower's Waihou Substation
 - b. Minister of Climate Change – as the project potentially involves benefits relating to climate change mitigation and adaptation, and the project area is within a flood hazard
 - c. Minister for Regional Development – as the project involves a potentially significant regional development
 - d. Minister for Economic Growth – as the project involves potentially significant economic benefits.

Action sought

11. Please indicate your decisions on the recommendations in Table A.

Signature

Stephanie Frame
Manager – Fast-track Operations

Table A: Stage 1 analysis

	Project Name	Applicant	Project Area		
Project details	Tauhei Solar Farm Extension (the project)	Harmony Energy NZ Limited (the applicant)	Approximately 95.6 hectares of rural land at Te Aroha West in the Matamata-Piako District, Waikato. The project area is located immediately south of the existing Tauhei Solar Farm and spans three land parcels across two titles. The project area is bounded by Mikkelsen Road to the west, Waihekau Road to the south, and is bisected by O’Donoghue Road.		
Project description	The project involves the construction, operation, and maintenance of an extension to the existing Tauhei Solar Farm in the Matamata-Piako District, Waikato. The extension would generate up to 50 megawatts of alternating current (MW AC) renewable electricity, which the applicant states is sufficient to meet the annual electricity requirements of approximately 15,500 households. The project comprises: a. approximately 115,000 solar panels and associated electricity infrastructure with an installed capacity of approximately 50 MW AC b. underground cabling and associated electricity infrastructure to connect the project to the existing Tauhei Solar Farm substation and the national grid via Transpower's Waihou Substation c. internal access roads, vehicle crossings, earthworks, and stream crossing works primarily for the installation of culverts d. security fencing, lighting, monitoring equipment and other operational infrastructure e. temporary construction facilities and associated construction activities f. landscaping, ecological restoration and planting, including riparian and wetland restoration works g. ongoing agricultural activities, including sheep grazing h. other ancillary works required to support the construction, operation and maintenance of the solar farm i. minor consequential changes to the existing Tauhei Solar Farm consent as required. The applicant seeks the following approvals via the fast-track approvals process to authorise the project, including wildlife approvals sought at this stage on a precautionary basis, subject to further investigations prior to any substantive application: a. resource consents under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA), including standard freshwater fisheries activities (culverts) as described in section 42(4)(a) of the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 (the Act) b. a change or cancellation of a resource consent condition that would otherwise be applied for under the RMA as described in section 42(4)(b) of the Act c. wildlife approvals under the Wildlife Act 1953 as described in section 42(4)(h) of the Act.				
Notification and/or consultation undertaken	As required by section 11, the applicant has:				
	Notified in writing, the relevant local authorities	Notified in writing, the relevant iwi authorities, hapū and Treaty settlement entities	Notified in writing, the relevant administering agencies	Consulted, the relevant MACA groups, or ngā hapū o Ngāti Porou	Notified in writing, the holder of land to be exchanged
	- Matamata-Piako District Council (MPDC) - Waikato Regional Council (WRC)	- Hako Tūpuna Trust - Ngāti Hauā Iwi Trust - Ngāti Tumutumu Trust - Ngāti Tara Tokanui Trust - Te Puāwaitanga o Ngāti Hinerangi Trust - Ngati Maru Ki Haruaki Inc - Ngāti Tamaterā Treaty Settlement Trust - Te Whakakitenga o Waikato Incorporated	Department of Conservation (DOC)	Not applicable to the project	Not applicable to the project
Section 22 assessment criteria					
The project is an infrastructure or development project that would have significant regional or national benefits [section 22(1)(a)]	The Minister <u>must</u> consider a relevant Government policy statement (GPS) [s22(1A)] The only current GPS is the GPS on Grocery Competition. This is not relevant to your decisions for a solar farm project. You <u>may</u> consider any of the following matters, or any other matters the Minister considers relevant – the applicant considers the project is an infrastructure project that would have significant regional and national benefits for the reasons outlined below: Will deliver new regionally or nationally significant infrastructure or enable the continued functioning of existing regionally or nationally significant infrastructure [s22(2)(a)(ii)] The applicant considers the project will deliver new regionally and nationally significant infrastructure by providing an additional 50 MW AC of renewable electricity generation connected to the national grid via the Tauhei Solar Farm and Waihou substation. The applicant considers the project meets the Waikato Regional Policy Statement definition of regionally significant infrastructure and would generate sufficient electricity to power approximately 15,500 households or approximately 69,700 electric vehicles annually. The applicant states the project will integrate with existing infrastructure at the Tauhei Solar Farm and considers it will contribute to the resilience and reliability of New Zealand’s electricity supply by increasing renewable generation capacity, supporting diversification of the electricity mix, and reducing reliance on fossil fuels and hydroelectric generation during periods of low rainfall.				

	<i>Will deliver significant economic benefits [s22(2)(a)(iv)]</i> The applicant considers the project would generate significant economic benefits during construction, supporting approximately \$21 million in gross domestic product (GDP), \$11 million in wages and salaries, and 117 full-time equivalent (FTE) years of employment over the estimated 15–18 month construction period. The applicant also states the project represents a substantial private-sector investment in renewable energy infrastructure and would support New Zealand’s future electricity supply. The applicant considers the project would provide ongoing economic benefits by increasing low-marginal-cost electricity generation, which may improve competition in the wholesale electricity market and moderate electricity price growth over time. The applicant states the economic benefits of the project outweigh the forgone economic output associated with the site’s current dairy farming use, with continued agrivoltaic grazing potentially reducing this impact. <i>Will support primary industries, including aquaculture [s22(2)(a)(v)]</i> The applicant states the project will be designed to integrate and allow for the ongoing grazing of stock (sheep) on the land below the solar panels. <i>Will support development of natural resources, including minerals and petroleum [s22(2)(a)(vi)]</i> The applicant identifies the project will utilise irradiance (sunlight), being a natural resource, to generate electricity. <i>Will support climate change mitigation, including the reduction or removal of greenhouse gas emissions [s22(2)(a)(vii)]</i> The Economic Assessment (Attachment 4) estimates the net greenhouse gas emissions displaced by the project. The applicant states that gas-fired generation is the generation source most likely to be displaced and considers the project will avoid approximately 53,000 tonnes of CO₂-equivalent emissions annually compared with gas-fired generation, equivalent to approximately 2.4% of New Zealand’s annual electricity generation emissions from gas, and supporting New Zealand’s statutory climate objectives and the Emissions Reduction Plan 2026–2030. <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 by increasing the diversity and resilience of New Zealand’s electricity generation mix, including by complementing hydroelectric generation during periods of low rainfall and contributing to grid reliability. The applicant states the project has been designed to be resilient to natural hazards, with solar panels and key infrastructure proposed to be elevated approximately 300mm above the 100-year flood level and geotechnical inputs informing the design and construction to address risks associated with natural hazards, including wind. <i>Will address significant environmental issues [s22(2)(a)(ix)]</i> The applicant considers the project will address significant environmental issues by increasing the supply and diversity of New Zealand’s renewable electricity generation. The applicant states that additional renewable generation is needed to meet growing electricity demand, support the transition to a low-emissions economy, improve the resilience of the electricity system, and reduce reliance on fossil fuel generation. The applicant states the project will contribute approximately 50 MW of renewable electricity generation to New Zealand’s electricity mix and considers this will support energy security, increase resilience to climate-related risks affecting electricity supply, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by displacing fossil fuel generation. <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 Waikato Regional Policy Statement and Waikato Regional Plan, noting it would deliver regionally significant renewable electricity infrastructure, contribute to reducing reliance on fossil fuels, support climate change resilience and adaptation, and increase renewable electricity generation capacity. The applicant further considers the project is consistent with the Matamata-Piako District Plan because it would provide regionally significant infrastructure while managing effects on natural character, landscape, biodiversity, water resources, transport networks, and natural hazards. The applicant states the project is appropriate within the rural environment, would not compromise soil productivity, and has been designed to support the safe and efficient operation of infrastructure and transport networks. The applicant further states the project is consistent with the Future Proof Strategy as it is not located within identified urban growth areas and would contribute to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.		
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 the project meets this criterion. The applicant states that the scale of the project and the relative novelty of large-scale solar developments in New Zealand could result in extended consenting timeframes under standard RMA processes, including through notification, hearings, appeals, and further delays arising from limited experience with large-scale solar projects. The applicant estimates a traditional consenting process could take around 200 days, excluding any delays associated with further information requests, and notes this timeframe could at least double if appeals occur. The applicant further considers the fast-track approvals process would provide a more timely and cost-effective pathway by excluding public notification, limiting appeal rights, and streamlining decision-making, reducing approval timeframes and the costs associated with consenting and construction delays. <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 meets this criterion, as it will be prepared by suitably qualified and experienced experts and as the applicant has experience preparing applications that address relevant environmental, cultural, and operational matters. The applicant states the project is a relatively straightforward increase in renewable generation capacity, as it extends an existing solar farm and key supporting infrastructure is already in place.		
Minister invites comments	<i>You must copy the application to, and invite written comments from [s17(1)]:</i> - relevant local authorities: - MPDC - WRC - the Minister for the Environment, the Minister for Māori Crown Relations: Te Arawhiti, and the Minister for Māori Development - other relevant portfolio Ministers: - Minister of Conservation – as the project may involve approvals under the Wildlife Act 1953	<i>You may copy the application to, and invite written comments from, any other person [s17(5)]:</i> We recommend you invite comments from the following additional persons, for the specified reasons: - Chief Executive of Transpower New Zealand Limited – as the electricity generated by the project is proposed to be exported to the national grid via existing overhead and underground lines to Transpower’s Waihou Substation - Minister of Climate Change – as the project potentially involves benefits relating to climate change mitigation and adaptation, and the project area is within a flood hazard	<i>You may request further information about a referral application from the applicant, the relevant local authorities, or the relevant administering agencies to be provided within the time frame specified in the request.</i> We have not identified any further information to be sought at this stage.

	– Minister for Energy – as the project is for the construction of a solar farm d. relevant administering agency: – DOC e. the Māori groups identified in Appendix 3.	c. Minister for Regional Development – as the project involves a potentially significant regional development d. Minister for Economic Growth – as the project involves potentially significant economic benefits.	
Recommendations			Minister's decision
a.	Note that section 25 of the Act permits you to decline the referral application without inviting comments from the parties under section 17.		Noted
b.	Note that you have not yet provided the application to, nor sought any written comments on it from, the parties listed in section 17(1) but that you are required to do so if you do not decline the application under section 21 of the Act.		Noted
c.	Note that section 17(5) of the Act permits you to forward an application to, and invite written comments from, any other person.		Noted
d.	Note that if comments have been sought and provided within the required time frame you are required to consider it, along with the referral application, before deciding to decline the application.		Noted
e.	Note that section 20 of the Act permits you to request further information from the applicant or relevant local authorities or relevant administering agencies at any time before you decide whether to accept or decline an application.		Noted
f.	Agree to progress the Tauhei Solar Farm Extension project to our Stage 2 analysis (invite written comments and request section 18 Treaty report).		Yes / No
g.	Agree to provide the application to, and invite written comments from: i. Matamata-Piako District Council and Waikato Regional Council as the relevant local authorities under section 17(1)(a) ii. the Minister for the Environment, the Minister for Māori Crown Relations: Te Arawhiti, and the Minister for Māori Development under section 17(1)(b) iii. the Minister of Conservation and Minister for Energy as the other relevant portfolio Ministers under section 17(1)(b) iv. the Department of Conservation as the relevant administering agency under section 17(1)(c) v. the parties in Appendix 3 as the identified Māori groups under section 17(1)(d) vi. any parties you are required to invite comments from under section 17(1)(d) and (e) who may be subsequently identified.		Yes / No Yes / No Yes / No Yes / No Yes / No Yes / No
h.	Agree to provide the application to and invite written comments from the following additional persons under section 17(5): i. the Chief Executive of Transpower New Zealand Limited ii. the Minister of Climate Change iii. the Minister for Regional Development iv. the Minister for Economic Growth.		Yes / No Yes / No Yes / No Yes / No
i.	Note that you have agreed to delegate to the Secretary for the Environment your responsibility to send all correspondence, other than to Ministers.		Noted
j.	Agree to send the email to invite written comments from Ministers.		Yes / No

Signed:

Hon Chris Bishop
Minister for Infrastructure

Date:

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 s22
 - b. you are satisfied the project involves an ineligible activity (s5)
 - 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 s21(5) and even if the application meets the s22 referral criteria.
5. You can decline an application before or after inviting comments under s17(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 this 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.

Appendix 2: Application documents for the Tauhei Solar Farm Extension project

Appendix 3: List of the Māori groups referred to in section 18(2)

Name of group	Type of group (section of Act)
Ngāti Hauā Iwi Trust	Iwi authority (s18(2)(a)), Treaty settlement entity (s18(2)(a))
Te Puāwaitanga o Ngāti Hinerangi Trust	Iwi authority (s18(2)(a)), Treaty settlement entity (s18(2)(a))
Ngāti Tumutumu Trust	Iwi authority (s18(2)(a)), Treaty settlement entity (s18(2)(a))
Ngāti Tara Tokanui Trust	Iwi authority (s18(2)(a)), Treaty settlement entity (s18(2)(a))
Hako Tūpuna Trust	Iwi authority (s18(2)(a)), Treaty settlement entity (s18(2)(a)); negotiating mandate (s18(2)(d))
Ngāti Maru Rūnanga Trust	Iwi authority (s18(2)(a)), Treaty settlement entity (s18(2)(a)); negotiating mandate (s18(2)(d))
Ngāti Tamaterā Treaty Settlement Trust	Iwi authority (s18(2)(a)), Treaty settlement entity (s18(2)(a)); negotiating mandate (s18(2)(d))
Te Whakakitenga o Waikato	Iwi authority (s18(2)(a)), Treaty settlement entity (s18(2)(a)); negotiating mandate (s18(2)(d))
Pare Hauraki Cultural Redress Trust/Pare Hauraki Whenua Limited Partnership/Pare Hauraki Ngahere Limited Partnership	Treaty settlement entity (s18(2)(a)); negotiating mandate (s18(2)(d))
Ngaati Whanaunga Incorporated Society	Any other Māori group with relevant interests (s18(2)(k))