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Vicki Morrison-Shaw
Waitaha Hydro Expert Panel Chair

By email: Substantive@fasttrack.govt.nz

Fast-track Approvals Act substantive application – Waitaha Hydro FTAA-2505-1069

Dear Vicki

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Westpower Limited's substantive application under the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 for the Waitaha Hydro Scheme. You have invited me to comment in my capacity as Minister for the South Island, and Minister for Hunting and Fishing.

I understand the proposed Waitaha Hydro Scheme is a renewable energy infrastructure project intended to strengthen electricity generation and regional energy security on the West Coast.

The proposal is to construct and operate a run-of-river hydroelectric scheme on the Waitaha River, approximately 60.0 kilometres south of Hokitika. The scheme will have a total capacity of 23 megawatts and is expected to generate between 120 and 140 gigawatt hours (GWh) of electricity annually, enough to power approximately 12,000 homes.

Assessments provided by the applicant indicate, during the three-to-four-year construction period, the project will contribute between \$35.00 million and \$43.00 million per year to gross domestic product in the Westland District, and \$52.00 million to \$64.00 million per year in the West Coast Region. During construction the project aims to create approximately 71 direct full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs per year in the Westland District and 121 direct and indirect jobs per year in the West Coast Region. Once operational, the scheme will require an ongoing FTE for regular operations and maintenance.

I note that the West Coast is currently a net importer of electricity, with regional demand exceeding local generation by an average of 70 GWh per year (approximately 35 per cent). Electricity from the proposed hydro-electric scheme will increase local renewable generation, help reduce reliance on imported electricity, and support regional resilience. Comments regarding specific impacts on local energy supply and transmission are noted for context, as detailed advice sits with the Energy portfolio.

As Minister for the South Island, I have considered the information provided in the substantive application for the project and its alignment with the priorities of my South Island portfolio. Its contribution to energy infrastructure aligns with national and regional priorities for renewable generation and energy security.

As the Minister for Hunting and Fishing, I acknowledge the potential implications of this project for regional interests and recreational activities. Based on the information provided and the application details, I offer the following comments:

- Construction and operation of the hydro scheme may temporarily restrict access to areas traditionally used for hunting and tramping. Conditions should ensure reasonable public access during and after construction, where practicable.

- There is potential for the project to enhance existing access by upgrading tracks and public facilities. That should be encouraged.
- While the lower Waitaha River – identified as regionally significant for angling – will remain unaffected, changes to river flow and habitat upstream could impact wildlife and freshwater ecosystems.
- Measures could be implemented to minimise disruption to species important for recreational hunting and fishing, and to monitor ecological impacts on freshwater species.

I suggest that these considerations be addressed in the assessment and any proposed approval conditions. Overall, I strongly support the project.

I am available for further engagement should additional information or clarification be required.

Yours sincerely,



Hon James Meager
Minister for the South Island
Minister for Hunting and Fishing
Minister for Youth
Associate Minister of Transport