FTAA-2606-1255

4 November 2026

Lynley Fletcher
Meridian Energy Limited
Email: s9(2)(a)

c/o Alia Cederman
Tonkin & Taylor Limited
Email: s9(2)(a)

Dear Alia and Lynley

Notice of Decisions on application for referral of the Western Bay Solar Farm project under the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024

This notice of decisions is for an application received from Meridian Energy Limited for referral of the Western Bays Solar Farm project (project) under the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 (the Act) that has been accepted by the Minister for Infrastructure (the Minister) under section 21 and referred under section 26.

The project is the construction, operation and maintenance of a solar farm and battery energy storage system occupying approximately 620 hectares (ha), together with a transmission line, substation, Grid Injection Point and ancillary buildings and infrastructure, near Kuratau in the Waikato region, and includes:

a. a solar farm with a generation capacity of up to 420 megawatts (MW), including solar photovoltaic panels, inverters, power conversion and storage blocks incorporating battery energy storage systems (BESS), with an aggregated storage capacity of approximately 250 MW, for the storage and supply of electricity to support grid stability and security of supply and associated electrical infrastructure;
b. a 33 kilovolt (kV) underground electricity network, and a 33/220 kV onsite substation, together with operational facilities, buildings, perimeter fencing and mitigation planting;
c. stock grazing beneath the solar panels;
d. a 220 kV double-circuit transmission line approximately 9.7 km in length, supported by towers up to 60 m high, connecting the solar farm substation to the Grid Injection Point;
e. a 220 kV Grid Injection Point connecting the project to the National Grid Bunnythorpe-Whakamaru A and B 220 kV transmission lines;

f. associated construction activities, including earthworks, discharges, vegetation clearance, laydown areas, access works, access tracks, road widening and supporting infrastructure; and
g. groundwater take and use from an existing bore during construction and operation.

The project seeks all necessary approvals and will require:

a. resource consents and certificates of compliance under the Resource Management Act 1991; and
b. an archaeological authority under the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014.

The project can only be accepted if the Minister is satisfied the criteria in section 22 is met, which includes being satisfied the project is an infrastructure or development project that would have significant regional or national benefits and 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 and is unlikely to materially affect the efficient operation of the fast-track approvals process..

Decision on referral application

The Minister has decided to accept the referral application for the whole project and is satisfied it meets the criteria in section 22 (s 21(1)(c)) and to refer the project to the fast-track approvals process under section 26(2)(a).

Reasons for accepting referral application

The Minister is satisfied the project:

a. is an infrastructure or development project that would have significant regional or national benefits; and
b. referring the project to the fast-track approvals process –
    i. would facilitate the project, including by enabling it to be processed in a more timely and cost-effective way than under normal processes; and
    ii. is unlikely to materially affect the efficient operation of the fast-track approvals process.

The Minister is satisfied the project is an infrastructure or development project that would have significant regional or national benefits as it:

1. involves the construction, operation and maintenance of a utility-scale solar farm, battery energy storage system and associated electricity transmission infrastructure
2. will deliver new regionally or nationally significant infrastructure or enable the continued functioning of existing regionally or nationally significant infrastructure (s22(2)(a)(ii)): by delivering new renewable electricity generation and transmission infrastructure, comprising up to 420 MW of solar generation, approximately 250 MW / 2,000 megawatt-hours of battery storage, a new transmission line and connection to the National Grid.

3. will deliver significant economic benefits (s22(2)(a)(iii)): including an estimated capital investment of approximately $758 million and employment during construction and operation
4. will support climate change mitigation, including the reduction or removal of greenhouse gas emissions – s22(2)(a)(vii)): through substantial additional renewable electricity generation and battery storage capacity, reducing reliance on higher-emissions generation and supporting electrification of the economy.
5. will support climate change adaptation, reduce risks arising from natural hazards, or support recovery from events caused by natural hazards – s22(2)(a)(viii): by increasing the diversity, reliability and resilience of New Zealand's electricity system through additional renewable generation and large-scale battery storage capacity.

The Minister is satisfied there is no reason they must decline the project under section 21(3) of the Act.

Specified matters for accepted referral application

1. Meridian Energy Limited who lodged the referral application are specified as the person authorised to lodge a substantive application for the project under section 27(2).

2. In relation to a substantive application for the project:
   a. A deadline for lodging the application applies under section 27(3)(b)(i), the application must be lodged by two years from the date of issue of this letter.
   b. The following information must be submitted with the application lodged for the project – s27(3)(b(ii):
      i. an Integrated Transport Assessment addressing the construction and operational transport effects of the project, including its interface with State Highway 32 and proposed access and intersection arrangements.

   c. The persons or groups from whom a panel must invite comments from in addition to any specified in section 53 – s27(3)(b)(iii):
      i. Chief Executive of Transpower New Zealand Limited; and
      ii. Chief Executive of NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi

Other matters (section 28):

Pursuant to section 16(2)(c), any panel considering a substantive application for the project must:

a. comply with the relevant procedural requirements under the Ngāti Tūwharetoa Claims Settlement Act 2018 relating to notification to Te Kōpua Kānapanapa, the appointment of hearing commissioners, and consideration of Te Kaupapa Kaitiaki (Taupō Catchment Plan); and
b. comply with the relevant procedural requirements of the 2009 joint management agreement between Tūwharetoa Māori Trust Board and Taupō District Council, including those relating to the option for joint decision-making.

If you have any queries about this notice of decisions, please email referral@fasttrack.govt.nz and include the name of the lead contact – Antonia Croft or phone 0800 FASTRK (0800 225 537).

Yours sincerely



Stephanie Frame
Manager – Fast-track Operations

cc: Written notice of decisions – s28(1):

the applicant – Meridian Energy Limited

anyone invited to comment – s17(1):

- relevant local authorities – Waikato Regional Council, Taupō District Council
- Minister for the Environment, Minister for Māori Crown Relations: Te Arawhiti; Minister for Māori Development and relevant portfolio Ministers: Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage; Minister for Energy and Minister of Climate Change
- relevant administering agencies – Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga
- Māori groups identified in the s18(2) list provided to the Minister – Te Kotahitanga o Ngāti Tūwharetoa; Tūwharetoa Māori Trust Board; Ngāti Parekaawa; Raukawa Settlement Trust
- owners of Māori land in the project area – Proprietors of Hauhungaroa 1D3B
- any other person – Minister for Economic Growth, Minister for Regional Development, Transpower New Zealand Limited, NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi and the Department of Conservation.

cc: Written notice where the Minister accepts the application and refers the project – s28(2):

- the Panel Convener (including all the information received by the Minister – s28(4))
- the EPA (including all the information received by the Minister – s28(4))
- the relevant administering agencies –Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga