

Hon Shane Jones

Minister for Oceans and Fisheries
Minister for Regional Development
Minister for Resources
Associate Minister of Finance
Associate Minister for Energy



18 December 2025

[Redacted]
Wellington

Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 – Waitaha Hydro Project substantive application (FTAA-2505-1069)

Dear June,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this substantive application under the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 (FTAA 2024).

The FTAA 2024 has been established to provide a regime that makes it easier and quicker for regionally and nationally significant infrastructure projects to gain the approvals needed for development, in support of this Government's economic growth objectives.

You sought my comment through both the Regional Development and Resources portfolios, however I consider there are minimal implications in relation to Resources issues. I am responding in my capacity as Regional Development Minister. My comments are attached as Annex One.

Yours sincerely

[Redacted Signature]

Hon Shane Jones
Minister for Regional Development

Annex One – Regional Development comments

Project overview

1. Westpower Limited (Westpower) proposes establishing a run-of-river hydro-electric power scheme (Scheme) on the Waitaha River on the West Coast of the South Island, diverting the river's water into a pressurised water tunnel to a new power station located below Morgan Gorge.
2. Westpower expects that the Scheme will have an installed peak output of 23 megawatts (MW) and generate between 120 and 140 gigawatt hours (GWh) per year, providing renewable electricity sufficient to power approximately 12,000 New Zealand homes.
3. The Waitaha Hydro Project will also include the construction of ancillary access roads, new 66 kilo-volt transmission lines and additional switching gear to connect the new power station to the local network via the existing Waitaha Substation.
4. In analysis provided by the applicant, the Waitaha Hydro Project is expected to generate the following benefits:
 - a. A construction cost of over \$200 million, with an estimated spend of \$80-100 million in Westland, and a spend of \$110-138 million across the West Coast associated with the project's 3.5-year construction phase.
 - b. 71 full-time equivalent construction jobs for each year of construction.
 - c. An increase to the resilience of the Westpower electricity supply network, during times of interrupted National Grid supply to the region as the applicant proposes the Scheme will be able to operate as an independent generation system.

Regional Development comments

5. Based on the analysis provided, the West Coast region would experience important economic benefits throughout the project's construction period. The region would also experience increased energy resilience, which would support communities in instances of disruption from the national network.
6. There may be broader impacts on the regional economy from the construction and presence of the Scheme, for example through disruption to tourism and recreational activities. The analysis presented suggests there could be an impact on visitation to the area, although economic impact is likely to be low, given the remote location of the proposed site and usual visitation numbers are not significant.
7. Comment on the significance of the Scheme on the national energy system should be addressed through the Energy portfolio. Indicatively, however, the proposed Scheme output, because it is run-of-the-river (which limits the capacity in comparison to dam hydro schemes), appears modest in comparison to other large hydro generation schemes across New Zealand. For example, the Clyde Dam has an installed capacity of 432 MW, compared with the proposed 23 MW installed capacity of the Waitaha Hydro Project.