



19 April 2024

Environment Committee  
Parliament Buildings  
Private Bag 18041  
Wellington 6160

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Tēnā koutou

## **Powerco submission on the Fast Track Approvals Bill**

1. Powerco Limited (Powerco) welcomes this opportunity to provide feedback on the Fast Track Approvals Bill (FTAB).

### **Summary of Submission**

2. Powerco broadly supports the overall direction of the Bill as it will establish a simplified approval process for large infrastructure projects that currently require separate approvals under different legislation. Such a process will likely reduce timeframes, risks and costs associated with large projects, enabling them to be delivered more efficiently. Energy distribution infrastructure is a critical component of our current environment and wellbeing, and will be even more critical as New Zealand electrifies in our decarbonisation.
3. As many large projects will impact on or connect to lifeline utilities, some enhancements are suggested in this submission to ensure impacts on lifeline utilities and interactions with our energy system are appropriately considered during the decision-making process. We consider that the majority of Powerco projects (including electrification projects) are unlikely to progress through a fast-track process, hence our focus on our interaction with the process as an affected party.

### **About Powerco**

4. Powerco is New Zealand's largest electricity and second largest gas distributor in terms of network length. Our network spreads across the upper and lower central North Island, servicing around 1.1 million customers across 450,000 homes, businesses and industries. This represents 46% of the gas connections and 16% of the electricity connections in New Zealand. We are a requiring authority and operate assets within six regions, under 29 district plans, and pursuant to numerous resource consents and designations.

5. Our electricity distribution network measures over 28,000km in length, while our gas distribution network measures over 6,170km. With our wide geographical spread, Powerco's distribution networks traverse or adjoin a wide range of environments.
6. Powerco's existing distribution networks need to be operated, maintained, repaired, and upgraded to maintain or improve capacity or security of supply. New network infrastructure is also needed to meet growing electricity demand driven by decarbonisation, new technology, population and economic growth. In recognition of the critical nature of our distribution networks, Powerco is a "Lifeline Utility" as described in Part B of Schedule 1 of the Civil Defence Emergency Management Act 2002.
7. A reliable and constant energy supply is critical to sustaining the regional economy, population growth and community wellbeing. Powerco's goal is to provide its customers with the optimal balance of cost, security and flexibility. Development of our network, providing for new technologies and smart systems, is an important contributor to New Zealand meeting its 2050 net zero target.

#### Powerco's submission on the FTAB

8. As many large projects will impact on or connect to lifeline utilities, Powerco considers that sections 14, 16 and 19 of the Bill need to be amended to make specific reference to "Lifeline Utilities" as described in Part B of Schedule 1 of the Civil Defence Emergency Management Act 2002. This will ensure that such impacts are given appropriate consideration during the decision-making process. Our assets are widely distributed throughout our footprint which means that large projects are more than likely to disturb or be undertaken over, under or close to our assets. Activities such as renewable energy generation (e.g. distributed generation) also need to be considered by our network operations team. Based on Powerco's experience with the review of projects under the Covid-19 Recovery (Fast-track Consenting) Act 2020, there is a need to independently verify and confirm information put forward by applicants.

Powerco **seeks** section 14(3)(h) is amended as below:

- (h) *a list of the persons the applicant considers are likely to be affected by the project, including relevant local authorities, lifeline utilities, relevant iwi authorities, and relevant Treaty settlement entities, protected customary rights groups, customary marine title groups, applicant groups under the Marine and Coastal (Takutai Moana) Act 2011, ngā hapū o Ngāti Porou, and any person with a registered interest in land that may need to be acquired under the Public Works Act 1981*

Powerco **seeks** section 16(1) is amended as below:

- (1) *For an application for an approval under this Act, the applicant must undertake engagement with the following groups before lodging a referral application:*

- (a) *relevant iwi, hapū, and Treaty settlement entities;*
- (b) *any relevant applicant groups with applications for customary marine title under the Marine and Coastal Area (Takutai Moana Act) 2011;*
- (c) *if relevant, ngā hapū o Ngāti Porou;*
- (d) *relevant local authorities;*
- (e) relevant lifeline utilities.

Powerco **seeks** section 19(1) is amended as below:

- (1) Unless the joint Ministers decide to decline the application before inviting comments, the Ministers must copy the application to, and invite written comments from,—
  - (a) the relevant local authorities; and
  - (b) the relevant portfolio Ministers; and
  - (c) the relevant iwi authorities; and
  - (d) the relevant Treaty settlement entities; and
  - (e) the relevant Takutai Moana rights holders and applicants; and
  - (f) ngā hapū o Ngāti Porou (if the proposed activity is in or adjacent to ngā rohe moana o ngā hapū o Ngāti Porou); and
  - (g) the iwi and hapū parties to Mana Whakahono ā Rohe and joint management agreements (where relevant to the proposed activity); and
  - (h) in respect of any Māori land in the proposed area of activity,—
    - (i) any Māori land administering entity (trusts under Part 12 of Te Ture Whenua Maori Act and Māori incorporations); and
    - (ii) agents appointed by the Māori Land Court for the owners of a Māori land block that doesn't have an administering entity; and
  - (i) the relevant lifeline utilities.

9. Powerco also considers that section 19 of the FTAB should be amended to enable and encourage electronic service of applications and documents where written comments are invited. In one instance where Powerco was invited to comment on a project under the Covid-19 Recovery (Fast-track Consenting) Act 2020, the letter reached the appropriate person *after* the closing date for comments. A central database could be established where organisations 'opt-in' and provide contact details to receive service of applications electronically. This will assist organisations to respond within the 10 working day timeframe.

Powerco **seeks** that section 19 is amended to enable and encourage electronic service of applications and documents where written comments are invited.

## Conclusion

10. Should officials or the Committee require any additional information regarding Powerco or the changes to the Bill sought above, please do not hesitate to contact us via Gary Scholfield, Senior Environmental Planner, Ph +64 7 928 5659, Mobile +64 27 598 4145 or email: [planning@powerco.co.nz](mailto:planning@powerco.co.nz).
11. Powerco does not wish to be heard in support of this submission.

Ngā mihi



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