

DOC – DISTRICT RESPONSE TO INITIAL FAST TRACK APPLICATION:

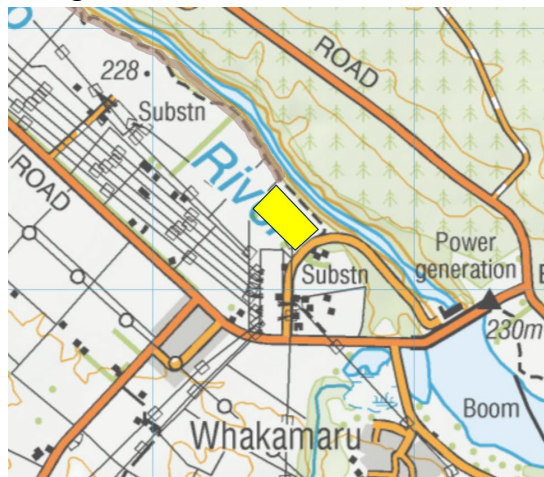
FTA286 – WHAKAMARU BATTERY ENERGY STORAGE SYSTEM – MERCURY ENERGY

The application involves installation and operation of a 300MW battery system on land owned by Mercury Energy to store electrical energy to help meet demand during peak times and to build resilience in the national grid. The installation would be adjacent to the existing Whakamaru Hydro Electric Power Scheme and would be connected to the hydro station's 220kV line, via a new 33kV underground cable.

We have been asked to comment on:

1. Does the project require any DoC-related approvals?

- No public conservation land is directly involved so no DOC approvals are required for the main consent sought. However, the battery site (shown in yellow) is adjacent to the Waikato River Marginal Strip (shown in brown) so we do have an interest as a neighbouring landowner.



- The application involves earthworks and removal of trees to access the site. Therefore, a Wildlife Act 1953 Authority may be required should monitoring identify bats or lizards within affected areas.
- No freshwater changes are mentioned in the applications, however, DOC would want to be sure that the Waikato River will not be adversely affected by installation, operation or any failures of the battery energy storage system.

2. Are you aware of anything that would render the project ineligible under clause 18 of the Bill?

- Clause 18(a) does not apply as there is no Māori-owned land or land subject to treaty claims involved.
- Clause 18(c)(i) does not apply as this location has no coastal involvement and the Marine and Coastal Area (Takutai Moana) Act 2011 does not apply.

3. Are you aware of any Treaty settlement matters which relate to the project site – such as local protocols

The application identifies Raukawa Settlement Trust as the relevant iwi for this location, but does not indicate the Trust's position on the project, just that they are continuing to engage following a hui in October 2023. It does state that the 2012 Raukawa Deed of Settlement does not affect any private land.

There is a slight possibility that this application may conflict with treaty settlements, however, further research is needed to be done to confirm this'.

Given the proximity of the project site to the Waikato River, the following acts may also apply:

- Ngati Tuwharetoa, Raukawa and Te Arawa River Iwi Waikato River Act 2010
- Waikato-Tainui Raupatu Claims (Waikato River) Settlement Act 2010

4. Any other relevant matters

The information provided in the application acknowledges known long-tailed bat populations in the area, with the closest population sited about 6km from the project site. It also identifies trees in the project site that are typical long-tailed bat roosting habitats.

DOC would like to see clearer details of what pre-project monitoring will be done prior to any earthworks and vegetation removal. The following paragraphs from Section 5 of the application are very general and do not explain what monitoring will be done prior to starting the project to identify which species may be present or affected. It also does not give any indication of what steps will be taken if species such as bats or lizards are found.

If removal of vegetation that provides fauna habitat is unavoidable, and fauna are identified to utilise the habitat, effects management will be applied to minimise and mitigate for any effects. This will include bat monitoring should any of the larger trees need to be removed.

Ongoing input from a qualified ecologist throughout the design of the project will ensure that ecological effects are avoided in the first instance. Where effects cannot be avoided, management measures including a lizard and/or bat management plan will ensure any adverse effects on fauna species that have been identified as utilising the habitat, will be appropriately managed and mitigated.

Given that all vegetation is habitat to some form of fauna, the threshold for applying 'effects management' needs to be clearer. There also need to be details about what 'effects management' might entail in this context or what activities might be applied for under the Wildlife Act 1953.

Ongoing input from a qualified ecologist is commendable, but DOC would like to see initial monitoring completed and any lizard or bat management plans in place before any earthworks or vegetation removal starts.