

BRF-2282

12 October 2022

Chris McLay
Chief Executive
Waikato Regional Council
email: s 9(2)(a)

Dear Chris McLay

COVID-19 Recovery (Fast-track Consenting) Act 2020 – comments sought on referral applications – Waerenga Solar Farm Project and Rangiriri Solar Farm Project

The Minister for the Environment (the Minister) received applications to refer the following two projects to an expert consenting panel (a panel) for consideration under the COVID-19 Recovery (Fast-track Consenting) Act 2020 (FTCA):

1. Waerenga Solar Farm Project from Waerenga Solar Farm Limited and Transpower New Zealand Limited
2. Rangiriri Solar Farm Project – from Rangiriri Solar Farm Limited and Transpower New Zealand Limited

The projects are described in Appendix A and the application documents are in Attachments 1 and 2.

Under delegated authority from the Minister and pursuant to section 21(2) of the FTCA, I invite Waikato Regional Council to provide written comments on the referral applications. A template is provided for this purpose in Attachment 3. Comment is sought on the specific matters outlined in the table below, and on any other matter you consider relevant to the Minister's decision on whether or not to accept the applications.

Specific questions on the applications**Waerenga Solar Farm Project:**

1. Are there any reasons that you consider it more appropriate for the project, or part of the project, to proceed through existing Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) consenting processes rather than the processes in the FTCA?
2. What reports and assessments would normally be required by the Council for a project of this nature in this area?
3. Does the applicant, or a company owned by the applicant, have any environmental regulatory compliance history in your region?

Rangiriri Solar Farm Project:

1. Are there any reasons that you consider it more appropriate for the project, or part of the project, to proceed through existing Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) consenting processes rather than the processes in the FTCA?
2. What reports and assessments would normally be required by the Council for a project of this nature in this area?
3. Does the applicant, or a company owned by the applicant, have any environmental regulatory compliance history in your region?

The above information is provided to you in confidence and as part of the statutory process set out in the FTCA. Please do not forward the applications or request for comments to anyone outside your organisation.

If the Minister accepts the applications and the projects are referred to panels, Waikato Regional Council will have the opportunity to nominate a local authority representative (who could be a councillor or independent hearings commissioner) to sit on the panels and determine the RMA approvals for the projects. The applicants will provide a detailed assessment of environmental effects and cultural impact assessments at this stage and the council will have the opportunity to provide further comments to the panels.

Please provide comments via return email within 10 working days to ensure that the Minister takes them into consideration when making his decision. Note that the Minister is not required to consider any comments provided after this time.

If it is more efficient for you to discuss the applications, please contact the Ministry for the Environment's Fast-track Consenting Team at fasttrackconsenting@mfe.govt.nz to arrange an appointment.

Yours sincerely



Madeleine Berry
Acting Manager, Fast-track Consenting Team

Appendix:

A. Details of proposed projects

Attachments:

1. Application to refer the Waerenga Solar Farm Project to an expert consenting panel, including supporting information (Databox link)
2. Application to refer the Rangiriri Solar Farm Project to an expert consenting panel, including supporting information (Databox link)
3. Response template for written comments

Appendix A – Details of proposed projects

Project	Applicants	Details
Waerenga Solar Farm Project	Waerenga Solar Farm Limited Transpower New Zealand Limited	The Waerenga Solar Farm project is to construct and operate a solar farm on a 385-hectare site at 3 properties located on Waerenga Road, Keith Road and Awariki Road, Waerenga, Waikato, and to connect to and supply electricity to the national grid. The solar farm will have an approximate peak output of 180 Megawatts. The solar farm will comprise: - approximately 290,000 solar panels, occupying approximately 81 hectares - arrays and mounting structures, inverter cabinets, and associated infrastructure - a 220kV substation and transmission line to connect to the national grid - an energy storage facility - underground electricity cables - ancillary buildings, structures and infrastructure (including roads, access, culverts, cabling, fencing, CCTV poles and other infrastructure) - landscaping including planting, boundary screening and enhancement of streams and waterways
Rangiriri Solar Farm Project	Rangiriri Solar Farm Project Transpower New Zealand Limited	The Rangiriri Solar Farm Project is to construct and operate a solar farm on a 275-hectare site comprising 4 properties on Glen Murray Road, Rangiriri West, Waikato (the primary address is 241 Glen Murray Road) and the adjacent road reserve, and to connect to and supply electricity to the national electricity grid. The solar farm will have an approximate peak output of 130 Megawatts. The solar farm will comprise: - approximately 200,000 solar panels, occupying approximately 58 hectares - arrays and mounting structures, inverter cabinets, and associated infrastructure - a 220kV substation and transmission line to connect to the national grid - an energy storage facility - underground electricity cables - ancillary buildings, structures and infrastructure (including roads, access, culverts, cabling, fencing, CCTV poles and other infrastructure) - landscaping including planting, boundary screening and enhancement of streams and waterways