



## Submission - November 14 2025

### Fast Track Approvals Amendment Bill

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We wish to speak in support of our submission

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the changes proposed through the Fast Track Approvals Amendments Bill.

We have a particular interest in the implications of fast tracking applications for novel projects that have not been done in New Zealand before and that there is no precedent for or sound understanding of the costs, benefits impacts and necessary regulations and compliance, monitoring and enforcement methods. This includes incinerators, chemical recycling and projects likely to generate future contaminated sites.

We strongly oppose these amendments to the Fast Track Approvals Act.

We consider the Fast Track Approvals Act has serious flaws and that the amendments proposed will compound the process, environmental and constitutional issues with the FTAA rather than improve the situation. It seems that Grocery Competition is being used as an excuse to adapt key elements of the FTAA.

## We make the following comments

Critical issues for our sector

### **Environmental Protection and harm reduction**

The processes in the current act for identifying and recommending or listing projects for consideration and approval are inadequate for uncovering the real costs and risks of complex, novel proposals and making sense of the technical descriptions and claims around potential benefits. The suggested amendments would weaken these further.

Fast track processes don't make sense for:

- **Novel projects** - involving new technology, or approaches that are new to New Zealand such as Incineration, chemical recycling and plastics to fuel.

- **Highly contested projects** - where there are strong and diverse perspectives on the costs, benefits and impacts

These require careful consideration to determine whether or not they should go ahead. They often need new regulatory frameworks, standards for operation and effective compliance, monitoring and enforcement systems.

We think there is a real risk that complex proposals for rubbish incinerators, waste to energy plants and advanced / chemical recycling facilities could be fast tracked without due consideration of environmental, social, health and economic impacts.

### **Sales pitches and greenwash**

The fast track process aims to speed up approval of projects and reduce consent costs. Evidence suggests that this is likely to push cost and risk out into the implementation and operational phases of the project's life.

Speed of decision making is no guarantee of quality of outcome. Speed at this stage of the process is likely to work against good outcomes because it often relies on arbitrary rule of thumb or 'intuitive' judgement calls that are not evidence based and do not take into account all the relevant perspectives.

It is important to remember that proposals being put forward by developers are sales pitches rather than comprehensive analysis of the costs, benefits and risks for society, our environment or our economy as a whole. Green washing of proposals is common in our sector with over promising and under delivering a common outcome for recycling and waste disposal systems.

Advanced and chemical recycling plants are being proposed as solutions but this technology is largely unproven. Promotional work is running well ahead of delivery at scale around demonstrating economic viability of the processes and the safety of the plastic outputs as food and drink grade packaging.

Some pilot plants exist, a number have failed due to financial and technical issues. Some plants promoted as plastic to plastic solutions have ended up operating as plastic to fuel facilities.

There is a real risk that Ministers could be drawn in by the sales pitch and create a Government Policy Statement for the regional or national significance of a particular activity such as incineration without understanding the real costs and risks in the medium to long term.

How costs are distributed across stakeholders is as important as the total, simplistic cost benefit approaches do not unpack this and can mask the long term costs and risks for communities and their local environments.

### **Contaminated Land**

Contaminated land is a core issue for our sector. There are a large number of contaminated sites across Aotearoa including those contaminated by chemicals and by products through past industrial activity and closed landfills leaching toxic compounds. A new risk is inundation and erosion of landfills due to flooding and sea level rise.

The cost of clean ups is usually borne by the taxpayer or the ratepayer. In both cases the public and the environment bear the costs associated with commercial activity while the businesses that created the problem receive the cash flow and the profit.

Decision making processes for proposals need to properly consider these medium to long term impacts, not just the short term economic benefits from the initial construction phase. The Proposed Government Policy Statements are likely to cause more problems than they solve.

### **Public participation**

We do not support restricting the panels' ability to call for evidence from a wide range of stakeholders including NGO's, community organisations and other subject matter experts as well as neighbours and others affected by proposals.

We do not consider that Local Authorities have the capacity, capability, resources or mandate to effectively represent the public interest in all circumstances.

Shutting some stakeholders out of the process will leave gaps in the evidence presented and will reduce stakeholder buy-in around the decisions that come out of the process.

This would prioritise the interests of large (often global) companies over those of local businesses, organisations, Iwi, hapū and communities. This is unacceptable.

### **Cost recovery**

It is reasonable to expect that applicants will cover the cost of a fair and comprehensive exploration of the costs, benefits and impacts of the proposals being put up for approval. The extent to which costs can be recovered by councils and statutory bodies needs to be clarified in the amendments if they do proceed.

## Due process

The amendment bill proposals would substantially change the nature of the operation of the Fast Track Approvals Act. We consider the following changes significant and unacceptable.

We are astonished that the Ministry For Regulation granted an exemption from a Regulatory Impact Statement because in their opinion the social, economic and environmental impacts of the proposals were limited.

### **Influence of Ministers**

We consider that Ministers should remain separate from the Approvals process. Decision making needs to be one step removed from political influence. We do not support the use of Government Policy Statements as a mechanism for influencing the process by determining what should and should not be considered to be national or regional benefits.

This would give Ministers undue influence over both which projects go through into the approvals process and how they are valued in the deliberation process. That would mean the panel is unable to independently consider the nature of the costs and benefits of the projects on the table.

The Act already prioritises regional and national development over other matters of critical importance to New Zealanders such as environmental protection and sustainable resource management.

The Act assumes all development is good development. But making good development decisions requires a holistic approach and joined up thinking about how our plans for investing in infrastructure and other large projects will impact on:

- Destination management
- Liveability
- Environmental quality
- International trade
- Productive capability
- Decarbonisation of supply chains.

What we know is we have a long list of infrastructure projects and a shortage of capital, opex funding and workforce capacity. So we have to pick the projects that are going to deliver the best value. We have to have decision making processes ask the hard questions:

- Will it help us achieve our medium to long term goals
- Who is going to pay and how.

### **Modification of proposals after they have been lodged**

We do not support any modifications that substantially alter the proposal.

We do support minor modifications which improve the social, environmental and economic impacts of proposals.

### **Time frames**

We do not support shorter time frames for consideration of proposals. Setting a certain number of days for all applications seems arbitrary. Timelines should be based on the complexity, scale, contestability and novelty of proposals themselves.

### **Panels and impartiality**

We do not support applicants being able to influence the composition of panels. The focus should be on conflicts of interest rather than suitability or partiality.

## **We make the following recommendations**

Given the short timeframe for submissions we have not been able to do a detailed analysis of the clauses in the proposed amendment bill.

We strongly support the detailed submission that has been made by the Environmental Defence Society regarding this amendment Bill. We consider their specific recommendations regarding clauses should be given effect.

<https://eds.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/EDS-submission-on-Fast-track-Approvals-Amendment-Bill-Final.pdf>

## About us

Zero Waste Aotearoa is a membership organisation with 130+ members across the country who work towards Zero Waste with their local communities. One of these members is Para Kore which is a network in its own right.

82 members provide practical resource recovery and behaviour change services. Collectively they employ 1,185 people, recover 43,802 tonnes of material each year and turn over \$87m.

We recognise that upholding Te Tiriti and supporting Indigenous self-determination and kaitiakitanga are essential to addressing the root causes of the waste and climate crises, and to building a truly just and regenerative zero-waste future.

