



Submission to the
Environment
Select Committee
on the Fast-Track
Approvals Bill.



17 April 2024

The Fast-Track Approvals Bill poses serious and intergenerational threats to New Zealanders' health and well-being.

We urge reconsideration.

The Public Health Communication Centre (PHCC) thanks the Government for the opportunity to make a submission on the proposed Fast-Track Approvals Bill ('the Bill').

We wish to make an oral submission to the Environment Select Committee on the Bill.

The PHCC opposes the Bill and urges reconsideration. Our main objections, detailed in this submission, are:

1. The Bill is significantly out-of-step with the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet advice on best-practice policy and policy development.
2. The Bill reduces the rigour required, and increases bias in, decision-making on major projects.
3. The Bill circumvents legal protections for public health, leaving New Zealanders more vulnerable to illness and death from pollution.
4. The Bill fails to adequately account for climate change and the protective value of a healthy environment, leaving communities' health and well-being more vulnerable.
5. The Bill undermines democratic processes.
6. The Bill is likely to worsen inequality.
7. The Bill is likely to have long-term impacts on public health – impacting the lives of our children and grandchildren.

We strongly recommend the Environment Select Committee does not recommend the Bill to the House and, in doing so, highlights its threats to New Zealanders' health and well-being.

We recommend the Committee urge the Government to re-direct its work programme to develop "a long-term vision for a transition towards a low-carbon, greener economy," and to

“build on [our] well-developed knowledge and innovation system for exporting higher value export products and decouple growth from natural resource use” as recommended by the OECD¹.

About the Public Health Communication Centre

The Public Health Communication Centre (PHCC) is an independently funded organisation dedicated to increasing the reach and impact of public health research in Aotearoa New Zealand. The Centre has a range of public health and science communication experts.

We are hosted by the Department of Public Health at the University of Otago, Wellington.

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¹ OECD (2017), OECD Environmental Performance Reviews: New Zealand 2017, OECD Environmental Performance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264268203-en>.

1. The Bill is significantly out-of-step with the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet advice on best-practice policy development.

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) has produced a large body of policy guidance that “supports good government decision making”.² The guidance is produced under a programme called ‘The Policy Project’, initiated under the previous National-led Government in 2014.³ A review of guidance shows serious discrepancies between DPMC guidance for best-practice policy development and the Bill.

Three examples of this are:

- DPMC emphasis on the value of community input and the Bill’s severe restriction of community input.

DPMC guidance frequently stresses the value of broad input into policy making from the public and experts. One section of the guidance summarises this by stating, “good quality engagement by government can solve complex problems, can lead to better solutions and build enduring relationships with individuals and groups in the community.”⁴

The Bill proposes to severely restrict the public input and the input of those with relevant expertise on project decisions.⁵ The public may only have input if a project is on their property or adjacent to their property,⁶ and expert panels are only required to draw on a small number of people and groups. Neither these expert panels nor those they must consult nor the Ministers responsible are required to have any public health expertise.

² Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. (2024). The Policy Project. Retrieved from <https://www.dPMC.govt.nz/our-programmes/policy-project>

³ As above.

⁴ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. (2024). The Policy Project: Policy Advice Themes - Engagement. Retrieved from <https://www.dPMC.govt.nz/our-programmes/policy-project/policy-advice-themes/engagement>

⁵ Schedule 4

⁶ Schedule 4, clause 20

It is evident that this extreme reduction in public participation means all members of the public impacted by a project are unlikely to be represented in the process. Air, water, climate pollution, and biodiversity loss (etc.) are not restricted to the land on which a project takes place, they cross property and regional boundaries. The restriction on expertise required or able to participate means essential information is highly likely to be overlooked. Furthermore, public notification is not allowed under the Bill, rendering important public decisions non-transparent and reducing trust.⁷ Based on the advice of the DMPC, this restriction of input into decision making means the Bill will be less likely to solve complex problems, is likely to result in poorer solutions, and is likely to damage social and institutional relationships.

- DPMC emphasis on the value of foresight, “to think, anticipate, and act in the future interests of people in New Zealand” and the Bill’s goal to expedite short-term economic outcomes.

The Policy Project has put substantial effort into supporting policy- and decision-makers to develop policy that acts in the long-term interests of New Zealanders. Our biggest resource management challenges and risks (eg, stable and resilient landscapes that minimise risk to people’s lives and livelihoods in storm events like Cyclone Gabrielle) demand a long-term view. This is because of the cumulative effect of poor short-term decisions and the coordination needed across agencies, groups, and individuals.

This Bill is designed in a way that encourages short-term Ministerial priorities over management of the long-term health and well-being needs of the New Zealanders. The purpose of the Bill is to simply speed up decision making for projects that are considered to have “significant regional or national benefits” However, crucially, these benefits are undefined.⁸

There is little in the Bill to require decision-makers consider the health and well-being of the public over the longer term. Policy mechanisms designed to enforce long term

⁷ Schedule 4, clause 20.

⁸ Purpose: “The purpose of this Act is to provide a fast-track decision-making process that facilitates the delivery of infrastructure and development projects with significant regional or national benefits.”

decision-making are proposed to be overridden by the Bill. For example, explicit public health requirements like drinking water source protection under the Resource Management Act 1991 and regional planning instruments (the key tools for regions and communities to plan and work for their long-term well-being) would both be overridden by the Bill.

- DPMC emphasis on policy analysis and development that is ‘clear, logical and informed by evidence’ and the profound limitations in analysis during the Bill’s development.

DMPC’s policy guidance emphasises the importance of evidence and robust analysis in the development of policy. However, government material on the Bill demonstrates a troubling lack of analysis to inform parliament and the public on the risks this Bill poses. The minimal analysis is disproportionate to the potential impacts of the Bill on the economy, public health, democratic process, environmental health, and the wellbeing of future generations.

As the Ministry for the Environment’s ‘Supplementary Analysis Report’ states, analysis of the Bill was not as detailed or thorough as “would usually be expected for a Bill of this significance” (Supplementary Analysis Report, pg. 5).⁹ Further sections of the Report reinforce this, quoted below (bold is our emphasis). These are not minor limitations to analysis, they are profound, and indicative of inadequate policy development.

*“The policy proposals that shape the fast-track regime are limited to the scope of this change agreed by Cabinet, which **does not consider other wider aspects of the resource management system**. This minimises the interaction between the change that a fast-track regime would bring and also the significant number of other resource management policy proposals which are being developed concurrently or in quick succession (RMA changes to Te Mana o te Wai, National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management, National Policy Statement for Highly Productive Land etc).*”

⁹ Ministry for the Environment. (2024). Supplementary Analysis Report: Fast-track Approvals Bill. Retrieved from https://environment.govt.nz/assets/publications/FTAB-24-Supplementary-Analysis-Report-PCO_Redacted.pdf

Officials are unable to undertake a system-wide analysis that incorporates all the linkages for all the proposed amendments, how they work together and what the cumulative impacts of all these amendments will be.” (pg.3).

“Some of the options discussed in this SAR will impose costs and/or benefits on a range of actors including the Crown, local government, iwi/Māori, the development community, the general public, or future generations. While we can anticipate where these costs and benefits will fall, their monetary value is difficult to quantify in the time we have available to complete this analysis.” (pg. 3)

*“There has been limited analysis on the inclusion of non-RMA legislation Due to time constraints, **there has been very limited analysis on the problem definition associated with conservation, heritage and public works legislation. No analysis has been provided by the Department of Conservation for the SAR on the conservation approvals contained in the fast-track regime.***

*While there appears to be general consensus among infrastructure providers and developers that multiple approvals processes can be costly and time-consuming, the challenges/barriers posed specifically by conservation and heritage approvals are not well understood. **There may be negative impacts on conservation land and wildlife outcomes which have not been quantified.** There has been limited analysis on the proposed changes to non-RMA legislation designed to enable more development, including the impacts of enabling greater development on public conservation land. This creates significant risks for achieving the Government’s wider objectives. For instance, there will be impacts on the conservation values of public conservation land. **The potential benefits to development and the impacts upon conservation are not well understood.** Many issues in the public works legislation involve balancing competing interests between delivering public infrastructure and private property rights, which need further exploration.*

There has been limited analysis on the problem definition associated with the public works legislation. Any issues in the public works legislation involves balancing competing interests between delivering public infrastructure and private property rights which requires careful consideration.

The changes proposed to the Fisheries Act were a late addition to the fast-track bill and have not been considered further in the SAR due to the time available for analysis.” (pg. 4)

2. The Bill reduces rigour of, and increases bias in, decision making on major projects.

As well as the evident lack of rigour in the development of the Bill (as demonstrated by the quotes above), the Bill would also establish decision making processes that reduce rigour (when compared to current processes) and are likely to increase bias in decision making on major projects.

Our team has reviewed public comments of the three Ministers with the most significant roles under the Bill.¹⁰ Our review indicated Ministers are emphasising mining and major roading projects for fast-tracked under the Bill. Ministers have also commonly mentioned aquaculture, housing, and renewable energy projects, as well as oil, gas and coal extraction, dams and farming projects, and public transport.

These types of projects are large, impactful, and have long-term implications for communities and the country. They are the types of projects that have potentially serious and wide-reaching impacts on public health, lives, and livelihoods, particularly as climate change progresses. It should be clear that rigour in decision-making around such major projects is needed.

Even when developments have potential public health benefits (such as housing developments, new public transport infrastructure and new renewable energy) rigorous investigation and consideration of projects is required to ensure their safety and longevity. For example, the development of housing on flood plains can create risk to people’s lives and livelihoods, as witnessed with Cyclone Gabrielle last year.

¹⁰Full review available in the appendix of Prickett, M., Revuecamp, I., Hales, S., Baker MG. (2024). *Fast-track Bill puts NZ on wrong track, threatening public health*. The Briefing. Retrieved from <https://www.phcc.org.nz/briefing/fast-track-bill-puts-nz-wrong-track-threatening-public-health>

However, as mentioned previously, the Bill drastically reduces the people, organisations and types of expertise that are required to or able to provide input on decisions. As well as minimal expertise and perspectives involved in the process of assessing a project, the process of approving projects lacks appropriate checks and balances. There is an absence of clear public benefit criteria or protective backstops (like protections for drinking water) against which projects can be tested. Ministers may even override conditions imposed on a project by an expert panel to minimise environmental or other harms should they wish.¹¹

The requirement to undertake ‘analysis’ should Ministers wish to deviate from panel recommendations is inadequate, as there is no indication of the form, or the quality of analysis required. Analysis is open to interpretation and poor or biased decision-makers are likely to choose to formulate minimal and/or inappropriate analysis to justify their decisions.

The lack of scrutiny through participation, concentration of decision-making power to a small number of Ministers, and limited accountability for decisions made under the Bill will encourage biased decisions.

Ministers have not only demonstrated their preference for certain types of projects over others in public comments¹², but they have also identified specific projects they wish to approve. For example, the Ruataniwha Dam proposed for the Hawke’s Bay, which was rejected after a long process of consultation and court proceedings.¹³ Minister for Resources Shane Jones has highlighted the ‘Ruataniwha clause’ in the Bill in parliamentary debate.¹⁴ This comment presumably refers to Schedule 5, part 3, clause 18: ‘Exchanges of conservation areas and Crown-owned reserves’ which would circumvent the Supreme Court decision that ruled against the dam. Furthermore, the Government has begun to invite particular projects to apply to be fast-track if the Bill becomes the law.¹⁵

¹¹ Part 2, section 25.

¹² Prickett, M., Revuecamp, I., Hales, S., Baker MG. (2024). *Fast-track Bill puts NZ on wrong track, threatening public health*. The Briefing. Retrieved from <https://www.phcc.org.nz/briefing/fast-track-bill-puts-nz-wrong-track-threatening-public-health>

¹³ Science Media Centre. (2017). Supreme Court denies Ruataniwha Dam appeal – In the News. Retrieved from <https://www.sciencemediacentre.co.nz/2017/07/06/supreme-court-denies-ruataniwha-dam-appeal-news/>

¹⁴ NZ Parliament Hansard. (7 March 2024). Fast-track Approvals Bill – First reading. Retrieved from https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/hansard-debates/rhr/combined/HansDeb_20240307_20240307_44

¹⁵ For example, “Chatham Rock Phosphate Limited (TSXV: NZP, NZX: CRP, Frankfurt Borse: 3GRE) wishes to advise that the Company has been requested by the New Zealand government to make an application for the

The Ministry for the Environment advised that Ministers should not be final decision-makers due to risks around the perception of politicisation of project decisions.¹⁶ We would go a step further and say that this is not only a risk of perception but a real risk of conflict of interest in Ministerial decision making. The Office of the Auditor General states that “managing conflicts is particularly important in the public sector,”¹⁷ and goes on to explain (bold is our emphasis):

“Conflicts of interest can arise in all walks of life, including the private sector. However, there are higher expectations about conflicts of interest in the public sector because it is public money that is being spent, and public powers that are being exercised.

*Where activities are paid for out of public funds, **or decisions are made exercising public powers, members of the public rightly expect the people making those decisions to act impartially, without any possibility that they could be influenced by favouritism or improper personal motives, or that public resources could be misused for private benefit.***

*Also, unlike private organisations, **public organisations are subject to specific legal rules that require their decision-making processes to be procedurally fair. Any decision of a public organisation that is tainted by bias, or the appearance of bias, is potentially subject to legal challenge.**”¹⁸*

Chatham Rise rock phosphate project to be considered as a listed project in the Fast Track Consenting Bill (the Bill) to be put to Parliament.” (10 April 2024). Retrieved from <https://www.nzx.com/announcements/429367>

¹⁶ Ministry for the Environment. (2024). Supplementary Analysis Report: Fast-track Approvals Bill. Retrieved from https://environment.govt.nz/assets/publications/FTAB-24-Supplementary-Analysis-Report-PCO_Redacted.pdf

¹⁷ Office of the Auditor-General. (2024). Part 2: The nature of conflicts of interest. Retrieved from <https://oag.parliament.nz/2020/conflicts/part2.htm>

¹⁸ Office of the Auditor-General. (2024). Part 2: The nature of conflicts of interest. Retrieved from <https://oag.parliament.nz/2020/conflicts/part2.htm>

3. The Bill circumvents legal protections for public health, leaving New Zealanders more vulnerable to illness and death from pollution.

Public health benefits from environmental protections. For example, pollution to air and water are largely controlled under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA)

and associated policies (eg, National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management, which includes protective provisions for drinking water).

Despite these protections, there are still:

- ~3,300 premature adult deaths per year in NZ as a result of air pollution,¹⁹
- ~34,000 New Zealanders who become ill from unsafe drinking water each year.²⁰

The large numbers of New Zealanders experiencing illness or dying from pollution indicates our legislative protections and their implementation need strengthening. Instead, the Bill allows for decision making that overrides existing RMA protections, including the usual restrictions on air and water pollution. It would not be good policy making to simply claim that Ministers would not risk people's health. Good policy making makes explicit as to 'how' something must be achieved.

Managing air and water pollution, as well as other environmental risks to public health, requires a joined-up approach across agencies and policies. Air and water, for example, are not confined, moving across landscapes, properties, regions, etc. The Ministry for the Environment in its Supplementary Assessment Report states that the Bill fails to do this and that it is likely to require changes in the future. It goes on to say that the government has not been able to analyse the full extent of implications the Bill would have.

“The policy proposals that shape the fast-track regime are limited to the scope of this change agreed by Cabinet, which does not consider other wider aspects of the resource management system.... Officials are unable to undertake a system-wide

¹⁹ Environmental Health Intelligence New Zealand. Health and Air Pollution in New Zealand: HAPINZ 3.0. (2022). Massey University.

²⁰ Chambers, T. et al. Beyond muddy waters: Three Waters reforms required to future-proof water service delivery and protect public health in Aotearoa New Zealand. New Zealand medical journal 135, 87-95 (2022).

analysis that incorporates all the linkages for all the proposed amendments, how they work together and what the cumulative impacts of all these amendments will be.”

Overriding existing protections and regional planning tools, and a failure of the policy development process to give time to the analysis of the proposed system in its entirety, clearly leaves New Zealanders more vulnerable to illness and (premature or otherwise) death from pollution.

4. The Bill fails to adequately account for climate change and the protective value of a healthy environment, leaving communities’ health and well-being more vulnerable.

Climate change poses both direct and indirect threats to people’s health. As examples of direct threats, an estimated 60,000 plus people in Europe died from heat-related issues in the summer of 2022²¹, and 11 New Zealanders died in February last year as a result of Cyclone Gabrielle²². Indirect threats include increased food insecurity (crop damage, for example, as witnessed in Hawke’s Bay after Cyclone Gabrielle)²³ and lack of access to clean, safe drinking water (also experienced by communities after Cyclone Gabrielle). Further examples of indirect and direct threats to people’s health from Climate Change are provided in Table 1.

The Bill does not adequately account for the need to reduce the country’s greenhouse gas emissions as part of the country’s international commitments. In the Bill, Ministers are not required as a matter of course to consider climate change implications of projects, stating

²¹ Ballester, J. *et al.* (2023). Heat-related mortality in Europe during the summer of 2022. *Nature Medicine*, doi:10.1038/s41591-023-02419-z

²² Kerr J, Thomson G, Wilson N. (2023). Cyclone Gabrielle joins list of Aotearoa NZ’s ‘sudden mass fatality events’. The Briefing. <https://www.phcc.org.nz/briefing/cyclone-gabrielle-joins-list-aotearoa-nzs-sudden-mass-fatality-events>

²³ Kitchin T. (2023). Cyclone Gabrielle's impact on New Zealand's 'fruit bowl'. Radio New Zealand. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/programmes/the-detail/story/2018880904/cyclone-gabrielle-s-impact-on-new-zealand-s-fruit-bowl>.

only that they “may” rather than “must.”²⁴ The Bill does not require decisions to align with our obligations under international agreements or the Climate Change Response Act 2002.

Table 1: Examples of direct and indirect impacts on public health from increased global greenhouse gas emissions

<p>Examples of <u>direct impacts</u> on public health from increased global greenhouse gas emissions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased climate extremes: storm severity and flooding, droughts (and fires) and related infrastructure damage • Displacement from climate-related disasters (eg, Cyclone Gabrielle induced damage to homes) • Extreme temperatures eg, causing deaths in heat waves
<p>Examples of <u>indirect impacts</u> on public health from increased global greenhouse gas emissions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crop damage with impacts on food availability, quality, and safety • Harmful algal blooms impacting drinking water safety and quality, recreational use of waterways, and food gathered from waterways • Microbial contamination (of drinking water and food) • Mental health and well-being impacts from climate-change disasters and other disruptions • Poorer outdoor air quality from fires • Impacts on infectious disease risk (eg, vector-borne diseases)

The emphasis indicated by Ministers’ public statements (identified through our review noted above) demonstrates existing bias towards emissions-intensive projects like mining (including coal) and large roading projects. This existing bias of Ministers, coupled with non-alignment of the Bill with existing climate policy and our international agreements results in a risk that our country’s climate control actions could be impaired by the Bill.

If New Zealand fails to meet its international obligations, there is a risk that other nations could take retaliatory actions (eg, carbon charges on NZ exports imposed by the European Union). With defaulting countries, there is also a risk of an unravelling of the whole international climate control response. A deteriorating climate crisis poses more risks to New Zealanders’ health and well-being.

Furthermore, the Bill fails to account for the protective value of a healthy environment. A healthy environment supports healthy ecosystems and our mitigation of, and resilience to,

²⁴ Part 3, Section 17

climate change. Scholars have identified a “vicious cycle” whereby ecosystem degradation drives climate change which leads to increased disaster risk for communities, which in turn drives further ecosystem degradation (Fig. 1).²⁵ In other words, a degraded environment leaves people and communities more vulnerable and impacts people’s health and wellbeing.

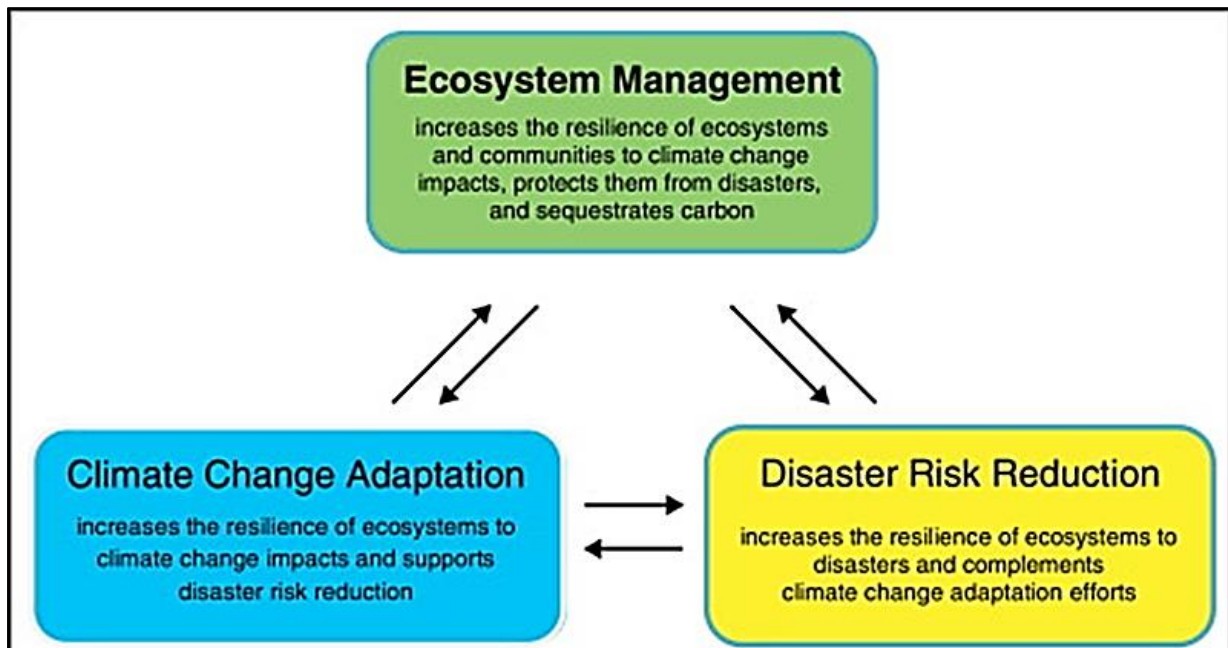


Figure 1: Simplified illustration of the interactions between climate change, ecosystem degradation and increased disaster risk (Source: Munang, R., Thiaw, I., Alverson, K., Liu, J., & Han, Z. (2013). The role of ecosystem services in climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 5(1), 47-52.)

Well-designed policy can do the opposite, ie, protecting the health of the environment and natural ecosystems which improves climate change mitigation (carbon sequestration) and resilience to natural disasters (eg, flooding, drought, etc.). Protecting the health of ecosystems, therefore, is a win-win-win for decision-makers and public health.

The Bill fails to recognise this, giving no formal value or weight to the health of ecosystems in decision-making under the Bill and by overriding other legislation that protects the health of the environment and ecosystems (such as the Resource Management Act 1991 and the Conservation Act 1987).

²⁵ Munang, R., Thiaw, I., Alverson, K., Liu, J., & Han, Z. (2013). The role of ecosystem services in climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 5(1), 47-52. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2013.02.002>

Because of this, and prevailing Ministerial bias towards environmentally damaging and emissions intensive projects, there is a high likelihood that New Zealand's natural environment will be degraded under the Bill. And, as the 'vicious cycle' diagram describes, this will leave communities' health and well-being more vulnerable.

5. The Bill undermines democratic processes

One of the principles of democratic process is public participation. As described, the Bill drastically restricts opportunities for the public to be involved in decisions, even where they are likely to be directly impacted (for example, where a project like a large-scale irrigation dam is likely to contaminate, or degrade, their drinking water supply).

Remarkably, public notification of projects is not allowed under the Bill, so members of the public may not even be made aware of projects that will profoundly impact them and their community.

Furthermore, projects may override local government decision making and planning. This means where locals may have been involved and heard in decisions relating their region or catchment, this can be overridden by decisions made under the Bill.

The Bill is so drastically different to normal processes around resource management that it risks profoundly undermining New Zealanders ability to trust in public engagement processes, decision-makers, and government decisions. This has wider societal ramifications that must be considered.

6. The Bill is likely to worsen inequality.

Because the Bill erodes existing democratic decision-making processes and excessively concentrates decision-making power, it is highly likely to worsen inequality. The process established under the Bill excessively favours interests who already have significant resources and power.

Those with fewer resources or access to those in power will not be heard under this Bill, and the negative impacts of projects are highly likely to disproportionately impact lower income communities and already marginalised groups, widening the opportunity gap and further reducing their capacity to protect their health and wellbeing. These impacts would not only be harmful to the groups concerned: they typically also generate society-wide effects that include (but are not limited to) increased costs and burden on our already-stretched health system.

There is a significant body of evidence that demonstrates that the impacts of pollution are not felt equally across society. Lower socio-economic groups and marginalised communities experience worse impacts from the pollution of the environment than others. For example, New Zealand research has found that outdoor pollution levels are worse in socially deprived communities.²⁶ With regards to drinking water, research has found, “people on smaller supplies and living in high deprivation: 1) receive the poorer quality water; 2) have fewer safeguards or protections against contamination; and 3) have the least capacity to address these systemic inequities.”²⁷

Furthermore, the Ministry for the Environment’s Supplementary Analysis Report states,

“Overall, the analysis in the Treaty Impact Assessment suggests there is likely to be some benefit to Māori developmental interests which would have some positive Treaty impacts. However, the key decisions made on the fast-track bill are likely to have negative Treaty impacts for broader Māori rights and interests, that will likely outweigh the positives” (pg. 38).

Finally, it is likely that some in favour of the Bill will claim that such fast-tracked projects will be good for employment and could benefit lower income workers. However, the Ministry for the Environment’s analysis states that the benefit to workers of the Bill is likely to be low, noting that employment opportunities may only benefit a small number and may be

²⁶ Pearce J, Kingham S. 2008. Environmental inequalities in New Zealand: A national study of air pollution and environmental justice. *Geoforum*. 39(2):980-993.

²⁷ Chambers T, Wilson N, Hales S, Prickett M, Ellison E, Baker MG. 2022. Beyond muddy waters: Three Waters reforms required to future-proof water service delivery and protect public health in Aotearoa New Zealand. *New Zealand medical journal*. 135(1566):87-95.

overstated.²⁸ For example, the short-term benefits to communities from local construction projects can be substantially outweighed by the enduring impacts of environmental degradation.

Without fair and just decision-making processes the benefits and costs of fast-tracked projects will tend to flow differently to advantaged and disadvantaged groups. It is in the nature of the projects that the Bill will enable that by design, the most advantaged groups will experience the majority of the benefits while those most in need of additional resources to sustain health and wellbeing will instead bear the majority of the costs. Once set in motion, these costs may be irreversible in terms of lost years of healthy life as well as being intergenerational in their duration of effect.

7. The Bill is likely to have long-term impacts on public health – impacting the lives of our children and grandchildren.

It must be recognised that the decisions made under the Bill are likely to have intergenerational consequences for public health. Likely projects are large in scale with long lifespans and implications across decades.

Given the severity of the problems with the Bill described above, when poor decisions are inevitably made under the Bill, the impacts will be with New Zealanders for multiple generations. In some cases, the damage to local communities (their resilience and health, particularly as climate change progresses) may be irreversible or prohibitively expensive to address. For example, drinking water sources may be too contaminated or depleted to continue to be used; poorly situated housing developments may become unsafe, uninsurable and need to be abandoned; and projects may render land more unstable, leading to major slips and downstream destruction to homes and businesses during storm events.

²⁸ Ministry for the Environment. (2024). Supplementary Analysis Report: Fast-track Approvals Bill. Retrieved from https://environment.govt.nz/assets/publications/FTAB-24-Supplementary-Analysis-Report-PCO_Redacted.pdf

Such a poorly considered Bill, with a high likelihood of negative intergenerational impacts, should not progress.

Recommendations

The Environment Select Committee has an essential role to play at this point in the progress of the Bill. We urge its members to take the opportunity they have to push the health and well-being of New Zealanders to the top of priorities for decision-makers and to encourage a more responsible, long-term vision for the development of resource management and infrastructure policy.

For the reasons outlined in our submission, we recommend to the members of the Environment Select Committee that their report to the House:

1. Does not support the Fast-Track Approvals Bill.
2. Highlights the serious and intergenerational risks it poses to New Zealanders health and well-being.
3. Highlights the lack of rigour and increase of bias in decision making the Bill would establish.
4. Proposes an alternative programme of work based on the OECD's recommendations from 2017.²⁹

The OECD's Environmental Performance Review stated, "New Zealand is one of the most dynamic economies in the OECD and has built an international reputation as a "green" country..."

However, New Zealand's growth model, largely based on exporting primary products, has started to show its environmental limits, with increased greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, diffuse freshwater pollution, and threats to biodiversity.

A long-term vision for the transition towards a low-carbon, greener economy is necessary.

²⁹ OECD (2017), OECD Environmental Performance Reviews: New Zealand 2017, OECD Environmental Performance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264268203-en>.

...New Zealand should build on its well-developed knowledge and innovation system for exporting higher value export products and decouple growth from natural resource use.”

Thank you for this opportunity. We look forward to speaking with you further on this important matter.

