

# MEDIA RELEASE

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19 April 2024

## Submission on Fast Track Approvals Bill – Te Kōkiringa Taumata | New Zealand Planning Institute

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Te Kōkiringa Taumata | New Zealand Planning Institute has made a submission on the Fast Track Approvals Bill today. Our response to the new legislation is informed by targeted conversations with practitioners working in the system and through an implementation lens. While the submission supports the concept of a fast-track decision making process within a resource management system, the Institute believes this process should be better justified and have the right checks and balances in place.

Our submission calls out some fundamental issues with the process in the Bill and suggests ways to overcome these. The Bill circumvents democratic planning processes and puts an inordinate amount of decision-making power in the hands of a small number of Ministers. It also places emphasis on regional and national benefits without the requirement to consider if those benefits outweigh the environmental, social and cultural costs. With no reference to the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, there is a risk that the momentum gained in recent years will be lost, and that contemporary Treaty claims may arise.

NZPI supports Ministerial decision-making for the referral stage of the process, but recommends expert panels are the final decision-makers on whether a project should go ahead or not. There will be more consistency and certainty over the long term if decision-making is non-political and expert led, and possibly less challenge. We recommend tightening up the eligibility criteria for projects to access the system. The current eligibility criteria opens up a very loose process with high discretion to a wide range of projects.

We also recommend introducing sustainable management into the purpose of the Bill, to address the skewed assessment criteria, along with a Treaty principles clause. "We believe that economic prosperity and environmental, social and culture wellbeing are not incompatible goals. In our collective experience, there is no evidence that the inclusion of sustainable management and a Treaty principles clause in the COVID-19 fast-track legislation has been an issue for the expedient approval of projects", says NZPI Deputy Chair Megan Couture.

Our submission also recommends a number of changes to improve the implementation and workability of the Bill. Our members have already been involved in fast-track processes and have a significant amount of on-the-ground experience to be able to offer practical improvements to the Bill. One of these is for councils to have a greater involvement in the development of conditions on approvals, noting councils will be the ones to enforce conditions. Another is to impose timeframes on Ministerial decision-making, at referral stage and when deciding whether to approve a project. "It is unreasonable to set tight timeframes for the expert panel while having no timeframes on Ministerial decision-making", says Megan. "Our submission recommends timeframes are imposed on Ministers so we can have confidence that the process will, in fact, be timely".

NZPI special interest groups Papa Pounamu and PlanTech have also developed submissions on this Bill and these are supported by the Institute.

NZPI is looking towards the longer-term reform of the RMA (what the Government is referring to as Phase Three). "We welcome all opportunities to be involved in the policy development process, to ensure an implementation lens and a sound understanding of planning principles is applied in the early stages" says NZPI CEO David Curtis.

-ENDS-

Read the submission here -

[https://planning.org.nz/resources/Attachment?Action=Download&Attachment\\_id=1000758](https://planning.org.nz/resources/Attachment?Action=Download&Attachment_id=1000758)

*The Institute is available for comment. For more information please contact:*

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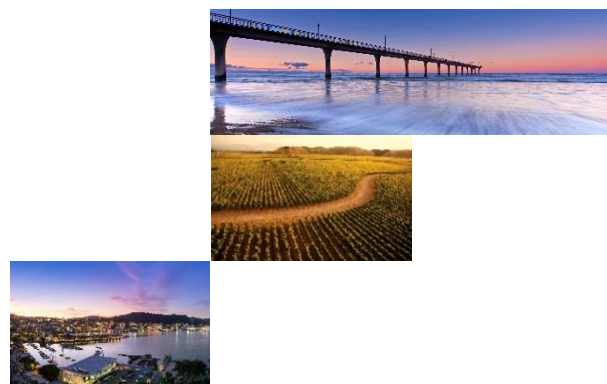
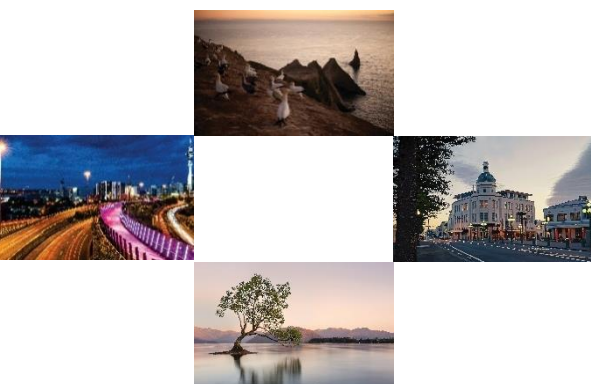
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**Note to media:**

- Established in 1949, NZPI / Te Kōkiringa Taumata has more than 3000 members involved in strategic planning initiatives and implementation of urban and rural plans.
- NZPI members work in cities, towns, district councils and rural areas and specialise in a variety of different disciplines – for example transport, urban design or conservation.



*Planning is essential for a better New Zealand*

Te Kōkiringa Taumata | New Zealand Planning Institute (NZPI) is the voice of planning in New Zealand. It is the professional organisation representing this country's planners, resource managers, urban designers, and environmental practitioners. Planners have a critical role in shaping New Zealand's future by helping to develop solutions to key issues, such as population growth, infrastructure needs, pressure on natural resources and environments, demographic change and transport.



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