

27 July 2025

National Direction Consultation  
Ministry for the Environment  
PO Box 10362  
Wellington 6143

Lodged via: <https://consult.environment.govt.nz/resource-management/infrastructure-development-primary-sector-nd/>

Tēnā koutou

## **Powerco Submission on National Direction Package 2: Primary Sector**

1. Powerco Limited (Powerco) welcomes this opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed changes to the national direction instruments for the primary sector.

### **Summary of Submission**

2. Our submission supports the intent of the Package 2 proposals to improve national direction and planning efficiency. We consider the proposed changes, with refinement, have the potential to deliver more consistent, integrated, and practical outcomes, particularly where national and local responsibilities intersect.
3. We have provided feedback aimed at ensuring critical infrastructure, such as electricity networks, is adequately considered and protected. Our suggestions focus on enabling early identification of risks, improving clarity for decision-makers, and supporting nationally consistent approaches where appropriate.
4. With these adjustments, the proposals will be better positioned to reduce regulatory conflict, enhance implementation, and support resilient infrastructure outcomes across Aotearoa.

### **About Powerco**

5. Powerco is New Zealand's largest electricity and second-largest gas distributor by network length. Our networks span the upper and lower central North Island, servicing approximately 1.1 million customers across 450,000 homes, businesses, and industries. This represents 46% of the country's gas connections and 16% of its electricity connections.

6. Our electricity distribution network extends over 28,000 km, and our gas network covers more than 6,170 km. With this wide geographical reach, our infrastructure traverses a diverse range of environments - urban, rural, and remote. For example, our networks on the Coromandel Peninsula pass through Outstanding Natural Features and Landscapes, Significant Natural Areas, the Coastal Marine Area, conservation land, wetlands, and multiple planning zones.
7. We are a requiring authority, operating across six regions, under 29 district plans, and pursuant to numerous resource consents and designations. Powerco is also listed as a "Lifeline Utility" under the Civil Defence Emergency Management Act 2002, reflecting the essential role of our services in supporting community resilience and emergency response.
8. Our existing distribution infrastructure must be maintained, repaired, and upgraded to ensure reliable supply and meet increasing demand. This includes expanding capacity, improving resilience, and supporting the uptake of low-emissions technologies. Meeting this demand, while managing environmental and planning constraints, is vital to achieving New Zealand's net zero 2050 target.
9. The outcomes sought through this submission are intended to support these objectives by providing greater national consistency, enabling essential infrastructure works, and reducing regulatory duplication and uncertainty. The proposed changes aim to ensure that Powerco can continue to deliver safe, efficient, and resilient energy services while adapting to the future needs of Aotearoa's communities and economy.

## **Section 2: Primary sector package**

### **Part 2.1: National Environmental Standards for Marine Aquaculture**

*Question 5 - Should there be any further changes to the matters of control specified in attachments 2.1 and 2.1.1?*

10. Yes. A new permitted activity condition (or entry requirement) should be added to the provisions for research and trials activities in new locations (i.e. R17, R18, R21 and R24) to ensure that new structures and equipment are not located over existing submarine cables. This would ensure that research activities are appropriately sited, and encroachment or damage to existing submarine cables is avoided.

### **Part 2.2: National Environmental Standards for Commercial Forestry**

*Question 11. Does the proposal provide clarity and certainty for local authorities and forestry planning?*

11. We support the proposed repeal of regulation 6(4A) of the NES for Plantation Forestry, as it will enable more effective management of afforestation at the local level. Councils are well placed to respond to localised and bespoke environmental effects, and we agree they should have the flexibility to set rules that reflect those circumstances.

12. However, we believe that **guidance is needed in areas where a nationally consistent approach is important**, particularly in relation to **electricity networks**. The effects of afforestation on electricity infrastructure, such as vegetation interference, safety clearances, and access limitations, are not always well understood at the local level and can vary across regions. Without guidance, there's a risk that council approaches to these issues may be inconsistent or overlook critical infrastructure needs. These matters are best addressed at the planning stage, prior to planting to avoid future conflicts, safety risks, or costly mitigations.
13. We recommend that either guidance is included to support councils in identifying where **nationally consistent provisions** are needed to manage risks to infrastructure, or that section 6 is expanded to include the Electricity Networks under (1) or (2). Alternatively, S14 could also be expanded to include setbacks from the EN.

*Question 20. Do you support the proposed removal of the requirement to prepare afforestation and replanting plans?*

14. We partially support the proposed removal of the requirement to prepare afforestation and replanting plans. While we understand the intent to streamline planning requirements and reduce duplication with other permitted activity management plans, we believe some functions of the afforestation plan remain important and should be retained in a simplified form.
15. Afforestation plans are already required to identify **mapped section 6 features** and apply **setbacks under section 14** of the NES-CF. If our submission point to include **electricity network (EN) assets** within the scope of section 14 setbacks is accepted, this planning step would also serve as a practical mechanism to identify and manage proximity to EN infrastructure. This would help ensure that potential conflicts, such as vegetation encroachment, access constraints, or safety risks; are addressed **at the outset**, prior to planting, as part of a consistent and nationally integrated planning framework.
16. We support removing the replanting plan requirement where replanting is consistent with the original afforestation plan. We also agree that Schedule 3 could be reduced to include only aspects not already covered by other management plans. However, we recommend retaining a simplified afforestation planning requirement that ensures key issues such as infrastructure proximity and setbacks are addressed up front. A replanting plan should also be required where compliance with a setback is required to be addressed where previously the aspect was not considered, or compliance requirements have changed.

## **Part 2.3: New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement**

*Question 22. Would the proposed changes achieve the objective of enabling more priority activities and be simple enough to implement before wider resource management reform takes place?*

17. Yes, with changes. The concept of enabling more priority activities is supported. Powerco has numerous assets within the coastal marine area which comprise both overhead assets as well as submarine cables. These assets include strategic sub-transmission circuits which serve a significant number of customers. In the Bay of Plenty and the Coromandel in particular, numerous communities have been established on or near the coast, which means that Powerco infrastructure is required in those same locations. This means we have a number of assets within the CMA that we need to operate, maintain, repair and replace over their operational life.
18. While supportive of the inclusion of operational need within Policy 6, the way in which the changes have been incorporated seems to create a policy conflict. For example, the new text suggested for Policy 6(2)(f) seems subordinate to Policy 6(2)(c) and Policy 6(2)(d) which only recognise functional need. This seems to create a level of uncertainty in interpretation which could be avoided by creating a stand-alone clause that does not cross reference back. For example:

(f) ~~*in relation to (2)(c) and (d),*~~ ***Recognise that infrastructure, renewable electricity, electricity transmission, aquaculture and resource extraction activities may have a functional need or operational need to locate in the coastal marine area, and provide for those activities in appropriate places. Where these activities do not have a functional or operational need for location in the coastal marine area they generally should not be located there.***

*Question 23. Would the proposed changes ensure that wider coastal and marine values and uses are still appropriately considered in decision-making?*

19. Yes. The proposed changes acknowledge that activities may have an operational need to locate within the coastal environment, however the changes do not alter the overarching objectives or outcomes sought by other policies in the NZCPS, many of which are 'protectionist'.

## **Part 2.5: Multiple instruments for quarrying and mining provisions**

*Question 35. Should "operational need" be added as a gateway test for other activities controlled by the NPS-FM and NES-F?*

20. Yes. Infrastructure assets are required wherever a customer chooses to locate, including within all zones and sometimes within existing wetlands and wetland setbacks. Powerco has numerous strategic assets located within wetlands, often with minimal impact, which have a clear operational need to pass through such areas. Including reference to operational need would enable infrastructure projects to be appropriately considered on their merits, noting that effects of the proposal will still be managed by the effects management hierarchy.

## Conclusion

21. While we support the intent to improve national direction, we consider that the proposals **as currently drafted** require adjustment to ensure they provide a consistent and enabling framework for infrastructure networks. As outlined in this submission, we have proposed changes that would reduce uncertainty and ensure alignment between national direction instruments. With these changes, we believe the national direction framework will be more informed and go some way toward reducing the conflict that currently exists between overlapping policy documents. These refinements are essential to ensure that networks can continue to deliver safe, resilient, and future-focused services to Aotearoa.
22. Should officials require any additional information regarding Powerco or the changes sought above, please do not hesitate to contact us via Adam Du Fall, Head of Environment, Ph +64 6 759 6268, Mobile +64 27 603 0833 or email: [planning@powerco.co.nz](mailto:planning@powerco.co.nz).

Ngā mihi,



**Adam Du Fall**  
Head of Environment  
**POWERCO**

Powerco has read and acknowledges the Privacy Statement outlined in the Consultation Document dated May 2025.