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Submission to the Environment Select Committee re Fast-Track Approvals Bill

DairyNZ appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback to the Environment Select Committee on the Fast-Track Approvals Bill.

DairyNZ is the industry good organisation that represents all New Zealand dairy farmers. DairyNZ is focused on helping farmers build profitable, sustainable, and resilient farm businesses through extension, advocacy, science and research. Our purpose is to progress a positive future for New Zealand dairy farming.

DairyNZ is funded by a levy on milksolids that is paid by all dairy farmers under the Commodity Levies Act 1990, a significant proportion of our work is allocated towards research and development in delivering water quality outcomes. DairyNZ continues to invest in science and research to help our farmers improve environmental outcomes – and so communities can continue to thrive. We remain committed to helping improve water quality outcomes across all dairy catchments, building off the great work farmers have already undertaken.

This Bill has limited applications for individual dairy farmers', however, opportunities exist to improve the resilience of the sector and supporting industries. DairyNZ has provided our key feedback on the proposed Fast-track Approvals Bill in this submission, our key points are:

1. DairyNZ supports the intent of the Bill, as it provides the opportunity to improve the resilience of the dairy sector and surrounding industries.
2. Enduring pragmatic Resource Management reform should be progressed as a priority and a sunset clause should be added to the Bill until reform of the RMA has taken place.
3. Application considerations should utilise adequate analysis to determine the full extent of economic benefit and ensure they are operating effectively within environmental boundaries.
4. Projects in scope for fast-tracking could include those that increase the resilience of the agricultural sector through enabling infrastructure that assists adaptation such as water storage, irrigation or flood protection.

Background

1. The purpose of the Fast-track Approvals Bill is to provide a streamlined decision-making process to facilitate the delivery of infrastructure and development projects with significant regional or national benefits.



2. DairyNZ supports the intent of the Bill, as it provides opportunities to improve the resilience of the dairy sector and supporting industries.
3. Whilst this Bill is focused on easing concerns in the short term for certain infrastructure and development projects, it will be important that enduring pragmatic Resource Management reform is progressed as a priority. Changes to the broader Resource Management system hold greater value for farmers to be able to progress efficient land uses and practice changes as well as invest in restorative work and environmental enhancements on farm, for example smaller scale constructed wetlands. **It will be important that the implementation of fast-track processes for larger value projects does not disincentivise or de-prioritise enduring resource management reforms which will have more applicability to individual farmers.**
4. The powers enabled through the Bill are significant and will be unnecessary once pragmatic and effective Resource Management reform is carried out. The Environment Select Committee should consider that this Bill is required for a temporary term, to meet its purpose of enabling delivery of infrastructure and development projects with significant regional or national benefits until the RMA has been replaced. **DairyNZ recommends a sunset clause is added to the Bill until reform of the RMA has taken place.**
5. It is important that this Bill is utilised in a way that operates within environmental limits and does not over allocate resources that will be difficult to manage in the future. As proposed, the Bill enables Ministers to consider how a project will contribute to climate mitigation, adaptation, and resilience to natural hazards, and to decline an application for referral based on its projected environmental effects. **DairyNZ considers this could be further supported through:**
 - **Inclusion of the Minister for the Environment as part of the decision-making process.**
 - **Enabling the expert panel to consider environmental performance, relevant national policy direction and the potential for 'irreversible loss' of environmental values or 'irreversible damage to ecosystems' when assessing applications.**
6. A proposal may adversely impact, or enable, access to important resources for existing resource users. This includes direct impacts, for example water availability, where a project may not be subject to environmental limits that other uses are. In such a situation a project's use may adversely impact the availability of water for other uses. A proposal may also enable resource availability, in which case it may be favourably weighted.
7. Indirect impacts may also eventuate, where a proposal may significantly and adversely impact environmental values, with the effect that expectations of other land uses are increased. An example is biodiversity, where losses of biodiversity values to a proposal may increase community expectations of farmers. **DairyNZ recommends proposals eligible for referral should include:**
 - **A cost benefit analysis.**
 - **An assessment of the proposal's impact on the availability of, and efficient use of, resources such as freshwater, soils and biodiversity.**



8. DairyNZ sees an opportunity through this Bill to increase the resilience of the agricultural sector through enabling infrastructure that assists adaptation such as water storage, irrigation or flood protection. Water storage is a key climate change adaptation option for the New Zealand dairy sector. It also has a dual effect of being able to provide flood management benefits, by reducing flood peaks or capturing flood events.
9. Very few catchments in New Zealand provide sufficient water supply security without storage if irrigation is used. With changing climate conditions, existing farm systems will become more at risk of reduced access to reliable water. Water storage and irrigation will provide the ability for farm systems to adapt in the future.
10. Due to changing climatic conditions, farmers will also become more exposed to the risk of flooding. Effective flood management infrastructure will reduce the impact of flooding within rural communities, maintaining productive landscapes and reducing damage to homes and assets.
11. DairyNZ supports the intent of the Bill to reduce consenting timeframes for projects that provide significant regional or national benefits in the short term. However, adequate analysis will need to be carried out to determine the full extent of economic benefit of projects as well as ensure they are operating effectively within environmental boundaries to maintain their viability and cost-to-benefit ratio.
12. In conclusion, our key points on the proposed Fast-track Approvals Bill are:
 - DairyNZ supports the intent of the Bill, as it provides opportunity to improve the resilience of the dairy sector and surrounding industries.
 - Enduring pragmatic Resource Management reform should be progressed as a priority and a sunset clause should be added to the Bill until reform of the RMA has taken place.
 - Application considerations should utilise adequate analysis to determine the full extent of economic benefit and ensure they are operating effectively within environmental boundaries.
 - Projects in scope for fast-tracking could include those that increase the resilience of the agricultural sector through enabling infrastructure that assists adaptation such as water storage, irrigation or flood protection.

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SUBMISSION ENDS