

23.3.09

Evidence to the Board of Inquiry

submitted by MF Hansen on behalf of NA McConnell and Mana Trust

There were three key issues identified in our original submission which I will now expand on.

- 1) Should the line in whole or part be undergrounded;
- 2) If it is not undergrounded should more work be done to identify the most appropriate overhead route; and
- 3) How should the question of remuneration to the transmission line route landowners be resolved.

In Contact's evidence there is also evidence attributed to me (Martin Hansen) which is factually incorrect, and which will be challenged in this evidence.

1) Should the line in whole or part be undergrounded

Undergrounding the transmission line has been canvassed by most of those affected, and unfortunately we have to rely on Contact's consultants and their own in house assessment of the financial viability of such a course of action. I am not convinced that it is safe for the Board to rely on this evidence.

The process has not been robust and I question whether a similar conclusion would have resulted had the proponents of going underground had the financial resources to commission their own report. Neither report would have been independent, so the results would always be open to a question of bias. A transparent independent

report should have been commissioned reporting to a group representing both sides of the question.

2) If it is not undergrounded should more work be done to identify the most appropriate overhead route

In the event that the line cannot go underground the route for overhead line should be further scrutinised. The engineering assessment of the best route for the overhead line is based on a table of weighted scores taking into account a number of relevant issues. Included in these, at the eastern end, is the impact on the Punga Punga wetland close to the proposed Orton Substation. In my submissions to Contact, in the event there is an overhead line, I have asked them to move the transmission line crossing the wetland 500m to the east and thereby avoid the severe visual impact of a tower and conductors sitting on a ridge dominating the skyline.

In the engineering assessment the dominant criteria that prevents this is ecological and engineering, despite the fact that the ecological reports down play the significance of the wetland and a pair of Australian Bitterns, and two other bird species . Any consideration of the significance of the wetland is something I take issue with. The wetland west of Churchill Road is on private property, and is in fact part of a drainage scheme to drain the wetland, administered by Franklin District Council. There are no covenants or other restrictions to prevent the land owners from removing the willows and swamp manuka and converting the area in question to pasture. In fact that is the whole point of the drain and why the landowners are rated accordingly. It is

surprising therefore that any consideration or weighting is given to the Wetland in this location.

In all the reports I have seen where engineering difficulties have been, no details are given as ground or geotechnical studies have not been completed, but the consensus in the various reports seems to be that solutions can be found. Therefore I find it difficult to accept that the route adjacent to the Orton substation could not be modified to improve the visual impact of a 43.0 metre-high tower on top of a ridge, which has the potential for becoming an unwanted local landmark amongst what is becoming an Ocean of transmission towers.

3) How should the question of remuneration to the transmission line route landowners be resolved

The compensation for landowners continues to be an issue, and despite 18 months having passed since Contact first made known its intention to bless us with a major transmission line little progress has been made. There are a number of reasons for this. The basic principle for reaching agreement is in dispute and Contact appear to have no real interest in progressing the matter usually taking several months between correspondences.

Contact energy have reached agreements with the landowners of the wind turbine sites based on freely negotiated commercial terms but are unprepared to do likewise with the landowners on the transmission line route. In addition Telecom, and Vodafone, who are also network utility operators are able to provide much more equitable compensation for

towers that are less obtrusive and have no conductors. It should be remembered that Contact is a publicly listed company whose shareholders will enjoy the benefits of this project whilst the landowners on the transmission line route are denied any benefits but are expected to live with the construction disruption and the impacts of the transmission line, possibly forever.

It seems to be almost impossible to gain any traction on these issues. The current proposal for the route and compensation seem to be grossly unfair. To be compromised by a pair of Australian Bittern squatters who have taken up residence without invitation and without a valid visa is bizarre, and to have a multinational discriminate between windmills and transmission towers for its own financial benefit and those of its shareholders is incongruous.

In Contact's evidence there is also evidence attributed to me (Martin Hansen) which is factually incorrect, and which will be challenged in this evidence.

Contact's evidence contains a statement attributed to me which summarised states that: *I suggested that Contact should make a sum of money available and let the landowners distribute it.* This is an absolute nonsense and a complete misunderstanding of what was said. My suggestion was that Contact should look at the line holistically and establish a budget based on a Telecom, Vodafone or 'Contact wind-turbine' style of negotiation. They should then create a blueprint for the generic impact on each landowner, using issues such as proximity

to dwellings, impact on amenities, disruption etc. and then explain to landowners the criteria and come up with suggested compensation packages. This was raised because Contact seemed to have some difficulty working out compensation on the basis of the number of towers and the potential of some affected parties having proportionally less towers than length of conductors, and different location issues.

Contact needs to consider again undergrounding the cable to the substation. If they are not required to do this as a condition of their consent they should be required to consider further modifications/fine tuning to the overhead route outside the current proposed corridor. The Board might question why this has not already been done? The simple answer is that Contact have not completed this process to a point where there is closure. For example the response from Beca's on my eastern modification was a letter Mills/Yorke 25/11/2008, which in the seven pages had one sentence specifically directed towards my concern and suggestion, and the balance a reproduction of their original report which didn't focus in detail on my concern. When this was raised with Contact I was given a new person to liaise with who would be in contact early in 2009. As I have not heard another word I can only assume this matter is still open.

The Contact evidence includes evidence from Mr. Black in which he envisages that his eight wind turbines will net him somewhere between \$120,000 and \$180,00 a year. Contact's offer to me for the equivalent of four transmission towers is \$10,578 a year. Contact portrays these arrangements in the NBR newspaper (Friday 20 March 2009) as being

fair and equitable to all those involved. I think the Board can judge for itself that this statement seriously questions the commercial integrity and credibility of Contact. The Board should require Contact as a condition of its consent to match its words with deeds, and come up with an equitable commercial package for the landowners on the transmission route. It should be done as a matter of urgency to remove the uncertainty surrounding the value of the properties affected. How could you even contemplate selling or buying affected properties given the current environment Contact has created? They have a responsibility to resolve these issues now.