

# Submission to the Board of Inquiry on the proposed National Policy Statement for Renewable Electricity Generation

From Linda Conning

## 1. Introduction

1.1 Too much emphasis is being put on this NPS to achieve energy policy targets, relative to efforts to achieve energy conservation and to encourage individual action to adopt on-site energy options such as solar. The NPS is just a small piece of a big jigsaw.

1.2 The fact that many energy projects are opposed through the RMA process is an indication that the community does not want energy projects that damage the environment. Some Environment Court decisions have removed turbines from some windfarm projects suggesting over-aggressive development. Many people do not want to live near windfarms. These are reasonable concerns and should be listened to. Such people are expected to bear the cost of society's demand for renewable energy, and this is not equitable.

1.3 My concerns with this NPS are as much about what is *not* included, as the content itself. For example, this NPS could be used by the government to *discourage new thermal generation* – but it does not. It could provide greater certainty and efficiency by preventing regional and district councils from each working out individual approaches – but it does not.

1.4 An NPS is supposed to achieve the purpose of the Act (i.e. sustainable management). If the NPS promotes renewable energy projects regardless of adverse effects, it is not really consistent with the Act.

1.5 In this submission, I will address

- (i) the indiscriminate approach to renewable energy
- (ii) the inappropriate approach to matters of national importance under s (6) of the RMA
- (iii) some comments on specific provisions

## 2. Unbalanced approach to renewable energy

### Lack of guidance for decision makers when considering other matters of national importance

2.1 It should be recognised that not all forms of renewable energy are equal, and *not all forms of renewable energy are sustainable*. I am aware that this NPS is very much driven by the previous government's renewable energy target, as expressed in the Objective. However the current Minister for the Environment's statement on the sustainable management of freshwater recognizes that water is a finite resource<sup>1</sup>, and this highlights that there are particular issues surrounding the different forms of renewable energy. This NPS should recognize those differences, and address them.

2.2 In relation to its finite capacity, it may be appropriate to give priority to water to be used for power generation rather than irrigation – this is an allocative issue, not specifically mentioned in the NPS. However when considering the adverse effects of hydro, its benefits are severely diminished when its destructive effect on riverine ecosystems is considered:

- ❖ Hydro development is an ongoing threat to the survival of the long-finned eel (and other indigenous fish species that migrate to the ocean to breed). Despite hydro companies' programmes for upstream eel transfer, the fact that most females are destroyed on their downstream migration to breed illustrates that it is not a sustainable activity. In the South Island 22% and in the North Island about 10% of eel habitat is restricted by hydro development<sup>2</sup>.
- ❖ Hydro development also destroys the natural state of rivers. There are many people in New Zealand, and I am one of them, who believe our society should consume less electricity rather than destroy more natural features which provide a range of ecological, social and cultural benefits.

2.3 Therefore in considering hydro generation, priority could be given to

- ❖ Small-scale, run-of-river hydro schemes (common in Europe) that don't block fish passage, and
- ❖ Other forms of renewable energy that don't destroy indigenous ecosystems e.g. on-site solar or wind energy.

2.4 Similarly, wind energy has known and documented adverse effects:

- ❖ Threat to native birds, especially the threatened NZ falcon, and some seabirds
- ❖ Destroys landscape values
- ❖ Creates localised nuisance effects of noise and glint

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<sup>1</sup> New Start for Freshwater Cabinet Paper para 21

<http://www.mfe.govt.nz/issues/water/freshwater/new-start-for-fresh-water-paper.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Don Jellyman NIWA 2008

2.5 Therefore in considering wind generation, priority could be given to windfarms which

- ❖ have minimal effect on threatened bird populations
- ❖ are not located in outstanding natural landscapes
- ❖ provide appropriate mitigation (such as relocating affected residents).

2.6 My primary concern with this Proposed NPS is that it **promotes renewable energy indiscriminately, without giving guidance about these adverse effects and how they should be managed.**

2.7 This NPS makes renewable energy (a s7 matter) more important than any other Part II values, including s6 matters<sup>3</sup>. It forces new generation on communities and the environment regardless of what it might destroy, and *does not require any reduction in demand or consumption.* This is not sustainable management! **Renewable energy should not, and must not, indiscriminately “trump” other nationally important values.**

2.8 Planning instruments should identify preferred locations for certain types of renewable energy, and also indicate **“no-go” areas in terms of Section 6 of the RMA** to ensure our cultural and natural heritage is not destroyed for future generations by our short term desires to consume energy. Outside of these ‘no-go’ areas, local authorities, in consultation with their communities, need to consider at what locations and at what intensity of development various forms of renewable energy is appropriate. This should include “favoured locations” as well as “no-go” areas. These decisions are appropriately made at a regional scale – e.g. Auckland Region should decide whether or not windfarms should be permitted on the Waitakere and Hunua Ranges; whether, and if so, where, tidal energy projects would be considered.

2.9 Whilst I have no objection to the directive in Policies 4 and 5 for amendments to policy statements and plans to address specifically renewable energy, there should be more guidance as to how these activities are to be managed such as which types of renewable energy are suitable in what locations, not just a bald ‘enabling’.

2.10 In effect, providing sensibly for renewable energy actually requires a more directive form of planning than the simplistic ‘enabling’ approach of the RMA has countenanced. Power companies will use their financial resources to pursue appeal processes to secure favourable planning outcomes which will stretch the resources of the community, or exclude them altogether if the RMA amendments proceed.

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<sup>3</sup> Whilst the s 32 analysis (p32-3, 38-9) alludes to Part II of the Act, the wording of this NPS implies otherwise.

### 3. Comments on Policies

3.1 Policy 1 refers to “any scale”. However the definition of sustainable management in s 5(2) of the Act anticipates some control of such matters, referring to “use, development, and protection of natural and physical resources **in a way, or at a rate**” [my emphasis]. Where s 6 matters are adversely affected, small-scale is obviously preferable.

However the adage ‘the first cut is the deepest’ applies, and the policy does not address the issues as to whether renewable energy is beneficial “at any location” or “of any nature”.

3.2 Policy 1 says to me that renewable energy generation will be determinative over any local and regional, if not national significance. This should be tested regionally at least, by allowing communities, through their regional policy statements and plans, to determine which parts of their regions and communities (if any) they are prepared to “trade-off” for the benefit of energy users rather than requiring a carte blanche priority for renewable generation.

3.3 Although we all use energy, not all of us use the same amount. Should those who use energy thoughtlessly be given the privilege of destroying what others value? This is an ethical question perhaps, but until all energy users are required to participate in a nationally-driven energy-efficient system (e.g. energy efficient devices are required; new homes built to the most advanced energy efficient standards) – i.e. *energy conservation is shared by all*, then communities should not have to sacrifice values that are important to them.

3.4 In other words – if my neighbour generates sufficient electricity through their solar panels to routinely put their clothes in a drier regardless of the weather outside, and leave the heated towel rails on 24 hours a day, I can accept that level of energy usage. But if that usage means damming the Motu (or any other special river), I cannot accept that.

3.5 Decisions sought:

**Re write Policy 1 so as to convey that whilst the benefits of renewable energy are to be recognised, the location and scale is not automatically given priority over s 6 matters.**

**Renewable energy is to be favoured if it is appropriately located, at appropriate scale, and with relevant mitigation e.g. those who are to suffer adverse effects are adequately compensated, and adverse effects of existing renewable generation are remedied or further mitigated.**

Explanation: residents in proposed windfarm areas should be assisted to relocate, and existing hydro operators should be investing in research and implementation of methods to facilitate eel spawning escapement.

Power companies make large profits from electricity generation, and should internalise their environmental costs as for any other development, including historical costs of existing generation.

**Re write Policy 4 as follows:**

**Delete the words "to enable activities associated with"**

**Rewrite Policy 4 (i)**

**(i) to identify sites and energy resources likely to provide sustainable renewable energy generation**

**(ii) to provide a framework for researching and trialling emerging renewable electricity generation technologies and methods e.g. providing for short term consents for small-scale trials.**