

To	Damien McGahan	From	Louise Strogon
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Subject	Mt Munro – Social Impact Assessment		

1. Purpose

I understand that Meridian Energy Limited (Meridian) is seeking resource consents to construct, operate and maintain a wind farm, including all ancillary activities such as earthworks, transmission lines and substations, on a site known as Mt Munro, located approximately 5km south of Eketāhuna in the northern Wairarapa (the Project). The site, and its surrounds, are rural in nature and primarily used for pastoral farming.

While the application documentation includes a suite of technical specialist assessments considering the actual and potential adverse effects of the proposed wind farm, a Social Impact Assessment (SIA) has not been prepared. I have been asked to provide advice to Councils' reporting planner as to the benefits of a SIA to inform the resource consenting process for the Project.

2. Background

I am a planner and environmental impact assessor. My current role is Director within the Environment and Planning team at Aurecon New Zealand Ltd. My qualifications and experience are otherwise set out in **Appendix A**.

I confirm that I have read the Code of Conduct for expert witnesses contained in the Environment Court Practice Notice 2023 and I agree to comply with it in the preparation of this short report. The contents of this report are within my area of expertise, except where I state that I am relying on another person, and I have not omitted to consider any material facts known to me that might alter or detract from the opinions I express.

3. Context for SIA

The Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) requires the decision-making process to include consideration of the actual and potential effects of activities on the environment. The RMA interpretation of the environment in Part 1, Section 2 includes *"The social, economic, aesthetic, and cultural conditions which affect the matters stated in paragraphs (a) to (c) or which are affected by those matters."* This interpretation is central to considering social impacts with respect to the environment.

SIA is the most common framework in New Zealand and internationally to identify, analyse, monitor and manage the potential social consequences of development. It, therefore, forms part of the suite of technical assessments used in the RMA resource consent process.

SIA are predominantly desk-based assessments but an important component is community engagement – this can be part of a Project's community engagement or by way of targeted SIA stakeholder engagement. The latter is advised where a community is demonstrating a level of social concern about a development from the community profiling undertaken as part of the SIA development.

Methodology steps which are typically applied in a SIA are summarised below:

Step	Task Overview
Scoping	Scoping the likely range of potential social issues relevant to the Project and identifying the communities likely to be affected by the Project. Inputs would be any community consultation records, information from comparative studies, literature reviews, etc.
Study Area	Based on scoping exercise, a Study Area is identified

Step	Task Overview
Social Baseline	Prepare a social baseline describing existing social environment and characteristics, values and conditions within the study area. This provides a snapshot of existing social conditions within the study area, establishing a base case against which potential impacts can be assessed.
Impact identification	Identify the social domains of concern / nature of likely social impacts for assessment.
Assessment	Through analysis, determine the social changes (positive and negative) and impacts that will likely result from the planning, construction and operation phases of a project, including any cumulative impacts.
Mitigation / Management recommendations	Consider requirements necessary to avoid, remedy or mitigate/manage any identified social impacts and make recommendations. These recommendations would form the basis for social impact resource consent conditions.

It is important to note that a SIA is not an economic assessment and is normally limited to regional or local economic impacts and business disruption where a Project may potentially impact employment. Similarly, a SIA is not a Health Impact Assessment and is normally limited to health and wellbeing impacts of environmental stressors (eg. noise, traffic and dust); and stress and anxiety relating to changes to environment/ process of planning phase.

The International Association of Impact Assessment (IAIA) is an organisation which promotes best practice impact assessment. IAIA describes a range of social impact categories. The IAIA categories are normally used as a scoping guide and following the scoping stage of a methodology the most relevant are identified for assessment with respect to a project:

Area	Consideration
Way of life	How people live, work, play and interact with one another on a day-to-day basis.
Culture	People's shared beliefs, customs, values and language or dialect.
Community	The cohesion, stability, character, services and facilities of an area.
Political systems	The extent to which people are able to participate in decisions that affect their lives, the level of democratisation that is taking place, and the resources provided for this purpose.
Environment	The quality of the environment in which people live, work and socialise (e.g. the air and water people use; the availability and quality of the food they eat; the level of hazard or risk, dust and noise they are exposed to; the adequacy of sanitation, their physical safety, and their access to and control over resources).
Health and wellbeing	People's state of physical, mental, social and spiritual wellbeing
Personal and property rights	The extent to which people are economically affected or experience personal disadvantage which may include a violation of their civil liberties.
Fears and aspirations	People's perceptions about their safety, their fears about the future of their community, and their aspirations for their future and the future of their children.

4. SIA and Mt Munro Windfarm proposal

I have reviewed the following information in respect of the project:

- Assessment of Environmental Effects dated May 2023

- Additional Information Request for Application APP-2022203902.00 dated 20 December 2023
- Applicant's response to Councils' Additional Information Request for Application APP-2022203902.00 dated 23 February 2024
- s87F Report of Councils dated 15 March 2024
- Submissions received on the Project
- Evidence of s274 Parties

The proposed windfarm is a large-scale infrastructure development which has the potential to create both positive and negative social impacts arising from the planning, construction and operation phases.

Based on my experience in the preparation of SIA, the submissions have raised matters which I consider to be social impacts. and would fall within the following IAIA categories: way of life, community, environment, health and as well as fears and aspirations. There are both positive and negative impacts noted.

The evidence of the s274 parties, namely that of Mr Olliver, Mrs McIlraith, Mr Maxwell, Mrs Steadman and the Hastwell / Mt Munro Protection Society Inc include discussion on matters which I consider in my experience to be social impacts and would fall within the following IAIA categories: way of life, community, environment, health and wellbeing as well as fears and aspirations (relating for some to property rights).

I draw out some matters raised in the submissions and s274 evidence by way of example:

Area	Consideration
Way of life	<p>Many submitters have raised concerns regarding their ability during the construction phase to travel when they want and how they want to. The school run and ability to safely access facilities in Eketāhuna are examples.</p> <p>There is heightened concern that people's enjoyment of their homes, in particular outdoor spaces will be reduced / compromised by effects from construction activities and then the wind farm operation. Reference is made to constant intrusion of the windfarm on lives (nuisance of noise, flicker) with no relief for the resident population.</p> <p>Loss of relaxation time and the ability to continue to undertake recreation activities such as cycling and hunting are also noted.</p> <p>Some submissions raise concerns relating to business disruption ranging from constraints for stock movement to customer access.</p>
Community	<p>The cohesion and character of the local area is emphasised, noting that this has contributed to growth and vibrancy within the community.</p> <p>Road safety concerns are linked in many submissions to an impact (reduction) on family connections and social interactions. The loss of the quiet life rural surroundings for many means a loss in community character which in turn will have a negative change to the community dynamics. Refer is made to the project planning stage having created a divide within the community.</p> <p>Reduced / constrained access to services and facilities within the area are presented. Some have raised concern about services being able to continue to reach them.</p>
Environment	<p>The quality of the environment both during construction and operation are presented – concerns over water quality are particularly noted as many properties rely on rainwater re: potable supply / stock. Reduce quality of food from garden plots, the level of travel risk, exposure to dust and noise levels are concerns repeatedly raised.</p>

Area	Consideration
Health and wellbeing	<p>People's state of physical, mental and social wellbeing is reflected across the majority of submissions and within the s274 evidence. It is evident that the planning phase is creating great anxiety and stress for individuals which is linked to information, the process and the worries/concerns about future way of life/community/ environment.</p> <p>Once operational, concerns are being raised about potential health effects from dust and noise even if environmental management best practice measures are in place – these concerns are linked in the main to nuisance and potential way of life changes.</p>
Personal and property rights	Rental and/or resale difficulties, disruption to way of life and businesses are all noted.
Fears and aspirations	People's perceptions about their safety, their fears about their future, that of their children and wider community, and their aspirations for their future (retirement, family life, community plans).

Based on my experience and the range of social matters raised in the submissions and the s274 parties' evidence, a SIA in the context of proposed Mt Munro Wind Farm would be an appropriate assessment to undertake and to inform the decision-making process.

Social impacts are the likely changes to or impacts on communities and businesses that are likely to occur because of the Project. They may be tangible or intangible, direct or indirect, and different people or groups may experience a social impact in different ways. As such, the value of a SIA is to consider effects in a holistic manner in comparison to other technical effect assessments.

The SIA will assist in defining or shaping appropriate mitigation and/or management measures for effects. These may include recommendations on the membership, duration and remit of a Community Liaison Group; the requirement for a full time Community Liaison; management measures over and above those necessary to address an environmental effect, e.g, prescribe traffic routes and timings.

Appendix A - Qualifications and experience

My full name is Louise Strogon. I hold the position of Director within the Environment and Planning Team, Advisory Service Group at Aurecon New Zealand Ltd (Aurecon). I have over 27-years' experience as a planner and environmental assessor. I have worked at Aurecon since May 2008.

I hold the qualification of BA Geography (Hons) from University College Cork, Ireland and MSc City & Regional Planning from Cardiff University, UK. I am an Associate Member of the New Zealand Planning Institute, a Full Member of the Royal Town Planning Institute, UK and a member of the NZ Association of Impact Assessment.

My role involves advising clients on project feasibility from a planning and environmental management perspective, project leadership and management of the preparation of resource consents and notice or requirement/designation approvals including management plans. I also lead engagement activities that support planning and environmental management activities.

I have been an author and reviewer of SIA in the UK, New Zealand and Australia (Queensland & New South Wales) since 2002. I have experience advising and assessing on social impact matters arising from large infrastructure projects.

Examples of SIA project work includes the following:

- Mt Piper Battery Energy Storage System, NSW | EnergyAustralia NSW Pty Ltd | 2023-2024 | Socio-Economic Effects Assessor
- Bristol Street Rehabilitative and Reintegrative Residential Accommodation, Christchurch | Christchurch City Council | 2021 | Social Impact Assessor for Council
- Let's Get Wellington Moving – Programme Business Case | LGWM | 2020-21 | Social Impact Assessor
- City Rail Link | Auckland Transport & CRLL | 2014 – 2020 | Planner and Social Impact Advisor:
- Port of Gladstone Gatcombe and Golding Cutting Channel Duplication Project, Queensland | Gladstone Ports Authority | 2018 | Social Effects Assessor
- Northern Corridor Improvements | NZ Transport Agency | 2015 - 2017 | Environmental Team Manager and Social Effects Assessor