

BEFORE THE HEARINGS PANEL

UNDER

The Resource Management Act 1991

AND

IN THE MATTER

of Hearing of Submissions and Further
Submissions on the Hutt City Proposed District
Plan - Hearing Stream 6: Infrastructure

**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF GARY ALAN SCHOLFIELD
ON BEHALF OF POWERCO LIMITED**

Dated

07 September 2026

INTRODUCTION

- [1] My full name is Gary Alan Scholfield.
- [2] I am employed as Senior Environmental Planner by Powerco Limited (**Powerco**) and have worked for Powerco since January 2020.

Qualifications and Experience

- [3] I hold a Bachelor of Resource and Environmental Planning Degree from Massey University (1999). I have been engaged in the field of resource and environmental management for over 26 years however I wish to note that this evidence is not given as expert evidence, but rather in my capacity as an employee of Powerco.
- [4] In my current role I hold primary responsibility for managing submissions on District and Regional plan changes, bylaws and third-party resource consent applications across the Powerco network footprint¹. I have also assisted with a number of resource consent applications and Notices of Requirement to designate Powerco projects.
- [5] Between October 2010 and April 2017, I worked for Powerco in roles where I held responsibility for securing resource management approvals and property rights for network development and renewal projects. Having worked for Powerco for a number of years, I have a very good working knowledge of the Company's operations, assets and strategic direction, including the gas distribution networks located in Hutt City.
- [6] I was involved with the preparation of Powerco's submissions and further submissions on the Hutt City Proposed District Plan (**PDP**).
- [7] I am authorised to present this evidence on behalf of Powerco.

¹ The Powerco footprint includes 1 unitary authority, 6 regional councils and 30 territorial authorities.

STRUCTURE OF EVIDENCE

[8] The purpose of my evidence is to:

- (a) Provide a brief overview of Powerco and its networks within Hutt City.
- (b) Respond to recommendations on Powerco submission points that are rejected within the Section 42A Officer's Report.

POWERCO'S BUSINESS AND DISTRIBUTION NETWORKS

Overview of Powerco

- [9] Powerco is a New Zealand based energy company which distributes both electricity and natural gas. Powerco was formed following the 1999 electricity industry reforms when it decided to become a "network business" (or lines company). During this time, it sold its generation and retail businesses, and grew its distribution operations.
- [10] Our electricity network serves Coromandel to South Waikato, western Bay of Plenty, Taranaki, Whanganui, Rangitikei, Manawatū, Wairarapa, and Tairāwhiti and Wairoa. Our gas network serves Taranaki, Horowhenua, Hawke's Bay, Manawatū, Horowhenua, Porirua, Hutt Valley and Wellington.
- [11] Our networks deliver electricity and gas around the North Island from the national electricity transmission network owned by Transpower and the natural gas transmission system owned by First Gas Limited.
- [12] Powerco is Aotearoa New Zealand's largest dual electricity and gas distributor by network length, serving more than one million Kiwi across the North Island. We deliver electricity and gas to our customers through a total of approximately 502,000 connections.

The New Zealand Natural Gas System

- [13] The natural gas system in New Zealand is an interconnected system that comprises several distinct activities. While the upstream aspects of the system, namely production and transmission seem to be understood at a high level, the understanding and importance of distribution networks is often left wanting. Figure 1 below contains a simplified diagram of the natural gas system in New Zealand.



Figure 1 - The New Zealand Natural Gas System

Supply of Natural Gas to Hutt City

- [14] When looking at the supply of natural gas to Hutt City, various on and offshore production plants in Taranaki produce gas that is processed and injected into the Transmission network owned by First Gas. The Transmission network operates at a high pressure and transports gas to a number of main centres across the North Island, including Hutt City.
- [15] Powerco takes supply from the transmission network at 'delivery points' which are generally located on the periphery of main cities. Hutt City is served by one primary delivery point which is located in Belmont Regional Park. The Powerco networks then transport that gas (dropping pressures along the way) to each customer within Hutt City.
- [16] It is therefore evident that Powerco's networks are critical to the supply of natural gas to Hutt City. This criticality is reflected in the fact that Powerco assets are classified as a "Lifeline Utility" under the Civil Defence Emergency Management Act 2002.

[17] Furthermore, our assets are also explicitly recognised in the Wellington Regional Policy Statement as 'Regionally Significant Infrastructure' which includes pipelines for the distribution of natural gas.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON POWERCO SUBMISSION POINTS

Introduction

[18] Powerco made a number of submissions on the Infrastructure provisions contained within the PDP. A large number of those submission points supported provisions as drafted which the s42A Officer's Report has recommended be accepted. Given these points do not appear to be in contention, my evidence focuses on those submission points made by Powerco that the s42A Officer has recommended be rejected.

Definition – Infrastructure and Network Utility Operator

[19] Within its submissions, Powerco sought the inclusion of the term 'biogas' with clause (a) of the definitions of 'infrastructure' and 'network utility operator'². The reason for this submission point is that Powerco is investigating the use of biogas in its gas distribution networks in a process to decarbonise and create a sustainable alternative to natural gas. Biogas is a renewable gas made when microorganisms break down organic matter without oxygen. Examples include biodigesters and landfill gas recovery.

[20] The s42A author has rejected both of these submission points at paragraphs 656 and 669 as he considers 'biofuel'³ encompasses 'biogas'. As Powerco is gas distributor operating under the Gas Act 1992 (**GA**), Powerco seeks to ensure consistency of defined terms to avoid situations where uncertainty or disputes could arise. The definition of 'gas' under the GA is as follows (*emphasis added*):

² Powerco submission points 414.2 and 414.3 respectively.

³ Not defined within the PDP.

Gas means any fuel that is supplied through pipes or in containers and is a gas at a temperature of 15°C and an absolute pressure of 101.325 kilopascals; and includes—

(a) **biogas**, coal gas, liquefied petroleum gas, **natural gas**, oil gas, producer gas, refinery gas, reformed natural gas, and tempered liquefied petroleum gas...

- [21] Given the above definition under the GA, Powerco still seeks the relief sought in submission points 414.2 and 414.3 to add the term '*biogas*' with clause (a) of the definitions of 'infrastructure' and 'network utility operator'. The addition will add certainty to these terms and will aid in plan administration.

INF-P4

- [22] Powerco supported INF-P4 as drafted within the PDP⁴. Clarus, supported by Wellington Water, sought changes to clause 3 of the policy to add the words 'and other renewable energy sources' at the end of the clause. Powerco is happy with the addition of the words suggested by Clarus.

- [23] However, at paragraph 251 of the s42A report, the author has commented on Council directions with respect to low-emission futures, and at paragraph 254 has recommended that clause 3 of INF-P4 is amended as follows:

3. *Facilitate a transition to renewable electricity and other energy sources which are renewable and have low emissions, or*

- [24] The additional words suggested by the s42A author '*and have low emissions*' is not supported by Powerco. Low emissions is a subjective term that is open to interpretation. Furthermore, I would question the scope to provide the relief recommended as it is not responding to a submission point seeking such a change. Powerco seeks that the words '*and have low emissions*' is deleted from clause 3 of INF-P4 as follows:

⁴ Powerco submission point 414.13.

3. *Facilitate a transition to renewable electricity and other energy sources which are renewable and have low emissions, or*

INF-P6

[25] Powerco sought some changes to clause 2 and 3 of INF-P6 to recognise that undergrounding of infrastructure may not be possible in all circumstances and to add a qualifier to the term 'adverse effects'⁵.

[26] The s42 author has recommended changes to these clauses at paragraph 274 of his report, which include splitting clause 3 into two parts as follows:

2. *Whether it is practicable to reduce adverse effects through the Recognising that colocation of infrastructure, shared use of infrastructure corridors or and undergrounding of infrastructure ~~provide opportunities for avoiding and minimising adverse effects,~~*
3. *Whether ~~Where~~ adverse effects cannot be avoided due to the functional needs and operational needs of the infrastructure to be in that location,*
4. *~~then t~~The extent to which these adverse effects that cannot be avoided are minimised by the infrastructure design or operation,*

[27] Powerco supports the wording of clause 2 and 3 above. However, Powerco holds concern over clause 4 and believes that a significance qualifier still needs to be added to the consideration of adverse effects. As drafted any adverse effect that cannot be avoided, regardless of how small or large, would need to be minimised. In practice this is likely to be very problematic, particularly where a residual adverse effect at the lower end of the scale is generated.

[28] As a regulated business, Powerco is focused on cost-effectively operating and maintaining its gas networks in line with current standards. In this regard, Powerco's assets are not typically over-engineered and are likely to represent the optimal solution necessary

⁵ Powerco submission point 414.15.

to perform the required function within the network. As such, if a project required consideration under clause 4 that generated some low level of adverse effect, I hold concern that it may not be possible to minimise effects by design or operation.

[29] As such, Powerco seeks that INF-P6 clause 4 is amended as follows:

4. ~~then-t~~The extent to which ~~those~~ significant adverse effects ~~that cannot be avoided~~ are minimised by the infrastructure design or operation,

In the alternative, the word 'significant' could be replaced by 'more than minor'.

INF-P7(3)(b)

[30] Powerco supported INF-P7 as drafted within the PDP⁶. Powerco had supported the Policy generally as it referred to adequate space being allocated in the road corridor for infrastructure. At paragraph 287 of his report, the s42A author has recommended some changes to clause 3(b) of the policy to refer to public transport infrastructure. However, in doing so, the changes now exclude infrastructure generally from the clause.

[31] Powerco is not concerned with the addition of public transport infrastructure within clause 3(b), but this should not be at the expense of infrastructure generally. Under the Gas Act 1991⁷, Powerco has a right to construct assets within roads, and it is appropriate that where the transport network is developed that adequate space is allocated to infrastructure.

[32] I note that INF-S15 requires all roads to be designed and constructed in accordance with NZS 4404:2010 Land Development and Subdivision Infrastructure. Section 8 of NZS 4404:2010 sets out the requirements for the provision of infrastructure and their locations in the road including gas reticulation. As such, it is appropriate that INF-

⁶ Powerco submission point 414.16.

⁷ Section 25

P7 retains a general reference to infrastructure. Powerco seeks that clause 3 of INF-P7 is amended as follows:

- b. Allocating adequate space in the road corridor for walking, cycling, infrastructure, public transport infrastructure, streetlighting and street trees as well as vehicles and on-street parking (where appropriate), and*

INF-P9

[33] Powerco supported INF-P9 as drafted within the PDP⁸. At paragraph 313 of his report, the s42A author has recommended some changes to clause 2 of this policy. Powerco does not support the changes recommended and questions the scope to provide the relief recommended as it does not appear to be responding to a submission point seeking such a change. In my view the recommended change significantly alters the intent of the policy.

[34] Powerco is concerned that the changes could have unintended consequences as any structure could arguably impede conveyancing or diversion of floodwaters. Powerco seeks that that the originally notified provision is retained.

INF-P14

[35] Powerco sought the deletion of clause 4 in INF-P14⁹ to recognise that Powerco gas infrastructure, particularly customer connections, already exist within the Active Street Frontage Overlay areas. And it is not just gas infrastructure that exists within these areas, electricity and telecommunication customer connections are also present. Powerco is concerned that having a policy that requires consistency with urban design outcomes will be problematic for network utilities, particularly as it requires a subjective assessment to be undertaken.

[36] I note that the Policy already requires significant adverse effects on pedestrian amenity and visual amenity to be avoided, and that other

⁸ Powerco submission point 414.17.

⁹ Powerco submission point 414.22.

adverse effects are avoided, remedied, or mitigated. As such there is already plenty of scope within the Policy to consider effects in the Active Street Frontage.

[37] At paragraph 322 the s42A author has recommended some changes to the Policy and has recommend the insertion of a new advice note. Powerco still seeks the deletion of clause 4 and opposes the insertion of the new advice note as it is adding further considerations for proposals considered under INF-P14. The new advice note is concerning given the objectives and policies for the Active Street Frontage make very limited reference to infrastructure. Had this note been included within the notified version of the PDP, Powerco would have opposed it.

[38] I also question whether the addition of the advice note is within scope of the submissions outlined in paragraphs 179 – 182 of the s42A report. The Telecommunications Companies and Transpower sought the INF chapter be standalone, yet those submissions are being utilised to add further cross references to other chapters.

INF-S2

[39] Powerco supported INF-S2 as drafted within the PDP¹⁰. At paragraph 492 of his report, the s42A author has recommended some changes to clause 9(a) of this policy to ensure consistent usage of terminology within the plan. Powerco does not support the changes recommended as it would significantly limit the ability of infrastructure providers to upgrade infrastructure – essentially limiting footprint increases to 5%. The medium and high flood hazard area applies to a significant area of Hutt City and will unnecessarily restrict the ability to upgrade infrastructure.

[40] Powerco seeks that that the originally notified provision of INF-S2 9(a) is retained or modified to allow footprint increases of 30% in all areas.

¹⁰ Powerco submission point 414.35.

INF Table 1 – Street Trees

[41] Powerco sought some changes to the Table 1: Street trees specifications to increase the minimum horizontal setback distances from underground infrastructure¹¹. Such setbacks are required to protect underground services from tree-root damage and minimise costs associated with installing or accessing underground assets that may be within the dripline of a tree.

[42] The s42A author at paragraph 564 has provided some reasons why he does not support the relief requested by Powerco. Below is a response to each of those points:

- *Unreasonable restriction* – As noted at paragraph [31] above, Powerco has statutory rights to access the road corridor under the Gas Act 1991. Council can prescribe reasonable conditions on that access. I disagree with the assertion that imposing a setback for street trees from infrastructure represents an unreasonable restriction.
- *Maintenance access* – depending on the Council area we operate within, different requirements can apply to works around street trees. There are examples where Councils require arborist oversight, hand-digging or hydrovac excavation techniques to access assets where street trees have been planted in close proximity to our assets. This all adds costs to essential operation and maintenance activities.
- *Consistency with other District Plans* – I disagree with the conclusion that the setbacks are consistent with the Wellington City and Porirua District Plans. I was involved as a submitter on both plans. The Porirua District Plan requires a 3m setback from gas distribution pipelines regardless of the stem diameter at maturity¹². The Wellington District Plan 2024¹³ specifies a separation from gas distribution of 0.5m for trees <300mm stem diameter, and 1.5m for 300-600mm stem diameter trees.

¹¹ Powerco submission point 414.41.

¹² Porirua District Plan 2025 INF-Table 2 – Street Trees

¹³ Wellington City Plan 2024 Table 2 – INF: Street Trees

The Wellington District Plan also contains typical cross sections for the design of roads which separates infrastructure berms from street trees – often with a footpath between them¹⁴.

- [43] Within its submission, Powerco sought horizontal setback distances of street trees from underground infrastructure of 1.5m for trees with a stem diameter of <600mm, and a 3m setback for trees with a 600+mm stem diameter. Based on the responses above, I consider such relief is appropriate. An alternative resolution may be to require new street trees to have root box's installed to give tree roots a clear space to grow without affecting underground infrastructure.

CONCLUSION

- [44] For the reasons outlined above, it is clear that the Powerco networks located within Hutt City are regionally significant. The requests Powerco has made via its submissions and further submissions are entirely reasonable to ensure continuity of gas supply around Hutt City.

- [45] The development of appropriate provisions will ensure the ongoing operation, maintenance and upgrading of the local gas distribution networks. This will have positive benefits to residents, businesses and essential services in Hutt City.

Gary Alan Scholfield

07 September 2026

¹⁴ Wellington City Plan 2024 Table 1 – INF: Design of Roads – One Network Framework