

**BEFORE THE INDEPENDENT HEARINGS PANEL
APPOINTED BY HUTT CITY COUNCIL**

UNDER
the Resource Management Act 1991
IN THE MATTER
of the hearing of submissions on the Proposed Lower Hutt District Plan
HEARING TOPIC
Hearing Stream 6: Infrastructure

STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF HANNO VAN HELSDINGEN

for **WELLINGTON ELECTRICITY LINES LIMITED (SUBMITTER 415)**

Planning Evidence: Hearing Stream 6 - Infrastructure

Dated: 7 September 2026

Align

1 EXPERIENCE

- 1.1 My name is Hanno van Helsdingen. I am a Senior Planning Consultant with Align Limited, based in Wellington.
- 1.2 I hold a Bachelor in Town and Regional Planning (B TRP) from the University of Pretoria and am a Registered Associate Member of the New Zealand Planning Institute (NZPI). I have 28 years of experience as a planner, including statutory planning, land use and subdivision, infrastructure planning and development assessment. I have practiced under the Resource Management Act 1991 in New Zealand since 2021.
- 1.3 My work includes the preparation and assessment of resource consent applications, district and regional planning assessments, designation-related matters, and planning advice for local authorities and infrastructure providers. I have undertaken planning work for Wellington Electricity Lines Limited (WELL), Electra, Hutt City Council, Palmerston North City Councils well as for private land developers.
- 1.4 I have particular experience in electricity distribution infrastructure, including substations, overhead and underground electricity infrastructure, cable routes, road reserve works, reserve and rail corridor interfaces, and district and regional consenting matters. My work for WELL has included planning advice and consenting for network upgrading, cable replacement and relocation projects, including up to 33 kV infrastructure.
- 1.5 I also have experience in the preparation of planning submissions and in hearing and objection processes. My direct hearing and tribunal experience has primarily been in South Africa, while my New Zealand experience includes district plan submission work and statutory planning advice relating to electricity infrastructure.

INVOLVEMENT IN WELL SUBMISSION

- 1.6 I prepared WELL's submission on the Proposed Lower Hutt District Plan (submission 415), dated 2 May 2025. I have subsequently reviewed the section 42A officer's report for Hearing Stream 6: Infrastructure and the recommendations relevant to WELL.

CODE OF CONDUCT

- 1.7 I confirm that I have read the Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses contained in the Environment Court Practice Note 2023 and agree to comply with it. I have considered the material facts that I am aware of that might alter or detract from the opinions I express. The opinions in this evidence are within my area of expertise, except where I state that I am relying on information provided by others.

2 MATERIAL CONSIDERED

- 2.1 In preparing this evidence I have considered the following material:
- WELL submission 415 on the Proposed Lower Hutt District Plan, dated 2 May 2025;
 - Hutt City Council Section 42A Officer's Report – Hearing Stream 6: Infrastructure, dated 24 August 2026, including the recommended amendments and the submissions and further submissions addressed in that report insofar as they are relevant to WELL's submission points;
 - the relevant provisions of the Proposed Lower Hutt District Plan;
 - the National Policy Statement for Electricity Networks 2008, as amended in December 2025 and in force from 15 January 2026 (NPS-EN);
 - Ministry for the Environment, National Environmental Standards for Electricity Transmission Activities and National Environmental Standards for Telecommunication Facilities: Report on Recommendations and Decisions, published 4 May 2026, insofar as it records the proposed NES-ENA provisions for electricity distribution network activities, including proposed R9;
 - the Ministry for the Environment publication pages for the NPS-EN and proposed NES-ENA material, accessed 3 September 2026, including the current status of the proposed NES-ENA and the Ministry's note that further Ministerial decisions are recorded in an addendum; and

- WELL's 9 Moulton Street, Tītahi Bay transformer replacement resource consent material, including the Assessment of Environmental Effects and site plan, as a practical example of how a 5 m relocation threshold can operate.

3 SCOPE OF EVIDENCE

- 3.1 I have reviewed the section 42A recommendations carefully. Although a number of WELL's submission points are formally recommended to be rejected, in several instances the reporting officer has recommended or confirmed an alternative planning mechanism that substantially achieves the practical outcome WELL sought.
- 3.2 Accordingly, WELL does not seek to pursue all of its original relief at this hearing. My evidence briefly addresses each of the relevant WELL submission points and explains why WELL is satisfied with the recommended approach, before addressing the one substantive matter that WELL continues to pursue: the relocation distance in INF-S2(1).
- 3.3 In summary, WELL maintains submission point 415.9a seeking a 10 m relocation allowance in INF-S2(1), rather than the 5 m allowance recommended in the section 42A report. The remaining WELL relief addressed in this evidence is not pursued further for the reasons set out below.
- 3.4 A representative from WELL may attend and address the operational context and practical network considerations. My evidence is directed to the planning matters arising from submission 415, in particular the appropriateness of the relocation threshold in INF-S2(1).

4 WELL SUBMISSIONS AND RESPONSE TO THE SECTION 42A REPORT

- 4.1 Table 1 summarises my position on the section 42A recommendations relating to WELL's submission points. Overall, I agree with the section 42A recommendations and recommended approach as they relate to WELL, except for the recommendation on submission point 415.9a. WELL continues to seek a 10 m relocation allowance in INF-S2(1) rather than the recommended 5 m allowance.

Submission point	Matter	s42A recommendation / reference	WELL position	Reason
415.3a / 415.3b	Minor upgrading definition	Reject - paras 699-703 (see also paras 147-153)	Accept section 42A recommendation – no further relief sought	The officer explains that the PDP provides for minor-scale upgrading through INF-R3 and specified quantitative standards, avoiding a subjective threshold for deciding what is "minor". WELL accepts that this provides a clearer effects-based mechanism and substantially achieves the outcome sought.
415.5	PINF-P1 - protection of infrastructure	Reject - paras 777, 782 and 790	Accept section 42A recommendation – no further relief sought	The officer notes that electrical safe distances are regulated separately and that WELL's proposed policy wording was not implemented by corresponding rules or standards. WELL does not pursue the exact clause. The amended NPS-EN now provides stronger national direction on protecting electricity networks from third-party effects.
415.6	INF-R2 / routine minor upgrading	Reject - paras 353, 360-366 and 372	Accept section 42A recommendation – no further relief sought	The officer prefers the specific INF-R3 / INF-S2 standards rather than a qualitative minor-upgrading clause. Compliant upgrading remains permitted and non-compliance with INF-R3.1 is recommended to be restricted discretionary rather than non-complying. WELL considers this substantially achieves the practical outcome sought.

Submission point	Matter	s42A recommendation / reference	WELL position	Reason
415.7a / 415.7b	INF-S17 - trenching	Reject - paras 590-594 and 597-599	Accept officer clarification	The officer clarifies that longer linear works can be staged so that no more than the applicable area threshold is open at one time. This substantially addresses WELL's principal concern about routine linear trenching.
415.8	INF-S19 - Sites and Areas of Significance to Māori	INF-S19 removed through plan-stop amendments	No further relief sought	INF-S19 is identified for removal from the PDP as a consequence of the plan-stop requirements. WELL's original relief is therefore no longer necessary in this hearing.
415.9a	INF-S2(1) - relocation distance	Reject - paras 480, 484 and 490	Do not accept section 42A recommendation – maintain 10 m relief	WELL sought 10 m rather than 5 m. The officer considers 5 m an appropriate balance. WELL maintains that 10 m better reflects operational requirements, remains a bounded relocation envelope, and is supported by the 10 m approach recorded for relevant existing electricity distribution network assets in proposed NES-ENA R9.
415.9b	INF-S2 clauses 2-12	Reject - paras 482, 486-490	Accept section 42A recommendation, except for clause 1 addressed under 415.9a	WELL supported clauses 2-12 as notified. The officer has retained the quantitative structure of INF-S2, subject to limited amendments. WELL does not pursue a separate issue under 415.9b.
415.9c	Additional quantitative/qualitative upgrading clauses	Reject - paras 482, 486-490	Accept section 42A recommendation – no further relief sought	The officer considers WELL's additional clauses too qualitative for permitted-activity compliance and notes that the identified upgrading activities are already provided for where the quantitative standards are met. WELL accepts that approach.
415.9d	Reinstate Operative District Plan minor-upgrading framework	Reject - paras 353, 360-366 and 372	Accept section 42A recommendation – no further relief sought	Given the revised INF-R3 / INF-S2 framework, including the restricted discretionary pathway for non-compliance, WELL does not consider reinstatement of the previous Operative District Plan minor-upgrading framework necessary.

5 REMAINING ISSUE - INF-S2(1) RELOCATION DISTANCE

- 5.1 WELL's submission point 415.9a sought to amend INF-S2(1) so that the replacement, realignment or relocation of a line, pipe (excluding a gas transmission pipeline), support structure, conductor, cross arm, switch, transformer or ancillary structure must be within 10 m of the existing alignment or location. The notified standard used a 5 m threshold.
- 5.2 The section 42A officer recommends rejecting the 10 m relief. At paragraph 484 the officer considers that 5 m is an appropriate balance between providing some flexibility to alter an alignment and maintaining effects comparable with the existing alignment.
- 5.3 I acknowledge the intent of that reasoning. However, I have not identified an effects-based analysis in the section 42A report demonstrating why a relocation between 5 m and 10 m would inherently result in materially greater effects than a relocation within 5 m, particularly where the remaining quantitative requirements of INF-S2 and other applicable standards continue to be met.

- 5.4 The practical consequence of the 5 m threshold is that an otherwise routine replacement or upgrade can require resource consent solely because a suitable replacement position is, for example, 6 m, 8 m or 9 m from the existing position. For electricity distribution infrastructure, the exact replacement position can be influenced by existing underground services, road geometry, vehicle crossings, footpaths, access, safety requirements and the physical dimensions of modern replacement equipment.
- 5.5 Increasing the relocation allowance to 10 m would not remove the other controls applying to upgrading. The remaining INF-S2 standards continue to manage matters such as structure type, height, width, additional supports and footprint. Activities that do not meet the applicable standards would continue to require resource consent under the recommended INF-R3 framework.
- 5.6 In my opinion, a 10 m threshold is therefore a modest and bounded change. It provides additional siting flexibility for existing infrastructure while retaining the wider effects-management framework of the PDP.

6 NATIONAL DIRECTION

NATIONAL POLICY STATEMENT FOR ELECTRICITY NETWORKS

- 6.1 amended NPS-EN came into force on 15 January 2026 and applies to both electricity transmission and electricity distribution networks. Policy 4 requires decision-makers to recognise the role of the EDN provider in determining the purpose, scope, required capacity and technical solution for electricity network activities, and in considering and identifying the preferred site, route and method. Policy 5 requires decision-makers to provide for routine electricity network activities in all locations and environments, provided adverse effects are, where practicable, avoided, remedied or mitigated, while acknowledging the existing nature of the assets. Policy 7 also recognises the requirement for regular maintenance and upgrading of the electricity network.
- 6.2 Section 75(3)(a) of the RMA provides that a district plan must give effect to any national policy statement. I acknowledge the section 42A officer's view at paragraphs 154–158 that the updated NPS-EN cannot be comprehensively implemented through this hearing within the available submission scope, and I do not seek such an outcome. However, submission 415.9a expressly places the question of a 5 m or 10 m relocation allowance before the Panel. In my opinion, the NPS-EN is therefore relevant higher-order policy direction when considering that relief already within scope.

The NPS-EN provides the higher-order policy direction, whereas the proposed NES-ENA is more directly relevant to the numerical standards proposed for particular electricity distribution activities.

PROPOSED NES-ENA - ELECTRICITY DISTRIBUTION

- 6.3 Since WELL lodged its submission, the Ministry for the Environment has published its May 2026 Report on Recommendations and Decisions concerning proposed amendments to the national environmental standards. The proposed amendments would extend the national framework to electricity distribution network activities and rename the instrument as the National Environmental Standards for Electricity Network Activities (NES-ENA).
- 6.4 Of particular relevance to submission 415.9a, proposed R9 addresses the alteration, relocation and replacement of existing electricity distribution network assets. For existing distribution lines, support structures and cabinets, the May 2026 report records a proposed permitted activity standard that “the replaced or relocated EDN asset must be within 10 m of the existing location”. The 10 m standard forms part of a wider set of permitted activity conditions relating to matters including asset location and physical scale. Recommendation 99 records the proposed permitted activity approach for the alteration, relocation and replacement of existing distribution lines, support structures and cabinets, and the May report records the Minister as agreeing with that recommendation.

- 6.5 The broader electricity distribution provisions of the proposed NES-ENA have not yet been gazetted or brought into force. The Ministry for the Environment's publication page records that further Ministerial decisions have subsequently been made and are contained in an addendum that is to be read alongside the May 2026 report. I therefore do not rely on proposed R9 as operative regulation or as final legislative drafting. I rely on the 10 m approach recorded in the May 2026 report as relevant national policy context only.

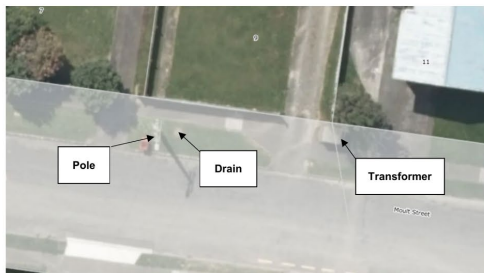
Ministry for the Environment, National Environmental Standards for Electricity Transmission Activities and National Environmental Standards for Telecommunication Facilities: Report on Recommendations and Decisions, publication page, accessed 4 September 2026.

- 6.6 The relevance to submission 415.9a is accordingly narrow. WELL sought a 10 m relocation allowance in its submission, and the subsequent national work on proposed rules for existing electricity distribution assets also records a 10 m relocation threshold. In my opinion, that provides additional support for the Panel to consider 10 m, rather than 5 m, as an appropriate relocation envelope for WELL's distribution infrastructure.

7 PRACTICAL EXAMPLE - 9 MOULT STREET, TĪTAHI BAY

- 7.1 A recent WELL project at 9 Moul Street, Tītahi Bay provides a practical example of how a 5 m relocation threshold can operate. I acknowledge that this site is in Porirua rather than Lower Hutt and I do not rely on it as a direct precedent. I rely on it as a real example of the operational siting constraints that arise when existing electricity distribution equipment is replaced.
- 7.2 At Moul Street, WELL proposed to replace an ageing transformer within the road reserve. The replacement unit could not be installed in exactly the same position because of the size of the new unit. The selected replacement position was approximately 8 m from the existing transformer and was chosen to avoid conflict with existing services in the berm area while maintaining the function of the footpath.
- 7.3 The operative Porirua District Plan upgrading standard required the realignment, relocation or replacement of a transformer to be within 5 m of the existing position. The approximately 8 m relocation therefore did not comply and contributed to a restricted discretionary consent requirement. Had that relocation standard been 10 m, the relocation component would have complied.

Existing transformer location



Proposed replacement location



Figure 1: Existing transformer location and proposed replacement position at 9 Moul Street, Tītahi Bay. Source: WELL / Align resource consent material, April 2026.

- 7.5 The effects assessment for the Moul Street proposal concluded that the replacement would continue to read as roadside utility infrastructure within an established suburban streetscape. The muted green cabinet finish assisted in reducing visual prominence, and streetscape and amenity effects were assessed as less than minor. Supporting information also indicated low operational noise effects.
- 7.6 The replacement location was also better separated from nearby vehicle crossings than the existing transformer position. This illustrates that a relocation beyond 5 m can, depending on the site, improve siting outcomes rather than increase effects.

- 7.7 In my opinion, the Moulton Street example demonstrates the practical benefit of a 10 m relocation envelope. The additional flexibility can allow network providers to respond to physical and operational constraints while retaining an asset within the same local road reserve environment and without a corresponding increase in adverse effects. More generally, it can also avoid unnecessary resource consent requirements, and the associated time, cost and potential delay, for relatively minor relocations of existing network infrastructure where the environmental effects remain comparable to the existing situation.

8 PLANNING ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 In considering the relative merits of 5 m and 10 m, I have had particular regard to effectiveness, efficiency, environmental effects and the subsequent national direction.

EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY

- 8.2 A 10 m threshold would more effectively enable routine upgrading of existing electricity distribution infrastructure by providing a reasonable envelope to respond to site constraints. It would reduce resource consent requirements for relocations between 5 m and 10 m where the other permitted standards are met, thereby reducing consenting time, cost and potential delay for routine network works.

ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

- 8.3 The relocation of existing infrastructure as part of an upgrade is different from the establishment of new infrastructure in a new location. INF-S2 already recognises this distinction by permitting the replacement, realignment or relocation of existing infrastructure within a specified relocation envelope, subject to the other standards in INF-S2. The issue before the Panel is therefore not whether relocation should be permitted in principle, but whether 5 m or 10 m is the more appropriate permitted relocation threshold.
- 8.4 In my opinion, increasing that relocation envelope from 5 m to 10 m does not, by itself, establish that adverse effects will be materially greater. The receiving environment, final position, scale and design of the replacement infrastructure remain relevant, and the other applicable INF-S2 standards continue to control the physical scale and effects of the upgrading activity.
- 8.5 The proposed 10 m threshold also remains finite. Relocations beyond 10 m would continue to fall outside the permitted standard and would require assessment through the applicable resource consent pathway.

CONSISTENCY WITH NATIONAL DIRECTION

- 8.6 The 10 m relief is consistent with the enabling direction of the NPS-EN for routine electricity network activities and is supported by the 10 m approach recorded for relevant existing distribution assets in proposed NES-ENA R9. Because the proposed NES-ENA distribution provisions are not yet operative, I rely on that national work as contextual support rather than as binding regulation.
- 8.7 For these reasons, I consider that 10 m is a more efficient and effective threshold than 5 m for INF-S2(1), while continuing to appropriately manage effects through the balance of the PDP infrastructure standards.

9 RELIEF SOUGHT

- 9.1 WELL accepts the section 42A recommendations in respect of the other matters addressed in section 4 of my evidence and does not seek to pursue that relief further at this hearing.
- 9.2 WELL maintains submission point 415.9a and seeks the following amendment to INF-S2(1):

INF-S2(1) - relief sought by WELL:

The replacement, realignment or relocation of a line, any pipe (excluding a gas transmission pipeline), support structure, conductor, cross arm, switch, transformer or ancillary structure must be within **10 m** of the existing alignment or location.

10 CONCLUSION

- 10.1 Overall, I consider the section 42A recommendations substantially address the practical outcomes WELL sought through its Infrastructure submission. In particular, the recommended INF-R3 / INF-S2 framework provides a clear permitted pathway for compliant upgrading, with a restricted discretionary pathway where the specified upgrading standards are not met. The trenching clarification also substantially resolves WELL's concern regarding long linear cable works.
- 10.2 The remaining issue is the 5 m relocation threshold in INF-S2(1). In my opinion, a 10 m threshold is more appropriate because it provides practical flexibility for routine replacement and upgrading, does not remove the other effects-based controls in INF-S2, is supported by a real WELL operational example, and is consistent with the 10 m approach recorded for relevant existing electricity distribution assets in proposed NES-ENA R9.
- 10.3 I therefore recommend that the Panel accept WELL submission point 415.9a and amend INF-S2(1) by replacing 5 m with 10 m.

Hanno van Helsdingen

7 September 2026

APPENDIX A - MARKED-UP INF-S2(1)

A.1 The following marked-up provision shows the amendment sought by WELL through submission point 415.9a. No other amendment to INF-S2 is sought through this evidence.

Section 42A recommended wording	INF-S2(1): The replacement, realignment or relocation of a line, any pipe (excluding a gas transmission pipeline), support structure, conductor, cross arm, switch, transformer or ancillary structure must be within 5 m of the existing alignment or location.
WELL relief sought	INF-S2(1): The replacement, realignment or relocation of a line, any pipe (excluding a gas transmission pipeline), support structure, conductor, cross arm, switch, transformer or ancillary structure must be within 10 m of the existing alignment or location.
Change sought	Replace “5 m” with “10 m”.