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17 November 2025

Committee Secretariat
Environment Committee
Parliament Buildings
Wellington 6160

Submission on Fast-Track Approvals Amendment Bill

Comments

SAFE **opposes** the Fast-Track Approvals Amendment Bill.

The Coalition Government's proposed amendments to the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 take an already dangerous and anti-democratic law and entrench it's controversial aspects by handing more power to ministers and corporations with vested interests, sidelining communities, and stripping away the few environmental and democratic safeguards that remained.

This Bill is anti-democratic, anti-environment, and anti-animal welfare. It aims to silence communities and hapū and give corporations unacceptable influence and control by allowing developers to object to project assessment panel members who do not align with their desired outcomes.

The proposed amendments would also legitimise a rushed decision-making process and enable ministerial interference by way of issuing 'policy statements' which agencies would be obliged to take into account, paving the way for unrestrained recklessness. Sixty days is not enough time to adequately assess large-scale projects, and the cutting of corners would lead to increased risk for animals, the climate, and our communities. Democracy shouldn't be optional, and limiting the participation of communities and hapū silences the people who have a extensive knowledge of and direct connections to these ecosystems.

The Fast-track Approvals Act already undermines and threatens animal welfare considerations, environmental stewardship, and democratic integrity. Expediting the approval process for large-scale farming projects such as intensive barn facilities, feedlots, intensive fish farming, and intensive winter grazing, would thwart any consideration for animal welfare. These farming practices already compromise animal welfare to an unacceptable degree, and further abolishing consultation requirements will only exacerbate the suffering of countless animals.

For example:

- Fish farming has been specifically earmarked to benefit from the fast-tracking process. During the ‘Fast Tracking Aquaculture Conference 2025’ⁱ held in October the focus was on ‘supercharging’ the sector – for an industry with no Code of Welfare this is a deeply concerning prospect in terms of the welfare of countless animals. Farmed fishes in New Zealand are confined in overcrowded and waste-ridden water. They suffer from bone deformities and skin lesions, are subjected to extreme heat stress, and die in mass mortality events.^{ii iii} Intensive fish farming operations have also been shown to produce excess nitrogen and phosphorus, contributing to oxygen depletion and causing toxic algal blooms that compromise marine ecosystems.^{iv}
- Animals confined on mud farms (also known as ‘winter grazing systems’) suffer from a range of serious welfare issues. In 2019, the Ministry for Primary Industries’ ‘Winter Grazing Taskforce’ reported that animals suffer from poor hoof health leading to claw lesions and lameness; increased risk of mastitis; birthing in mud; reduced lying time and poor quality of lying and sleep; reduced ability to ruminate; malnutrition and underfeeding; dehydration; cold and heat stress; negative social interactions at high density (e.g. competition for feed, water and lying spaces); nutritional or metabolic problems; injury caused by fencing and equipment including fractures and broken legs due to mud; dental problems; and death resulting from misadventure, exposure or acute metabolic incidents.^v SAFE has significant concerns about the accelerated approval of more winter grazing sites and the harm this will impose on animals.
- Dairy farming is on a dangerous trajectory marked by exorbitant methane emissions, unswimmable waterways, contaminated drinking water, soil erosion, and biodiversity loss. In 2019, the Ministry for the Environment and Stats NZ reported that 82% of river length in farming areas pose risks to human health from swimming, and 76% of native freshwater fish are threatened by or at risk of extinction.^{vi} Dairy intensification is also associated with greater levels of nitrate contamination in drinking water sources. A 2022 study found that 800,000 New Zealanders (17%) could be consuming water at nitrate levels associated with increased incidences of bowel cancer.^{vii} The further intensification of dairy farming, facilitated by this Bill, poses an alarming risk to animals, the environment, and human health.

Alongside the intensification of animal agriculture industries, we have significant concerns this Amendment Bill could enable mining operations in ecologically sensitive areas, including habitats of threatened and critically endangered species, by removing key environmental safeguards.^{viii}

Ensuring robust standards of animal and environmental protection should be the non-negotiable when considering consent applications and further eroding checks and balances for animals and the environment in the decision-making process is gravely unjust.



Recommendations

SAFE urges the committee to ensure the Fast-Track Approvals Amendment Bill **does not proceed**.

Thank you for your consideration of this submission.



Emily Hall
Campaign Manager

ⁱ [Fast Tracking Aquaculture Conference](#)

ⁱⁱ Hazel Johnston et al., "Case Definitions for Skin Lesion Syndromes in Chinook Salmon Farmed in Marlborough Sounds, New Zealand," *Journal of Fish Diseases* 44, no. 2 (2020): 145.

ⁱⁱⁱ Jeannine Fischer and John Appleby, *Intelligence Report (NZ-RLO&T maritimum 2015 response. MPI Technical Paper No. 2017/39, New Zealand: Ministry for Primary Industries, 2017)*.

^{iv} Anne Rolton et al., "Effects of Harmful Algal Blooms on Fish and Shellfish Species: A Case Study of New Zealand in a Changing Environment," *Toxins* 14, no.5 (2022): 341.

^v Winter Grazing Taskforce. (2019). *Final Report and Recommendations: Improving Animal Welfare on Winter Grazing Systems*.

^{vi} Ministry for the Environment and Stats NZ. (2019). *Environment Aotearoa 2019*.

^{vii} Tim Chambers et al., "Nitrate in drinking water and cancer risk: the biological mechanism, epidemiological evidence and future research," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* 46, no. 2 (2022): 105-108.

^{viii} Nicola Toki; [Forest & Bird](#)

