

Contact Energy Environmental and Social Impact Assessments overview

This document summarises the key steps that Contact will follow to ensure that Environmental and Social Impact Assessments are undertaken, monitored and reported on.

Resource Management Act resource consent process

The Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) enables the use of natural and physical resources - subject to certain parameters being met. These parameters are specified in a regional policy statement and regional and district plans. Where a proposal does not meet one (or more) of the parameters, a resource consent is required. The regional policy statement and regional and district plans are developed through a process that enables public participation.

The resource consent process is set out in the RMA. As part of an application for resource consent, the applicant must complete an assessment of environmental effects (AEE) – this is the New Zealand legislative-equivalent of an environmental (or social) impact assessment (EIA). The scope and content of an AEE is set out in Schedule 4 of the RMA.

Assessment of environmental effects

The process involved in developing an AEE involves the applicant (or, typically, an independent expert in that particular field) identifying the actual and potential effects (or impacts) of their activity on the environment. The term 'Environment' in the RMA has a very broad meaning and includes people and communities. The applicant then identifies measures to avoid, remedy, or mitigate the effects (or impacts).

A description of this process and the identified 'mitigations' are included in a specialist technical report (i.e. ecological or landscape) which is appended to the resource consent application.

These mitigations are proffered as conditions of consent: the applicant will be able to undertake the activity, provided that they implement measures to reduce any adverse effects (or impacts) on the environment.

For example, if an applicant were proposing to undertake earthworks for a housing development, the conditions of consent would probably require them to implement erosion and sediment control measures to avoid sediment run-off into a nearby waterbody. They could also be required to implement a riparian planting plan to ensure ground stability and to act as a filter should there be any run-off.

Consent conditions

The applicant must ensure on-going compliance with any resource consent conditions. They will also be required to undertake annual monitoring and reporting.

Contact uploads its resource consents into COLIN (Consents Online) and logs specific conditions requiring maintenance & monitoring routines in a formal system (SAP). We establish internal and external reporting processes to track, and ensure compliance with, specific conditions and mitigations. We then prepare and issue environmental reports against our compliance obligations to regional authorities.

Non-compliance with a consent condition can result in enforcement actions which can range from a warning through to an abatement notice (i.e. a direction to stop or start doing something) or prosecution.

Stakeholder engagement

Contact engages with the community, stakeholders and mana whenua before we lodge an application. This creates an opportunity to discuss the proposal and its impacts, and to hear and consider a wide range of feedback. We may make changes to the application and the proposed mitigations as a result.

Lodging and notification

A final draft of the resource consent application is generally provided to all affected parties. Once the application is lodged, the relevant authorities (district and/or regional councils) assess it and make a decision on notification: none; limited (selected parties); or public (all parties). This notification decision centres on the scale of the proposal, its effects and whether or not the interested or affected parties support it.

Accessing consent applications

Contact has not made a practice of uploading consent applications and accompanying AEEs to its public website, but these are available on request from the relevant local and regional councils.