Resource Management Act, 1991

To: Consents Section, West Coast Regional Council
Environmental Planning, Buller District Council

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Submission in opposition to applications by Meridian Ltd for the construction, operation and maintenance of a hydro-generation and dam scheme on the Mokihinui River near Seddonville and associated works and activities including construction of roading and a transmission line. Application RC07150 and related applications

22 April 2008

1. INTRODUCTION

The submission opposes all of the applications.

2. REASONS FOR SUBMISSION

AEE inadequate

The assessment of effects is inadequate in terms of s88 and Schedule 4 RMA. It understates the environmental effects, particularly effects on natural character of the Mokihinui River and Seddonville coast, and on the ecological, landscape, recreational and amenity values, quality of the environment and the life supporting capacity and healthy functioning of the river and gorge system and the coal plateau.

It fails to adequately describe alternative methods such as improved energy demand management through promotion of energy efficiency and energy conservation, and the need for a shift to less damaging alternatives such as solar energy.

Sustainable management not promoted

The application does not promote sustainable management of natural and physical resources as required by Part II Resource Management Act 1991. It is inconsistent with sections 5, 6 and 7, especially sections 6(a), 6(b), 6(c), 6(d), 7(aa), 7(b), 7(ba), 7(c), 7(d), 7(f), 7(g) and 7(i) and fails both the tests for non complying activities in s104D RMA.

The scheme would not meet the needs of future generations for wild rivers, and natural landscapes with high quality indigenous biodiversity.

Inefficient use of natural resources and of energy

Meridian states that the scheme would provide energy for 35-45,000 average homes creating a spectre of domestic power cuts if it does not proceed. The energy produced would not be used solely in West Coast homes. Increasing electricity demand is partly due to the increased water pumping for irrigation on the South Island's east coast and the demands of the coal mining (e.g. Pike River Coal), gold mining industries. Damming the Mokihinui to generate energy to help mine coal for export is neither efficient nor sustainable.

Natural character and life supporting capacity

By drowning 14 kms of the Mokihinui Gorge, obstructing sediment flow and supply down river and to the coastal environment, and changing the natural flow regime to one with impeded and pulsed flows, the scheme would disrupt the connectivity of a nationally and regionally important river system. It would severely degrade the natural character of the river and its margins, and compromise the life-supporting capacity of both aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems.

In the coastal environment a reduced sediment supply risks increased coastal erosion with consequent loss of public access and further loss of natural character through poorly sited and designed coastal protection works.

Decaying vegetation in the highly stratified reservoir risks the release of anoxic water and adverse effects on water quality and aquatic life downstream, including in estuarine and coastal waters. Methane and other greenhouse gas emissions can result from the decaying vegetation. These effects have been inadequately assessed.

Outstanding natural features and landscapes

The Mokihinui River system and the Denniston/Stockton coal plateaux are outstanding natural landscapes and the Gorge is an outstanding natural feature. The hydro scheme, roading, transmission lines and associated works would be an inappropriate use and development because of their impacts on the natural science, legibility, aesthetic quality and other landscape elements. The large structures and associated works would compromise natural elements, processes, and patterning and lead to human elements dominating.

The applicant's landscape evaluation over-emphasises visitation and visual amenity as key factors in determining whether a landscape is outstanding, contrary to case law. It understates the unique character and national ecological and landscape significance of the coal plateaux with their low stature vegetation, specialised vegetation communities, and extensive rock pavements, and the significance of the riverine and gorge landscapes. It does not recognise wild and scenic rivers as a finite and irreplaceable natural resource.

It also understates the potential effects of the dam structures, the reservoir, roading, vegetation clearance, the transmission lines and other scheme elements on landscape and amenity values.

The Buller District Plan is one of the earlier first generation plans. Its failure to identify outstanding natural features and landscapes in the district does not mean that the affected landscapes are not outstanding using the "Pigeon Bay/Queenstown Lakes" criteria recognised by the Environment Court.

Indigenous biodiversity

Road construction, vegetation clearance up to 30m wide in the transmission line corridor, filling the reservoir and other scheme works would destroy significant indigenous vegetation including riparian vegetation, lowland mixed beech/podocarp/hardwood forest on terrace and hillslopes, and coal measure and shrubland vegetation.

Vegetation clearance, earthworks, and land disturbance are likely to introduce plant pests and create suitable conditions for the establishment and spread of both exotic animal and plant pests compromising the integrity and value of existing largely intact riverine, riparian, forest, coal plateaux and other habitats.

Significant habitats of indigenous fauna, including habitat for threatened species such as the long-tailed, eleven threatened bird species and two threatened giant *Powelliphanta* land snail species would be destroyed or degraded. Threatened birds include kaka, kereru, western weka and blue duck or whio. Whio *"require bouldery rivers and streams within forested catchments which provide high water quality, low sediment loadings, stable banks and abundant and diverse invertebrate communities. With such habitat requirements, blue duck are key indicators of river system health. The higher the number of breeding pairs of blue duck on a given stretch of river, the greater the life supporting capacity of that river."*[1] Habitat loss, including from hydro generation has significantly reduced suitable habitat for whio. The river is highly significant habitat for whio given the presence of at least seven whio on the mainstem, and potentially others on the tributaries.

[1] www.doc.govt.nz

West Coast rivers are a stronghold for indigenous fish, several of which are migratory. The dam, reservoir and changed flow regime would destroy their habitat and impede their migration at critical life stages, reducing their abundance and diversity and the health of their populations. The scheme is likely to affect the whitebait fishery.

The steep terrain currently protects the threatened long-finned eel from commercial fishing. Meridian's proposed catch and release system provides no certainty that the eel population, indigenous galaxiids, and other fish species would be sustained.

Severe changes to the natural flow regime with extended periods of low flow and flow manipulation to maximise power generation, and degraded water quality would affect aquatic health and species diversity and abundance.

The 152 pylon transmission line would affect the Ngakawau Ecological Area, protected for its ecological values and at least two Recommended Areas for Protection. Coal measure communities are poorly represented in the conservation estate so the permanent disturbance to and intrusion into these habitats is a significant effect which temporary predator control elsewhere cannot adequately mitigate.

Adverse effects, including on life supporting capacity, natural character, outstanding landscapes and indigenous biodiversity can not be avoided, adequately reduced or mitigated. As a comprehensive report by Landcare Research has concluded, "*The Mokihinui Hydro Proposal has substantial residual biodiversity impacts that would require offsetting at several different levels of biodiversity (e.g. river system, habitat, species and populations). Several major management actions that would be required to offset the residual impacts on biodiversity appear unattainable, reflecting the high biodiversity value of the impacted area, the absence of realistic alternative riverine systems that could be restored to offset the significant residual biodiversity loss, and the uncertainty and time involved in the reconstruction and protection of those values elsewhere.*[2]"

Public access

The large area from which the public would be excluded during construction would limit public access to public land and waterways. The reservoir would prevent access to the current river. The road is no compensation for the existing access to high quality natural areas.

Recreation and amenity values

The Mokihinui River has its headwaters in Kahurangi National Park on the Thousand Acre Plateau above Lake Matiri near Murchison. The dam, hydro reservoir and flooding of the gorge will destroy the integrity of the river and of a spectacular wilderness recreational experience not available elsewhere in New Zealand. The multi-day tramp from the Matiri River, across the Plateau, down Larrikins Creek and the Mokihinui River to Seddonville and the coast provides diverse landforms, inspiring shrub and tussocklands, forest and wildlife, dramatic evidence of past seismic activity, and much scenic beauty. The current track to the Forks with its slips provides a challenging back country experience which contrasts with gentler routes in easier "front country", helping provide a wide spectrum of recreational opportunities in Buller. The landscapes and the challenge involved contributes to the quality of the experience.

Charming Creek Walkway is one of Buller's more heavily used and significant walking and tourist tracks. The former roads and access tracks on the Denniston/Stockton coal plateaux are increasingly popular with mountain bikers. The 152 pylon transmission line would compromise the landscape qualities and character which make these areas and the recreational experiences available here attractive.

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[2] Lee, W.E et al (Dec. 2007) "Calculating Biodiversity Offsets for the Mokihinui Hydro Proposal" Landcare research Contract Report LC0708/056 at p 4.

The dam and reservoir would destroy more than 14 kms of river valued by kayakers and rafters and deny them this experience. Above the Forks the river does not provide the same variety of rapids.

3. PLANNING INSTRUMENTS

The scheme would be inconsistent with the proposed West Coast Conservation Management Strategy and the purposes for which conservation land is managed under the Conservation Act, Reserves Act and other conservation legislation. Just as proposed district and regional plans have status so does a proposed CMS.

The application is contrary to objectives and policies in the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement, the West Coast Regional Policy Statement, the West Coast Regional Coastal Plan, the Proposed West Coast Water Plan, the proposed West Coast Land and Riverbed Management Plan and the Buller District Plan.

The effects of the application would be more than minor and it fails to meet either of the threshold tests for non-complying activities in section 104D(1) RMA.

4. CONCLUSION

Sustainable management requires much greater emphasis on managing demand and improving energy efficiency rather than the dinosaur approach of assuming there is always another river that can be dammed. In making this application Meridian is obstructing the shift to an energy efficient economy. It is effectively saying that business as usual is acceptable, regardless of its high environmental costs.

The energy may be renewable but the natural resource is not. Wild and scenic river systems like the Mokihinui with its high ecological, landscape, and amenity values, and the starkly beautiful coal plateaux are scarce, finite and precious.

5. DECISION SOUGHT

That all of the applications are declined.

6. H EARING

I wish to be heard in support of this submission and would consider presenting a joint case with submitters raising similar issues.

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Eugenie Sage

22 April 2008

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Karen Glover

From: Denise Cassidy
Sent: Wednesday, 23 April 2008 9:43 AM
To: Karen Glover
Subject: FW: Mokihinui submission
Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Red
Attachments: Mokihinui subm Meridian.doc

From: Eugenie Sage [mailto:e.sage@paradise.net.nz]
Sent: Wednesday, 23 April 2008 00:47
To: info; info@bdc.govt.nz
Subject: Mokihinui submission

Dear Sir/Madam

Please find attached a submission on Meridian's Mokihinui hydro application. A signed hard copy will be fast posted.

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