

Update from the Chair

April 2024

MEUG acknowledges Alison Andrew

On Tuesday we read with sadness that Alison Andrew, the Chief Executive of Transpower, is stepping down at the end of June after 10 years in her role. Alison has been a thought leader on New Zealand's energy future and has led the evolution of Transpower's asset management as we transition towards a lower emissions future.

Even when we had differences, MEUG always knew where we stood with Alison and she was always willing to engage, listen and debate. Our sector will be the poorer for Alison leaving and we wish her the very best in whatever she decides to do next.

We need more than network thinking

Over the past month we have started to see more analysis of what the electrification of New Zealand's economy will require, and it is increasingly obvious we need to challenge our current thinking more.

The cost of upgrading the national grid and our distribution networks has been priced at around \$5.7 billion a year. Leaving aside all other factors, the workforce does not exist to build at this pace, so we need to look harder at non-network solutions. Network solutions should only be signed off by the Commerce Commission where an applicant can demonstrate a high level of productivity and of optimisation of their current assets.

And we need to prioritise work. Not every EDB needs to upgrade their network right now – some are more important or more pressing than others.

The submission rush slows down

The last week or so has been a quieter period regarding the number of submissions due – though we will soon see draft decisions for regulated EDBs and Transpower, setting out the proposed allowances and revenue paths for 2025 – 2030.

The number of consultations over the last two months has been too high. MEUG, which has just one employee, has been averaging three submissions a week – and that is after deciding to simply not submit on some consultations because of workload pressures. Other consumer organisations we have spoken too, as well as other participants in the wider sector, have expressed similar concerns. Our regulators are required to work for the long-term benefit of consumers, yet their practices effectively limit or shut out the consumer voice by overwhelming consumer representative bodies. This needs to change.

Key dates

What's on	Who	When	Notes for members
Public Holiday: Easter Monday	All	1 April	Easter Holiday
Release: Transmission prices	Transpower	1 April	Transmission pricing under the TPM for the 2024/25 pricing year take effect from 1 April.
Deadline: RfP for non-transmission solutions for USI	Transpower	5 April	Transpower invites proposals from potential providers of non-transmission solutions in the upper South Island, to help manage growing electricity use at peak times.
Event: Mercury stakeholder function	Mercury	8 April	Stakeholder function with Mercury's Board and Executive Team.
Release: Consultation package	Climate Change Commission	8 April	The Commission is releasing consultation / discussion papers on its review of the 2050 emissions reduction target, its review of inclusion of emissions from international shipping and aviation in the 2050 target, and the fourth emissions budget. Consultation will run for 8 weeks from 8 April to 31 May 2024
Event: System Operator forum	Transpower	9 April	Extended online forum to discuss Transpower's approach to winter 2024.
Event: Germany's Road to Net Zero	BusinessNZ Energy Council	10 April	Breakfast session to discuss Germany's energy transition ("the Energiewende"), with speaker, Mr Dominik Schnichels
Submission: Future operation of NZ power system	Electricity Authority	11 April	Consultation on the key drivers for change and the challenges and opportunities with power system operation in New Zealand over the coming decade and beyond.
Event: Offshore wind impact study	BusinessNZ Energy Council & PwC	11 April	The BusinessNZ Energy Council and PwC discuss the recently launched assessment of the economic, social, and environmental implications of establishing a national offshore wind energy industry in Aotearoa, followed by a panel discussion.
Event: UDL Annual Forum	Utility Disputes	11 April	Utility Disputes Limited is running its annual forum on 11 April in Wellington, with a focus on "resolving with resilience".
Event: Climate Change webinars	Climate Change Commission	15 / 17 / 29 April	The Commission is running a series of in person webinars in Christchurch, Wellington and Auckland to discuss its consultation package released on 8 April.
Submission: Fast-track Approvals Bill	Select Committee	19 April	The Government is seeking submissions on its Fast-track Approvals Bill that will provide a streamlined decision-making process to facilitate the delivery of infrastructure and development projects with significant regional or national benefits.
Submission: Draft report on productivity of EDBs	Commerce Commission	24 April	Feedback is sought on the draft CEPA report prepared for the Commission to look into the productivity and efficiency of electricity distributors.
Meeting: MEUG Executive Commission	MEUG members	24 April	Online meeting with presentations from Meridian and EECA.
Holiday: ANZAC day	All	25 April	Public holiday.
Submission: Role of HVDC link	Transpower	26 April	Discussion paper on the purpose and future role of New Zealand's HVDC link.
Event: ENA / ERANZ networking event	ENA & ERANZ	30 April	ENA and ERANZ's collaborative networking event for members and stakeholders, with guest speakers, the Minister of Energy, Hon Simeon Brown and Minister for Infrastructure, Hon Chris Bishop.