Memo

File No:	APP.045356.01.01
Date of Correspondence:	9 July 2024
Subject:	Meridian Energy Ruakākā Solar Energy Park – site visit to wetland areas
Author:	Katrina Hansen, NRC Biodiversity Advisor

Action Taken:

On Thursday 9 May 2024, a site visit was undertaken by Lisa Forester (NRC Biodiversity Manager), Katrina Hansen (NRC Biodiversity Advisor), Tanya Cook (Boffa Miskell Ecologist) and Jack Warden (Rural Design Senior Ecologist) to look at the wetland areas at Site 1 (1A to 1C) of Meridian Energy's proposed Ruakākā solar energy park that were assessed in the wetland ecological assessment of Boffa Miskell (BM) and peer review by Rural Design Limited (RDL). The proposed Energy Park is located on Port Marsden Highway, SH15 to the south-west of Marsden Point. The Sites 1A – 1C (Fig. 1) cover an area of c. 62 hectares, of which BM has assessed 17 ha as wetland and RDL assessed c.29-30 ha as wetland[1].

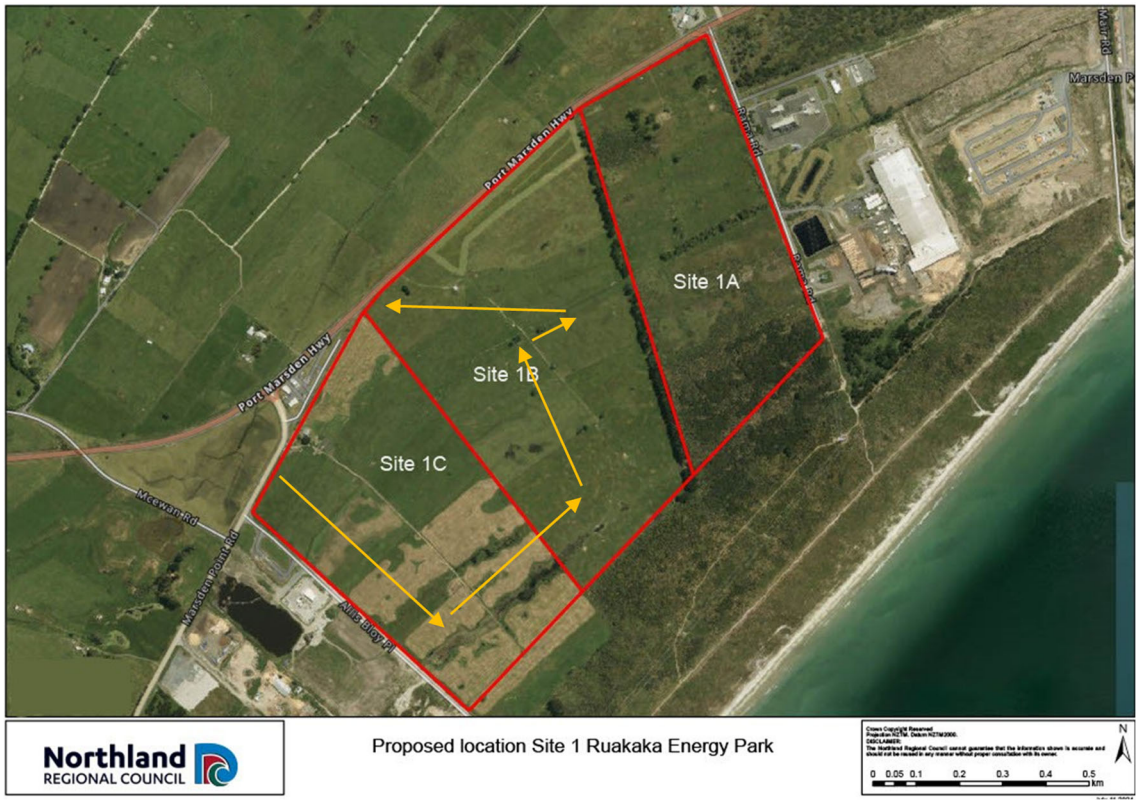

Figure 1. Proposed location of Site 1 for the Ruakākā Energy Park, showing approximate route walked.

[1] Ruakākā Solar Park Development: Ecological Effects Assessment: Report prepared by Boffa Miskell Limited for Meridian Energy Limited, and Section 92 Rural Design Ecological Peer Review 03102023

Our site visit started at the SH15 access gate to Site 1C (Fig. 1). We walked south-east towards the coast, past Bercich Drain and to the location of one of RDL's wetland vegetation assessment plots within Site 1C.

Figure 2. Pink flagged pole showing location of RDL plot.

We continued across 1C towards the open water area where offsetting is planned. We discussed the enhancement and creation of more open water and wetland habitat to potentially provide habitat for the nationally critically endangered Australasian bittern (*Botaurus poiciloptilus*) and the threatened (nationally increasing) NZ dabchick (*Poliocephalus rufopectus*). BM has recorded six observations of Australasian bittern across Site 1, showing that the Site is part of the habitat of this highly mobile threatened species.

We continued north across Sites 1C and 1B, looking at the dune slack wetlands, hollows and vegetation present (Fig. 3 and 4), noting the presence of wetland vegetation including rushes, sedges and herbs such as *Persicaria*.

Figures 3 and 4. Open water area and dune slack hollows.

While on-site, we compared the areas of wetland mapped by BM and RDL, as per the map supplied during the site visit by Tanya Cook.

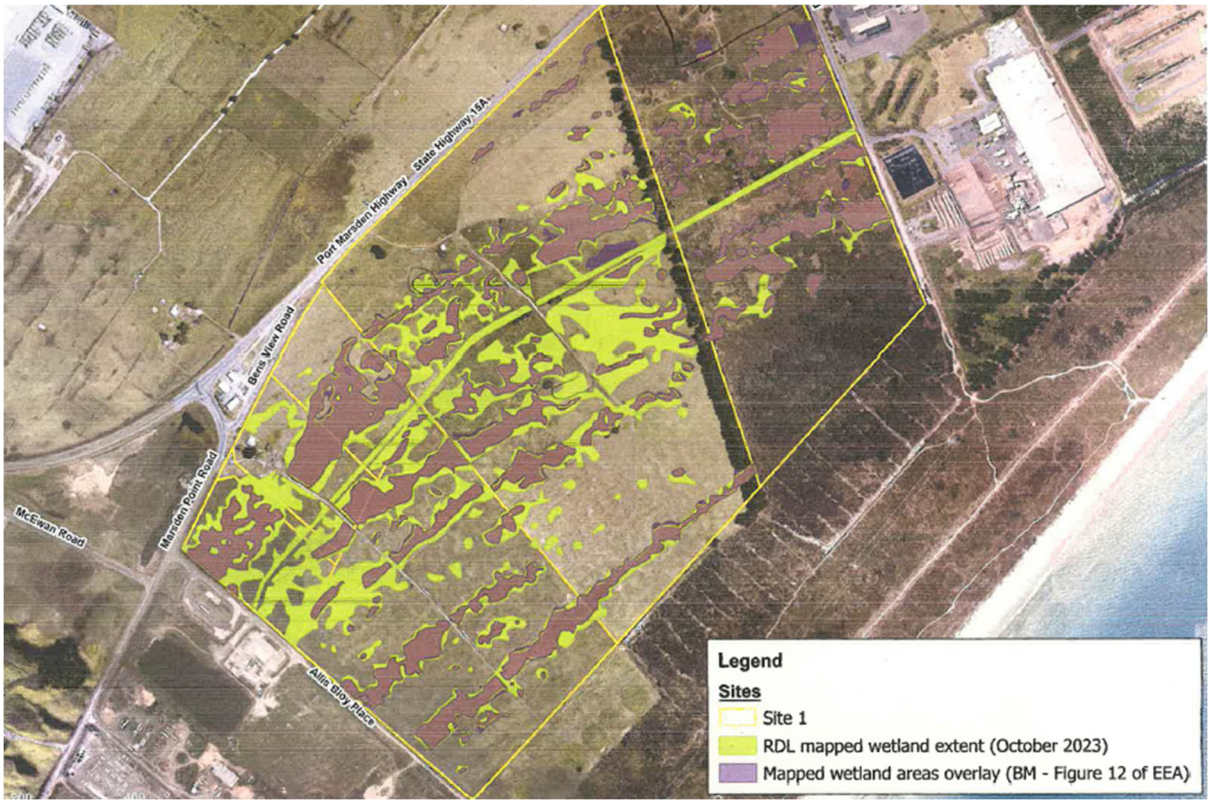

Figure 4. Map showing BH and RDL mapped wetland areas.

We noted the wetland areas as mapped by BM and covering a further extent, based on the presence of wetland vegetation at the time of the visit, as well as the hydrology and soil of the site (Fig. 5). We didn't carry out wetland delineation or soil or hydrology tests as per the Ministry of Environment guidelines, rather a visual assessment. The wetland vegetation is indicative of the hydrology and soils present.

Figure 5. Shallow test hole showing peat soil.

On the north-eastern side of Site 1B we looked at an area where BM had recorded a dominance of kikuyu during their site visit of March 2023. We noted the presence of wetland vegetation but no evidence of extensive presence of kikuyu, e.g., stolons (Fig. 6).

Figure 6. Site 1B looking north across area of the presence of kikuyu in March 2023.

While on site we discussed the fluctuation of wetland extent with seasonal and climatic conditions, which is a feature of these dune slack wetlands. It is noted that dune slack wetland type is classified as Nationally Endangered.

After completing our walk over Sites 1C and 1B, Tanya Cook, Lisa Forester and Katrina Hansen drove along Rama Road to have a look across Site 1A wetland areas which have been assessed as indigenous natural inland wetlands and will be retained.