

# Power scheme deserves far more scrutiny

The cost of the proposed Lake Onslow pumped-storage power scheme (*Lake Onslow – is there a cheaper option?*; letters, March 31) is indeed eye-watering at \$15.7 billion. Even the cost of the feasibility study into the project is \$90 million, but should give more definite answers.

The project is just to cater for perhaps one or two dry years in 10 instead of burning coal at Huntly Power Station. Dry years may never happen – the Marsden B oil-fired power station was built in the 1970s for dry years but never used.

Most pumped-storage schemes store power for just several hours or days (unlike Lake Onslow). New Zealand historical peak demand is at 6pm in winter when the sun is not shining.

But other investments for the cost of Lake Onslow may be better investments to cut “fossil fuel” consumption: eg, electrifying more rail lines, though paying for more solar power would not increase the supply when it is needed.

While Huntly could burn wood pellets, the forestry industry does not want to set up factories to produce the pellets from recent North Island forestry slash.

But hoping for “better batteries” for industrial-scale power storage is “pie-in-the-sky”.

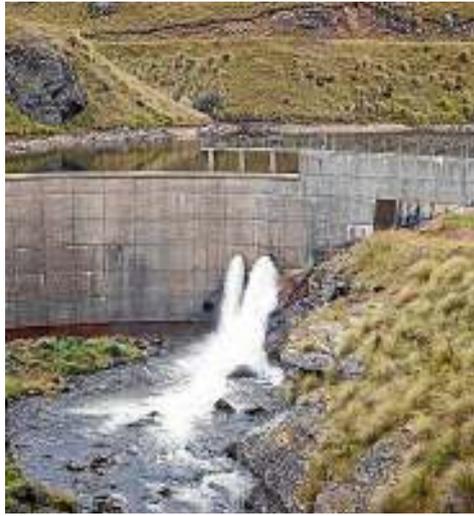
**John Wilson, Johnsonville**

## Solar power standard

Reticulated supplies of both water and energy to people’s homes are rapidly reaching, or have reached, breaking point. Breakdowns in services and supplies are becoming far more frequent.

Surely it is time to include the installation of both solar panels, and water tanks, as standard items in construction of a new home. We are constantly being reminded to be prepared for earthquakes and storms, which are likely to be more frequent due to climate change, by having an emergency supply of candles, food, water, torches etc.

Many of these essentials could be met



The existing dam at Lake Onslow.

## Letters

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if every new house that was built, had water tanks, and solar panels for electricity, making them more independent of council, and power supply services.

This would reduce the ever-increasing burden that councils have to include in rates, which in turn is passed on to new and existing homeowners.

**Alan Wilde, Greytown**

## Governance tool

Most people believe the role of lobbyists is to provide political input that will support a government minister’s instructions that will promote policy which the government wishes to introduce.

What this implies is that lobbying is not only perceived to be an essential

component in the provision of good governance but also underpins and ensures a healthy democratic system.

Yet there are those who also believe that the sole purpose of lobbying is to influence ministers to make decisions that will benefit themselves politically or endorse specific individuals or organisations for tactical investment or commercial gain.

At the same time, however, it is also worth noting that, in New Zealand, lobbying is not regulated, nor indeed even answerable, to a code of ethics, thereby leaving it open to corrupt practice.

Surely it is incumbent on the government to ensure that, in the interests of transparency and public scrutiny, lobbying needs to be made accountable, at least, to a code of conduct that will meet the expectations of all, rather than a select few.

**Brian Hartley, Rangiora**

## Not in writing

The only surprise about Stuart Nash’s disclosure to two of his donors about supposedly confidential Cabinet discussions is that he was stupid enough to put it in writing.

These disclosures happen all the time and have done so for years, except that the briefings have been verbal and therefore deniable. Putting it in an email is just dumb, as Simon Bridges, himself a former Cabinet minister, pointed out. He is right.

A former party president told me a few years ago that in New Zealand you can’t sell policy, but you can sell access. Access to the politician and to the information the politician has is what a big-ticket donor buys.

Nash could have had a drink with these guys in a back room at the Hawke’s Bay Club or had them for coffee at his house on a Sunday. Nobody would have known a thing because there would be nothing in writing. But he didn’t.

**John Bishop, Karori**

## Nash was refreshing

The National Party is becoming tiresome with all its grizzles and groans about minor, hardly important matters.

We don’t have conspiracies in New Zealand.

The party has watched too many US Netflix shows and social media. A bureaucrat not picking up something is not conspiracy, just human error. The

email in question was hardly damning. No state secrets were revealed.

Stuart Nash just said how he felt about a Government decision. Very refreshing. Such honesty in a politician should be applauded, not pilloried. He will be a sad loss to Parliament.

**Russell O Armitage, Hamilton**

## World-leading chance

It appears that true and legally binding definitions of “sex”, “gender”, “cis” and “trans” are badly needed so that current speech and dialogue do not provoke further confusion; it sometimes seems that almost everyone has their own definitions.

On the same page on Thursday, we had Luke Malpass defining “cis” as “people who are the same gender they were assigned at birth”, while Katie Kenny’s definition is “. . . short for cisgender, referring to people who aren’t transgender”.

These are not necessarily the same.

In addition, the usual assignation at birth is of sex, not gender, with the words “male” or “female” being used for the sex of the infant. More recently, I believe, “intersex” has been added.

If we are to have laws relating to the rights of people in all these categories, certainly the first step would be to define the terms legally.

Ideally, this would be universal, but given the state of the world, is it too much to ask that individual nations (like New Zealand) lead the way?

**Michael Gould, Brooklyn**

## Garden is for all

Would Wellington City Council please stop comparing Wellington with studies conducted internationally.

The latest cycleway debacle by the Botanic Garden is just another example of the council not listening to the businesses and people who visit and live in this beautiful, historic area. The garden is for everyone, not just cyclists.

Geographically Wellington is not suitable for cycling to be one of our major forms of transportation.

Perhaps the councillors should waste some more ratepayer money and go to Amsterdam to see the terrain of this city. This is when cycling works. Not in Wellington with its narrow, winding, hilly roads.

**Erin MacFarlane, Raumati Beach**

# Context key in threatening speech debate



## Corinne Seals

Senior lecturer in applied linguistics at Victoria University of Wellington-Te Herenga Waka

Following Kellie-Jay Keen-Minshull’s trip to New Zealand, there has been an uptick in discussion around “free speech” versus “threatening speech”.

While supporters of Keen-Minshull argue for free speech, there has also been significant concern raised by individuals and groups who have historically and recently been the victims of violence.

These concerns largely focus on the fear that such comments are likely to lead to extremist groups and/or individuals causing further violence against minority groups and that the concept of free speech is politically weaponised by extremist

## Language Matters

groups to enable them (as stated by United States Supreme Court Justice Elena Kagan).

Where does the language of the law fall on this issue?

Section 14 of the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 says that: “Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, including the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and opinions of any kind in any form.”

Meanwhile, Section 131 Part 6 of the Human Rights Act 1993 says that: “Every person commits an offence. . . who. . . uses in any public place . . . or within the hearing of other such persons in any such public place, or in any meeting to which the public are invited or have access, words which are threatening, abusive, or insulting, being matter or words likely to excite hostility of ill-will against, or bring into contempt or ridicule, any such group of persons in New Zealand on the ground of the colour, race, or ethnic or national origins of that group of persons.”

While the identity characteristics under protection are currently limited, proposed hate speech reforms in the last

few years originally included expanding them to include gender, sexuality, disability, religion, etc. and included outlawing speech that was made with an intent to “stir up, maintain or normalise hatred”.

However, such reforms are currently shelved. From a forensic linguistics perspective, what words can be considered threats that incite violence since that is a major factor in determining unlawful speech?

First, according to the Crimes Act 1961, it is unlawful to “threaten] to kill or do grievous bodily harm to any person”.

Beyond direct threats of murder, things become a bit more complicated in determining when threatening language is or is not likely to incite hostility and is being used for such a purpose.

We first must determine what is being achieved by the words that are said. One of the tools that forensic linguists can draw on is Speech Act Theory, pioneered by linguists Austin and Searle. Speech Act Theory analyses the form and function of language.

A threatening speech act occurs when a person (1) expresses an intention to

personally commit an act, or to be responsible for having an act occur; (2) believes that the act will lead to an unfavourable state of affairs for the addressee; (3) and intends to intimidate the addressee, according to Peter Tiersma and Lawrence Solan, leading scholars in law and language.

Part of the challenge in analysing speech acts is in figuring out not just what message people received, but also what message was intended by the speaker(s). This is what continues to be debated regarding Donald Trump’s involvement in the January 6, 2021, attack on Congress, with his supporters saying he directed them to do it, while he claims that was not his intention.

Because of this difficulty in interpretation, the contextual background is also very important, as language use always occurs in a context. Is a person and/or group likely to be targeted and hurt?

If so, then it is a reasonable preventive measure to focus on a contextual interpretation of the received message.

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