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# **Participation by Non-experts in Resource Management Decision-making**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
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## **Abstract**

The 2009 ‘simplification and streamlining’ amendments to the Resource Management Act 1991 changed the way proposals of national significance are processed. The most significant of these reforms were the establishment of an Environmental Protection Authority to manage national consenting processes, and the introduction of a fast-track, nine month processing timeframe where an application is to be decided by a board of inquiry.

The national consenting process retains the same right of any person to participate in the decision-making process as for proposals decided through a conventional process, by a local authority. However, there is widespread concern that the size of the proposals decided by boards of inquiry, coupled with the strict time constraints for decision-making, reduces the opportunities for affected and interested community members, particularly those without relevant personal expertise or the means to employ technical, planning or legal advice, to participate in board of inquiry decision-making.

Case study research comparing two consent processes, the Cambridge Expressway (a conventional consenting process) and Waterview Connection (a national consenting process), found that there were significantly greater barriers to participation by non-expert submitters in the national consenting process. These included difficulties in dealing with substantially increased quantities of documents and information during the process, particularly when coupled with limited and inflexible timeframes. The weight accorded to the contribution of non-expert submitters in comparison to expert evidence by the decision-makers was also significantly less in the report of the Board of Inquiry into the Waterview Connection proposal than in the decision of the Hearing Panel for the Cambridge Expressway.

## **Note on abbreviations**

The following abbreviations have been used for terms and phrases referred to extensively throughout this document:

Environmental Protection Authority	EPA
New Zealand Transport Agency	NZTA
No date	n.d.
No page number	n.p.
Resource Management Act 1991	RMA
Road(s) of national significance	RONs
Section (of an act)	s
State Highway	SH

All references to sections of legislation, unless otherwise stated, are to the RMA.

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