

resourceful way gets consent

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A policy of putting property owners first has seen the green light given to a new 25 km electricity line through the Waikato - without a single appeal to the Environment Court. 140 potentially affected parties were served notice of the proposal and it was publicly notified. However only four submitters appeared at the council hearing and not one lodged an appeal to the Environment Court.

Environmental Challenge, the company charged with overseeing the property and consenting processes, attributes the success of the project to their unconventional "landowner first" policy. Tasked by WEL Networks to establish a route for a 110 kV overhead line running between the proposed Te Uku Wind Park and the Te Kowhai substation, Environmental Challenge began by contacting those landowners who were potentially affected.

"We took a fundamentally different, yet basic approach to finding a route and gaining consent," Managing Director Laurence Sherriff says. "By starting discussions with farmers and landowners first we could identify those open to the process and using their feedback we could identify possible routes."

Instead of deciding on just one or two routes at the start of the project, Environmental Challenge identified 56 possible routes based on landowner feedback. This meant there was far more flexibility. "Landowners liked the idea that they were part of the first step and that it was not Resource Management Act experts calling the shots," says Mr Sherriff.

Once a farmer himself, Mr Sherriff, understands the connection farmers have with their land and the protectiveness they feel if they believe they are losing control over their own property.

"I know where they are coming from," Mr Sherriff says, "there are farmers out there who would go to extreme measures to defend their property rights".

"The project *could have* faced huge resistance because of the high number of people involved – yet no one has ended up opposing the project in the Environment Court. This is unheard of for a project this size," Mr Sherriff says.

The proposed line will transmit to the WEL Networks network enough electricity to power approximately 30,000 homes, boosting electricity supply to Raglan and conveying renewable energy from the proposed Te Uku Wind Park to the National Grid.