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Dear Minister Simmonds

Infrastructure Industry Skills Board Representation

We would like to extend our sincere thanks for your engagement with our recent Vocational Education and Training reform submissions, and for recognising the critical role infrastructure plays in achieving the Government's vision for New Zealand's future.

We are particularly grateful for your openness to our concerns regarding the future of vocational education and training, and for acknowledging the importance of a skilled and resilient workforce to support the delivery of essential infrastructure across the country.

The current government's recognition of infrastructure as a national priority—through initiatives such as the Regional Infrastructure Fund, Fast Track consenting, Electrify Aotearoa platform, the National Infrastructure Pipeline and its commitment to revitalise gas production—demonstrates a strong commitment to building a future-ready New Zealand.

We believe that a dedicated, standalone Infrastructure Industry Skills Board (ISB) is essential to realising this vision.

However, a number of things concern us, which we wanted to share directly with you.

1. Infrastructure ISB composition.

You will recall that our submission on behalf of the infrastructure sector included civil construction, water, electricity networks, and extractive. We note with concern that the current configuration of the Infrastructure Industry Skills Board does not include representation from the water or extractives sectors.

The collective view of infrastructure organisations is that this exclusion must have been an oversight that must be addressed. Water, like civil construction and electricity networks, is a vital lifeline service. The extractives sector is critical for horizontal infrastructure delivery. Additionally, Energy and Chemical; process and plant operations is absent and aligns with the infrastructure sector. Reticulated gas supply is also absent from other ISB and the work of this industry is in the infrastructure domain.

Their inclusion in the ISB will ensure coordinated and effective workforce planning across the infrastructure system.

2. Principle of "industry led"

We are concerned that, with an outcome that purports to be industry led, industry actually has little say in the composition and governance of the Industry Skills Boards. Our sense is that many of the critical decisions that will determine the success or

otherwise of the new structure are to be made by TEC. That doesn't reflect industry leadership, and we urge you to ensure that industry has a greater role in the definition and establishment of the ISBs and their supporting structures.

3. Seed funding and intellectual property

The Infrastructure ISB is looking to transition Connexis from being a Te Pukenga WBL to an Infrastructure PTE. We have not received any indication of your expectations about how this may occur. We do know that to make this transition successfully, there needs to be sufficient capital to support this transition (as if it were a startup), and its intellectual property must be protected.

Our expectation is that the share of reserves that Connexis has accumulated from our employers (about 30% of total reserves) will follow Connexis. The balance of 70% contributed by unified funding will be retained by Te Pukenga.

Our expectation also is that the intellectual property held by Connexis will be retained by and transfer with Connexis. Under the industry led model, industry will then decide which PTEs it wants to work with and how (if at all) it shares any intellectual property with those.

4. Consistency of advice

Multiple webinars have been hosted by various TEC officials. However, we have noted between webinars differing advice and interpretation being presented. This does not give us confidence that TEC are across your decisions and the implications of those. We respectfully ask that you assure yourself that TEC messaging is accurately reflecting your decisions.

We are committed to the successful implementation of these reforms – the risk to our learners, our employers, and our ability to deliver quality infrastructure projects in the future is too high.

A unified infrastructure ISB will reduce duplication and fragmentation, enable effective workforce transition mapping and align vocational training and cross-regional planning.

We look forward to continuing our collaboration with you and your officials to ensure that the vocational education system supports the infrastructure sector in building a stronger, more prosperous and resilient New Zealand.

Signed:

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