Submission on From the Ground Up — Draft Geothermal Strategy

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Executive summary

We strongly support the intent of the draft strategy but urge faster action, larger investment, and governance reform to match the scale of opportunity.

Key recommendations:
1. Scale up investment beyond the proposed $60m to a multi-billion-dollar national mission.
2. Set a moonshot target: 50% of New Zealand's energy from super-critical geothermal and other firm clean sources within 20 years.
3. Create an independent "Geothermal Mission Authority", led by world-class commercial leaders, engineers and scientists replacing MBIE as lead within 6 months.
4. Build a New Zealand Geothermal Centre of Excellence to make this country the global hub for geothermal innovation, development, IP creation and exportable expertise.
5. Prioritise merit and capability in all participation — ensuring the best minds, from New Zealand and the world, can contribute at speed.

6. Leverage off New Zealand's natural advantages and don't wait for other countries to show us the way.

Scale and urgency

Base load security: Winter peaks, dry-year risks, and future commercial and domestic energy, clean baseload power critical to give New Zealand international competitive energy advantage.

New Zealand manufacturers are not competitive with current high energy costs.
Data-centre growth: Global tech companies are seeking low-cost, 24/7 renewable energy hubs. With the right investment and technology partnerships, New Zealand strives to become the firm clean low-cost energy provider in the world.
Global leadership: Like Iceland, but with better scalability and IP protection, New Zealand can turn geothermal excellence into a major strategic export industry.

Governance reform

MBIE has provided a valuable starting platform, but it is not structured for rapid commercial execution.

We recommend establishing a self-governing Geothermal Mission Authority with a

professional board including:
-Commercial operators experienced in scaling energy infrastructure

- Global experts in geothermal science and super-critical drilling
- Investors capable of structuring global partnerships and finance

- New Zealand governors who have the interests of adding value to New Zealand.

This authority should execute at commercial speed while maintaining accountability for safety and environmental standards.

Merit-based inclusion

This mission should invite and empower the very best minds — scientists, engineers, innovators, and investors — regardless of background, nationality, or affiliation.

- No quotas: Participation must be based purely on capability and contribution.
- Global talent attraction: Streamline visas and partnerships to bring in top-tier expertise quickly.
- Community partnerships including Iwi: Respectful collaboration without unnecessary barriers that deter investment or delay progress.

Key strategic actions

A. Super-critical geothermal moonshot:
- Drill and test medium/deep super-hot wells in the Taupō Volcanic Zone.
- Invest in high-temperature materials, casing, and drilling innovation.
- Build an IP framework that protects New Zealand's discoveries while enabling global commercialization without constraining progress.

B. Centre of Excellence:
- Create a globally recognised geothermal hub for R&D, data, and collaboration.
- Provide open-access testbeds and training pipelines to develop world-leading skills.

C. Commercialisation and IP:
- Support rapid patenting and trade-secret protection for innovations.
- Build pathways for licensing and export of New Zealand-developed tools, models, and systems.

D. Global investment platform:
- Market New Zealand as a premium, firm-clean energy hub.
- Build long-term partnerships with businesses who seek clean energy – Advanced Manufacturers, Producers and Tech Companies (data centre operators), iwi organisations.

Investment scale

- Super-critical test wells & R&D: $1.5 – $2.0 billion
- Materials science & toolchain: $200 – $300 million
- Transmission & integration: $1.0 – $1.5 billion
- Skills & Centre of Excellence: $150 – $250 million
- Investment promotion & branding: $50 – $100 million

Targets and milestones

- 2030: Two super-critical pilot wells producing commercially
- 2035: 2 GW of firm clean power online, underpinned by commercial PPAs
- 2045: 50% of New Zealand's power from super-critical and other firm renewables

Summary of recommendations

1. Establish a self-governing, mission and outcomes -driven authority for geothermal development.
2. Scale the programme to multi-billion levels to secure global leadership.
3. Focus on merit-based participation to attract the world's best talent.
4. Create a global Centre of Excellence to anchor innovation and IP in New Zealand.
5. Position New Zealand as the global hub of lowest-cost, firm clean energy for advanced industries.

Closing

New Zealand with its natural advantages stands on the brink of an extraordinary opportunity: to become the world's leader in super-critical geothermal energy, delivering the lowest-cost, clean baseload power and a new wave of high-value industries.

With bold investment, independent governance, and a clear focus on attracting the best expertise, New Zealand can build an energy platform that powers its economy for generations and becomes an exportable model to the world.