

Regional Spatial Planning Roadshow

Briefing Note 7: Change Readiness for Regional Spatial Planning

July - August 2026





7. Change Readiness for Regional Spatial Planning

This Briefing Note supports a RSP Roadshow presentation to chief executives, tier-two leaders, planning managers, reform leads, programme managers, and prospective RSP secretariat or committee support staff. Issues of organisational design, establishment choices, and key points for council managers, taking account of Head Start scenarios are covered.

This note draws on papers prepared to support Workshop presentations that are synthesised in this series of eight Briefing Notes on topics relevant to organisational readiness for regional spatial planning. It includes information and advice based on official sources prepared for Taituarā by Simon Markham Consulting Ltd as an advisory Briefing Note.

Its statutory framing is Planning Bill 235-3, as reported from the Committee of the whole House, on regional spatial plans, national instruments, process agreements, iwi consultation, spatial plan committees, public notification, hearings, adoption, implementation and review. It considers what the current Bill and subsequent legal commentary mean for council managers, in light of existing spatial-planning collaborations and wider regional collaboration experience.

This Note is current to 14 September 2026. It integrates the July 2026 report-back changes into the substantive text and adds subsequent Committee-stage changes reflected in Planning Bill 235-3, together with relevant interpretation from the Regional Spatial Planning Legal Commentary Paper as at 14 September 2026 that accompanies this series of Briefing Notes. The Bill has completed Committee of the whole House consideration but has not yet received third reading or Royal assent. All update material is fully integrated into the main text.

1. Executive Summary

Change readiness for Regional Spatial Planning (RSP) should be understood as the collective ability of a council and its region to begin, sustain, and adapt the work of statutory regional spatial planning. It is not the same thing as individual willingness, awareness of the Bill, or attendance at training. In the RSP context, readiness is regional and organisational: no single council can be fully ready if the region lacks a mandate, process agreement, governance pathway, secretariat capacity, shared evidence practices, partner-engagement architecture, and realistic resourcing.

The readiness baseline is now more specific. A region must be capable of operating a binding Schedule 2 process agreement, the section 71 committee model, the section 73A statutory secretariat with Crown-funded Ministry technical expertise, an implementation plan and annual reporting under sections 73B-73D, and the section 74 review/new-information cycle - not merely a general planning work programme.

The readiness and pilot papers point to the same conclusion: first-generation RSP success will depend as much on change leadership, operating-model design, and collaboration readiness as on planning expertise. MfE's (now MCERT) May 2026 least-regrets presentation reinforces that the safest transition work is not to guess future standards or over-engineer plan content; it is to build foundations - information stocktakes, regional working relationships, Treaty-settlement obligation registers, governance and decision-preparedness, shared decision logs, early action planning, workforce thinking and readiness to engage with national direction when detail is available.

For managers, the bottom line is that RSP readiness is a managed transition programme. It requires visible sponsorship, practical sequencing, role clarity, region-wide operating disciplines, support for staff and partners, and a live assumptions/change-control approach while the final statutory, national direction and digital settings settle.

The legal commentary adds a national-standardisation readiness test. Regions will not control all RSP wording or methods: national standards can prescribe objectives, actions, policies, methods and standardised provisions, leaving only specified spatial, alternative or parameter choices. Readiness therefore means being able to absorb national direction rapidly while preserving robust regional evidence and decision capability.

The 29 May DIA Guidance means readiness should now be treated as transition-capable current-boundary readiness. Councils should keep preparing RSPs on the current Bill-introduction regional boundaries, but also maintain explicit assumptions and review triggers for accepted, rejected, altered, or legislated Head Start proposals.

The downstream implementation chain also needs to be part of readiness. Section 68 links the RSP to LUPs/NEPs, RLTP consistency, the GPS on land transport and LTP implementation steps; the implementation plan and annual reporting then make delivery performance visible. A region is not fully ready if it can prepare the RSP but cannot align these later programmes and budgets.

Planning Bill 235-3 is now the consolidated pre-third-reading baseline. The report-back RSP machinery remains, with later Committee-stage changes layered onto it. The separate Climate Change Response Amendment Bill remains a separate source stream; importantly, Planning Bill 235-3 itself now requires RSPs to identify priority areas for planning adaptation to the effects of climate change. The Bill has not yet been enacted.

Head Start adds institutional and operational uncertainty more than immediate RSP-geography certainty: successor authorities, residual-region issues, cross-boundary proposals, regional-function continuity, iwi/Māori partnership/participation continuity, evidence transfer and committee/secretariat reconstitution should now be part of the readiness assessment rather than treated as a separate local-government reform workstream.

2. What councils need to know now

2.1 Change readiness is broader than training or communications

Readiness concept	What it means for RSP	Managerial implication
Psychological readiness	The attitudes, confidence, motivation and perceived value held by staff, elected	Important, but not enough. Staff may be willing while the region still

	members, partners and others affected by the change.	lacks the structures, funding, authority, and evidence systems needed to act.
Organisational readiness	The collective system-level ability to start, sustain and adapt RSP work through sponsorship, decision rights, resourcing, work programming, risk control, evidence systems, and feedback loops.	This is the primary management focus. It tests whether the operating machinery exists, not simply whether people support the idea.
Collaboration readiness	The ability of multiple councils, Iwi/Māori, CG agencies, infrastructure providers, and other actors to work through contested spatial choices at pace.	RSP readiness is regional. A council cannot assess itself as ready without asking whether the regional collaboration architecture is ready.
Behavioural readiness	Whether people have the capability, opportunity, and motivation to behave differently under the new system.	Training must be matched with opportunity: time, mandate, tools, leadership signals, templates, and permission to stop/defer lower-priority work.
Adaptive readiness	The ability to learn and adjust as national direction, regulations, digital requirements, funding assumptions, and statutory amendments evolve.	Use assumptions registers, review triggers, and feedback loops rather than pretending uncertainty can be eliminated early.
Transition-capable readiness	The ability to keep current-boundary RSP establishment moving while preparing for possible successor authorities, residual regions, cross-boundary arrangements, or multiple-unitary-authority scenarios.	Add Head Start scenario testing, current-boundary continuity, committee reconstitution, Regional Function Continuity Schedule, and evidence-transfer controls to readiness work.
National-instrument readiness	The ability to interpret and implement NPD/national standards, distinguish mandatory standardised provisions from regional choices, and adjust evidence/work programmes as national requirements arrive.	Add a national-instrument register, legal/policy interpretation route, spatial-standard implementation capability and change-control process.

2.2 Readiness needs a domain model

The referenced readiness papers identify six practical domains that are directly relevant to RSP mobilisation. They are best treated as a regional readiness framework, not just an internal council checklist. Two RSP-specific overlay domains are included, reflecting uncertainties arising from Head Strat and that relating to the developing CG operating model that MCERT is developing.

Domain	What “good enough” early readiness looks like
Leadership and sponsorship	Clear executive ownership; named sponsors; tier-two alignment; a common regional narrative; and a regular review cycle for readiness issues.
Governance and decision rights	Interim and enduring governance options; process-agreement development; committee design; escalation and dispute pathways; clarity on who decides what, when, and on whose advice.
Programme and secretariat capability	Programme controls, issue/risk tracking, reporting, procurement, records, evidence commissioning, meeting support and a practical secretariat host/staffing model.

Workforce and organisational capability	Known capability gaps across planning, legal, GIS, data, economics, infrastructure, hazards, environmental science, engagement, and facilitation; plus secondment/shared-service/procurement options.
Stakeholder and partner management	Structured participation and engagement with iwi/Māori, infrastructure providers, CG agencies, adjacent regions, major landowners, developers, and community/sector actors; with timing, expectations and resourcing clarified. Update the Māori relationship architecture for MWAR cessation, direct RSP duties and any request-based iwi participation agreement.
Financial, digital and evidence readiness	Budget pathways, cost-sharing, data standards, protocols for Māori data and evidence, evidence-gap analysis, must-have datasets, document systems, metadata practices, and early clarity on digital dependencies. Include s 67C evidence quality/uncertainty controls and readiness for nationally prescribed spatial-planning methods/standardised provisions.
Head Start and regional-function continuity readiness	A current-boundary RSP continuity statement; four-scenario test; Regional Function Continuity Schedule for non-full-region proposals; evidence-transfer rules; and explicit treatment of catchments, transport, emergency management, water, biosecurity, science/data, and compliance interfaces.
Collective central-government interface readiness	Clarity on how the Ministerial appointee, central-government officials group, CG secretariat input, NZTA/Waka Kotahi, and possible Regional Public Service Commissioner role will be coordinated so the region receives a coherent CG view.
National instruments and implementation readiness	A controlled NPD/national-standards watch, ability to implement standardised provisions, statutory critical path, section 68 downstream alignment, implementation-plan ownership and s 74 review capability.

2.3 The scale should distinguish awareness from operating capability

Level	Label	Meaning in RSP context	Observable indicators
1	Nascent / unformed	Awareness exists but no active regional operating model.	No named sponsor or agreed lead; no governance path; no programme structure; no capability or budget assessment.
2	Emerging / exploratory	Some preparatory work exists but arrangements are not yet agreed.	Strategic priority or early papers; informal discussions; partial evidence work; key decisions still pending.
3	Structured / mobilising	A recognisable mobilisation pathway is forming.	Named executive or working group; governance paper/pathway; PM or secretariat model being scoped; partner engagement initiated.
4	Operationalising	Pre-enactment operating arrangements are functioning.	Lead/sponsor accepted; programme manager/control group active; workstreams underway; escalation routes and communications operating.
5	Integrated / adaptive	Enduring or near-enduring operating model is in place and learning/adapting.	Governance and secretariat funded/operating; role clarity; shared data systems; risks/dependencies actively managed; feedback loops working.

3. What the pilot readiness assessments told us

The four-region pilot was not an audit or scorecard. It was a practical baseline to test whether regions have the organisational machinery needed to mobilise RSP work. Across the pilot, readiness ranged from exploratory

arrangements through to operationalising pre-enactment arrangements. No region was assessed as fully integrated/adaptive because final legislative, national-direction, funding, governance, and digital settings were not yet settled.

The pilot results should now be re-read through the Head Start lens. Regions that were assessed as structured or operationalising still need to test whether their operating model can survive accepted, rejected, altered, or legislated Head Start proposals without losing evidence, participation commitments, regional-function coherence, or council approval pathways.

Readiness dimension	Observed pilot range	What the range means for managers
Overall organisational readiness	Level 2 to Level 4	Most regions understand the task, but the level of mobilisation varies sharply. Managers should not assume that awareness equals readiness.
Collaboration readiness	Level 2 to Level 4	The strongest indicators are accepted convening arrangements, project-control mechanisms, meeting rhythms, workstreams and escalation routes.
Leadership and sponsorship	Level 2 to Level 4	Recognition is present, but not always converted into named sponsors, operating rhythms, and a common regional narrative.
Governance and decision rights	Level 2 to Level 4	Governance is the dominant unresolved issue, especially lawful interim arrangements and how current forums transition into statutory machinery.
Programme and secretariat capability	Level 1 to Level 4	The widest spread. Some regions have no secretariat model progressed; others have workstreams and programme management in place.
Workforce and organisational capability	Level 1 to Level 3	This is generally the weakest domain. Small-council capacity and BAU load are major constraints.
Stakeholder and partner management	Level 2 to Level 3	All regions recognise iwi/Māori and partner engagement as central, but governance representation, resourcing and timing often remain unsettled.
Financial, digital and evidence readiness	Level 2 to Level 3	Evidence work can start, but budgets, digital systems and sufficiency standards remain constrained by national uncertainty.

4. MfE “least regrets” priorities: how they should shape readiness

Readiness plans should now use the 235-3 statutory timing formula: notify the first RSP by the later of 21 months after Royal assent or 9 months after NPD is issued under both Acts, and generally make/publish decisions within 9 months after notification, followed by LUP/NEP notification within a further 9 months. The time should be converted into governance, evidence, partner, national-instrument and secretariat maturity.

MfE’s 5 May 2026 presentation is best read as an indication of foundation-building work rather than formal direction. It expressly noted that the information does not override current statutory obligations and that councils make their own work-programme decisions. Its practical value is the distinction between work to continue, work to refocus because rework risk is higher, and work to start because it builds transition foundations without trying to pre-empt future standards or methodologies.

MfE category	Examples from the presentation	How managers should interpret this for RSP readiness
Continue - BAU and enduring foundations	Data and information gathering; baseline technical work and environmental monitoring; assessments of current conditions; freshwater limits; system performance tracking; monitoring/reporting on Iwi/Māori interests and outcomes under existing obligations; relationships; statutory requirements and exemptions; consenting and statutory timeframes; compliance and monitoring; natural hazards; established agreements; plan-stop exemptions.	Keep doing work that is needed now and will remain useful in the future. Protect core statutory delivery and enduring information/relationship assets.
Refocus - higher risk of significant revision	Plan-making other than permitted/exempted changes; new data/evidence aimed specifically at spatial plans; reviewing operative zone chapter rules; work that may be exempt or overtaken once Select Committee and Bill detail is clearer.	Do not treat this as a stop signal. Use it as a prioritisation lens: weigh effort against uncertainty and avoid speculative content development where rework risk is high.
Start - least-regrets readiness	Information stocktake and collation; stocktake of base knowledge; regional data integration; live Treaty settlements obligations register; governance and decision-making preparedness; regional collaboration and ways of working; early focus on how councils will work together; shared decision log and early action planning; informing community, Treaty partners, and Identified Māori land owners on future involvement; workforce capability thinking; policy readiness for national direction.	This is the priority zone for RSP managers. Start work that builds the operating model and evidence foundations without locking in untested methodologies, premature plan content, or assumptions about final national direction. Add preparation for standardised RSP provisions and national methods: build the evidence/data architecture and decision process, but avoid bespoke text that may be displaced.
Start / reinforce - Head Start continuity foundations	Current-boundary RSP continuity note; four-scenario RSP impact assessment; Regional Function Continuity Schedule template; evidence-transfer and decision-archive practices; and CG/NZTA/RPSC interface mapping.	Treat these as least-regrets readiness tasks. They do not pre-judge Head Start outcomes, but they make RSP mobilisation resilient if local-government structure changes while first-generation RSP work is under way.
Start / reinforce - 235-3 statutory lifecycle	First-RSP critical path; national-instrument register; implementation-plan/annual reporting design; s 74 review/new-information process; MWAR transition mapping.	These are now sufficiently specified in the Bill to be treated as no-regrets organisational readiness work even though enactment and secondary instruments remain outstanding.

5. What to do / what not to do

Do now	Do not do / avoid	Why it matters
Establish a sponsor group and a common regional narrative.	Do not leave RSP readiness as a planning-team side project.	Visible executive sponsorship is necessary to settle trade-offs, resourcing, and cross-council participation.
Prepare a regional readiness self-assessment against the six domains.	Do not assess readiness by asking only whether staff understand the Bill.	The main barriers are structural, legal, financial, governance, data, and inter-organisation issues.

Draft interim governance, process-agreement, and secretariat options that can adapt post-enactment.	Do not wait passively for perfect certainty before doing no-regrets establishment work.	The statutory window is compressed; regions need a lawful mobilisation path before final settings are fully known.
Create an information stocktake, base-knowledge register and evidence gap analysis.	Do not over-commission new spatial-plan evidence before standards, national direction and methodology are clearer.	Stocktaking and gap analysis are low-regret; premature technical work may need significant revision.
Develop Treaty settlements redress and partnering and participation obligations registers.	Do not treat iwi/Māori participation as an engagement round to be designed later.	Māori participation, agreements, and iwi planning documents are core design inputs.
Create a shared regional decision log, assumption register and early action plan.	Do not allow informal conversations to substitute for auditable regional decisions.	RSP establishment needs traceability because many decisions will be revisited when legislation and regulations settle.
Map workforce capacity, scarce skills, and BAU stop/defer options.	Do not assume RSP can be layered on top of BAU without trade-offs.	Pilot evidence shows workforce readiness is generally the weakest domain.
Keep statutory BAU functioning: consenting, compliance, monitoring and required plan-stop exemption work.	Do not abandon current legal duties in the name of future readiness.	MfE's least-regrets framing expressly does not override current statutory obligations.
Prepare to engage quickly with national direction when it is released.	Do not try to anticipate detailed standards or methodologies prematurely.	The safest posture is readiness to respond, not speculative compliance design and consider resourcing implications of any required technical work outside of councils.
Brief elected members and corporate leaders on readiness as organisational change.	Do not present RSP as merely another planning document.	Funding, governance, workforce, digital and implementation implications sit across the whole council and region.
Confirm the current-boundary RSP establishment baseline and test the four Head Start scenarios.	Do not pause RSP readiness or assume a proposed Head Start boundary automatically becomes the first-generation RSP region.	The May DIA Guidance clarifies that current Bill-introduction regions remain the immediate planning-system baseline for outline-proposal purposes.
Prepare a Head Start/RSP continuity note and, for non-full-region proposals, a Regional Function Continuity Schedule.	Do not treat Head Start as a separate structural workstream with no effect on RSP readiness.	The schedule should protect catchment, transport, emergency management, water, science/data, biosecurity, compliance, iwi/Māori, and infrastructure interfaces.
Clarify how the CG position will be collected and communicated through committee and secretariat arrangements.	Do not assume that NZTA, an individual official, or a Regional Public Service Commissioner can represent the whole CG without explicit mandate and clearance processes.	Updated Note 5 distinguishes the Ministerial appointee, CG officials group, CG secretariat input, portfolio agencies, and Ministerial escalation.

Build a national-instrument response function.	Do not assume the region will draft every RSP provision locally.	235-3 allows mandatory standardised provisions and nationally prescribed methods; readiness depends on implementing them quickly and focusing local effort on the choices that remain open.
Prepare an MWAR transition and iwi-participation map.	Do not treat the July proposal as unresolved or assume MWAR continues after Royal assent.	235-3 terminates MWAR and creates a different request-based iwi participation agreement mechanism while direct RSP/Treaty/JMA duties remain.

6. Readiness assessment progress: what managers should now test

The pilot suggests that a useful next-generation readiness assessment should remain practical, regional, and repeatable. It should not become a compliance audit. It should help managers identify where readiness is strong enough to proceed, where an issue needs escalation, and where further guidance or central-system clarity is required.

Assessment question	What evidence to look for	Escalation trigger
Is there a recognised regional sponsor or convening mandate?	CE/Mayoral Forum decision, sponsor statement, named lead, reporting cadence.	RSP remains a strategic priority, but no person/forum can unblock issues.
Is there an interim governance pathway?	Draft governance paper, council decision dates, pathway to statutory committee, escalation, and dispute route.	Councils disagree on lead, representation, decision flow, or legality of interim arrangements.
Is the programme office or secretariat model defined?	Host options, role descriptions, budget assumptions, PM support, records/reporting arrangements.	No one is authorised to coordinate evidence, meetings, documents, and regional reporting.
Is there a process agreement workstream?	Draft heads of agreement, clause prompts, role allocation, iwi/partner engagement architecture, change-control clauses.	Process agreement is being treated as a late legal document rather than the operating spine.
Is capability and capacity mapped?	Heatmap of staff, partners, scarce skills, consultant needs, small-council support, and BAU trade-offs.	RSP relies on the same few staff already carrying BAU, plan-stop, reform, and LTP tasks.
Is evidence/data readiness being built carefully?	Base knowledge stocktake, data inventory, metadata, confidence ratings, gap register, minimum viable evidence plan.	Councils are either waiting entirely or commissioning speculative work without agreed standards.
Is partnering and participation practically enabled?	Iwi/Māori partnering and participation map, Treaty obligations register, infrastructure/CG/stakeholder mapping, resourcing assumptions.	Participation is recognised but not resourced or connected to governance and evidence work.
Is uncertainty actively managed?	Assumptions log, legislative dependency log, national direction watchlist, review triggers, change-control process.	Decisions are being made without recording assumptions or triggers for review.
Is readiness being tested against Head Start scenarios?	Current-boundary continuity statement; four-scenario RSP impact assessment;	The region is proceeding as if current structures are fixed, or

	reconstitution triggers; residual-region and cross-boundary issue log.	alternatively waiting for Head Start decisions before mobilising.
Is there a Regional Function Continuity Schedule or equivalent for non-full-region scenarios?	Function inventory covering RSP, NEP, RLTP/RPTP, CDEM/EM, catchment/flood, water, biosecurity, science/monitoring, and compliance/enforcement.	A proposal splits or re-allocates regional functions without showing how the RSP evidence base and implementation architecture will continue.
Is the CG/NZTA/RPSC interface defined?	Draft clauses or operating note covering Ministerial appointee, officials group, CG secretariat input, NZTA role, RPSC convening role and escalation route.	Committee or secretariat design assumes central government participation but does not say how the CG view will be authorised or reconciled.
Can the region absorb national standards without stopping the programme?	National-instrument register; identified standardised provisions; legal/policy interpretation route; spatial/parameter decision process.	Teams are drafting bespoke RSP provisions without knowing whether the standard will prescribe them or who can decide the remaining choices.
Is the full RSP lifecycle ready?	Statutory critical path, implementation-plan owner, annual reporting, s 74 review/new-information register, section 68 LTP/RLTP/LUP/NEP interfaces.	Readiness ends at notification/adoption, and no one owns implementation or review.

7. How the change-management and evaluation lenses fit

The source Readiness, Change Management and Evaluation paper indicates that RM reform should be treated as a large-scale change management programme. The Brighta report, as summarised in that paper, identifies readiness as broader than training: workforce, funding, quality of practice, culture, behaviour, monitoring and sustained leadership all matter. COM-B and Kirkpatrick are useful sub-lenses, but not the whole framework.

Lens / model	Best use for RSP readiness	Limitation
Brighta capacity/capability framing	Confirms that RM reform requires deliberate investment in workforce, practice, culture, communication, monitoring, and change leadership.	High-level; does not by itself provide the regional operating model for RSP establishment.
COM-B behaviour lens	Tests whether staff and partners have capability, opportunity, and motivation to work in new ways.	Best for behaviour adoption; not a full organisational or regional governance framework.
Kirkpatrick evaluation model	Evaluates whether training/guidance/support is landing: reaction, learning, behaviour, and results.	Strong for learning interventions; weaker for governance, funding, operating model, and cross-council collaboration.
ORIC / organisational readiness	Useful for pulse-checking collective commitment and confidence to implement change.	Needs to be supplemented with operational evidence and regional collaboration diagnostics.
CFIR / implementation diagnostic	Useful for identifying barriers and enablers across outer setting, inner setting, individuals, and implementation process.	Comprehensive but can be too complex unless translated into a simple council tool.

Benefits realization	Tests whether readiness and implementation are producing desired system outcomes, not just activity.	Needs baseline measures and benefits ownership; not a near-term readiness substitute.
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8. Matters that remain uncertain or need careful watching

The change-control watchlist should now use 235-3 as the baseline and include Schedule 2 clause 4, sections 67BA-67D, 68, 71 and 73A-74E, the first-RSP transition timetable, standardised RSP provisions, MWAR cessation and sections 198A-198E iwi participation agreements, as well as the relevant Natural Environment Bill inputs.

Uncertain matter	Why it matters for change readiness
Final form of the Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill	Committee, process, timing, and implementation requirements may change. Readiness arrangements need review triggers. 235-3/234-3 now provide a substantially firmer Committee-stage baseline. Readiness should no longer be framed around the introduced/report-back text alone, while still retaining a final-enactment confirmation point.
National direction and standards	They will shape evidence needs, methodology, spatial-plan content, environmental limits, and options assessment. They may prescribe RSP content and methods, not just influence them. Regional readiness must include rapid implementation of standardised provisions and management of the choices the standards leave open.
Digital planning system scope and timing	Councils cannot fully design data, document, portal, or IT work until national digital expectations are clearer.
Funding, rates capping and LTP/Annual Plan timing	Readiness may be underfunded if councils cannot align budgets with the compressed RSP establishment window.
Central government role in regional processes	Regions need to know how and when to engage CG agencies and how CG inputs affect decision rights and accountability.
Iwi/Māori capacity, and partnering and participation resourcing	The pilot suggests mana whenua and partnering resourcing may be more acute than council resourcing in some regions. MWAR cessation and the new request-based iwi participation agreement framework add a transition workload that should be resourced separately from direct RSP consultation and Treaty/JMA obligations.
Small-council participation capacity	Regional readiness can fail if smaller councils cannot participate meaningfully in governance, evidence, and engagement workstreams.
Head Start and wider local government reform	Structural-change proposals may affect boundaries, functions, governance forums, secretariat models, and relationship agreements.
Plan-stop effectiveness	Plan-stop may not materially free the people needed for RSP readiness; managers need active workload reset decisions.
Behavioural adoption and culture change	Staff may learn the new system but lack opportunity or motivation to apply it if roles, leadership signals, and tools are unclear.
Current-boundary RSP continuity under Head Start	The immediate establishment baseline is clearer, but future succession, residual-region, cross-boundary, and reconstitution arrangements remain detailed-design issues.
Regional function continuity	Readiness may be undermined if catchments, transport, emergency management, water, biosecurity, science/data, or compliance functions are fragmented without a governance architecture.

Proposed LGA voting-rights change	Implications of any changes in relation to non-elected appointed members for committee membership, voting rights, and quorum as distinct matters.
Collective central-government, NZTA and RPSC roles	Readiness depends on knowing whether the CG will participate through a Ministerial appointee, officials group, secretariat agency workstreams, RPSC convenor role or some nationally standardised model. MCERT is working on this.
Illustrative NPD versus statutory NPD	The Illustrative NPD is useful for testing growth, infrastructure, hazard and conflict-resolution readiness but is not binding. Readiness plans should preserve flexibility until statutory NPD/standards are made.

9. Key points for council managers to note

Planning Bill 235-3 itself now requires adaptation-priority capability: common hazard and exposure evidence, strategic spatial mapping, iwi/Māori and community engagement, links to infrastructure and territorial adaptation work, and a live record of implementation/funding assumptions. The separate Climate Change Response Amendment Bill remains a related but distinct stream.

Suggested framing: “RSP readiness is not a state of mind. It is the regional operating capability to make statutory spatial choices at pace.”

No.	Briefing point	Talk-to note
1	Start with the concept.	Change readiness is the ability to begin, sustain and adapt RSP work, not simply awareness of the Bill or attendance at training.
2	Readiness is regional.	No council can be fully ready alone if the region lacks a process agreement, collaboration machinery, secretariat, shared evidence, and participation architecture.
3	Use the six domains.	Leadership, governance, programme/secretariat, workforce, partner management, and financial/digital/evidence readiness provide a practical manager checklist.
4	Recognise pilot lessons.	The pilot range was Level 2 to Level 4. The strongest regions had sponsors, workstreams, programme control and escalation; the weakest gaps were workforce and enduring secretariat arrangements.
5	Treat governance as a readiness issue.	Interim governance, decision rights, escalation, and process-agreement formation must be progressed before substantive drafting reaches pressure points.
6	Apply MfE least-regrets discipline.	Continue statutory BAU and enduring foundations; refocus work with high rework risk; start foundation-building that does not guess future standards.
7	Do not over-anticipate national direction.	Build information stocktakes and readiness to respond; avoid expensive speculative plan content or methodologies that may need revision.
8	Make workforce capacity visible.	Capability heatmaps and start/stop/defer decisions are needed because RSP cannot simply be added to BAU.
9	Separate training from readiness.	Training matters, but readiness also requires opportunity: roles, time, tools, mandate, leadership, and shared systems.
10	Manage uncertainty deliberately.	Use assumptions logs, dependency registers and review triggers so early decisions can adapt when final settings emerge.
11	Support partner readiness.	Treat iwi/Māori and infrastructure provider participation as core readiness dependencies, not later consultation tasks.
12	Bottom line for managers.	RSP is a whole-of-region organisational change programme; readiness must be led, resourced, assessed, and adjusted over time.

13	Head Start changes the readiness test.	Readiness now means current-boundary mobilisation plus the ability to adapt if accepted, rejected, altered, or legislated Head Start proposals affect institutions, functions, or participation arrangements.
14	Do not pause current-boundary RSP establishment.	The May DIA Guidance confirms current Bill-introduction regions as the immediate planning-system baseline for outline-proposal purposes; delay increases readiness risk.
15	Use the four scenarios as a readiness diagnostic.	Test full-region UA, subregional UA, cross-boundary UA and multiple-UAs-in-one-region scenarios against committee, secretariat, evidence, iwi/Māori and regional-function arrangements.
16	Add regional-function continuity to readiness.	For non-full-region proposals, managers need a schedule covering catchments, transport, emergency management, water, science/data, biosecurity, and compliance.
17	Readiness includes the CG interface.	Regions need to know how the Ministerial appointee, CG officials group, CG secretariat input, NZTA and any RPSC role will work together.
18	Committee and secretariat readiness are linked.	Process agreements, ToR, secretariat capability, current-boundary continuity, and Head Start change-control should be assessed as one operating model.
19	Add national-instrument readiness to the model.	The region needs a disciplined route for implementing standardised RSP provisions and focusing its judgement on the spatial/parameter choices left open.
20	Readiness includes the post-adoption lifecycle.	Implementation-plan delivery, annual reporting, section 68 alignment and section 74 review/new-information functions need owners and capability before the first RSP is adopted.
21	MWAR transition is now a readiness task.	Plan for cessation after Royal assent, preserve relationships and legal duties, and be ready to support any requested iwi participation agreement separately.

10. Bottom line for managers

Councils should treat RSP readiness as a whole-of-region organisational change programme. The immediate task is not to predict every future statutory detail or start writing a plan in advance. It is to create the conditions that will allow the region to move quickly when final detail is available: sponsorship, process agreement pathways, governance options, secretariat capability, workforce/capability mapping, evidence stocktakes, Treaty-settlement and participation registers, partner-engagement architecture, and change-control disciplines.

The practical test is simple: if the Bills were enacted and national direction began arriving, could the region move from awareness to organised action within weeks rather than months? If not, the readiness work still needs attention.

A second practical test should now be added: if a Head Start proposal proceeds, can the region preserve current-boundary RSP momentum, transfer evidence and records, maintain iwi/Māori and partner commitments, and keep regional functions coherent while statutory planning continues?

Appendix: Practical checklist for council managers

Checklist area	Question for managers
Readiness concept	Have we agreed that readiness means regional operating capability, not just training or awareness?
Sponsor and mandate	Is there a named sponsor or sponsor group with authority to progress RSP establishment and escalate issues?
Regional collaboration	Is there a convening mechanism that all councils accept, and does it include a pathway from staff to CEs, elected members and councils?
Governance pathway	Have we identified lawful interim governance options and a route to the statutory committee model?
Process agreement	Is there a workstream drafting the process agreement as the operating spine of the RSP, including iwi, CG, infrastructure, adjacent-region, and community interfaces?
Secretariat / programme office	Have we scoped host options, roles, budget, reporting, records, procurement, and programme-control arrangements?
Workforce and workload	Have we prepared a capability heatmap and identified BAU work that may need to stop, slow, defer or be supported differently?
Evidence and data	Do we have a base-knowledge stocktake, data inventory, minimum evidence needs, and confidence/currency register?
Treaty obligations and Māori partnering and participation	Do we have a live Treaty settlements obligations register and a partnering and participation map for iwi authorities, PSGEs, hapū/marae where relevant, iwi planning documents and existing agreements?
Partner/stakeholder readiness	Are infrastructure providers, CG agencies, adjacent regions, developers, rural/productive sectors, and community interests mapped into the programme architecture?
Least-regrets work programme	Have we separated work to continue, refocus, and start, using MfE's least-regrets framing as a prioritisation lens?
Uncertainty management	Is there an assumptions register, legislative dependency log, national direction watchlist, and agreed review trigger process?
Monitoring and learning	How will we pulse-check readiness, capture lessons, and escalate system issues to Taituarā/MCERT or regional governance?
Current-boundary RSP continuity	Have we explicitly stated that current regional boundaries are the RSP establishment baseline unless legislation provides otherwise?
Head Start scenario testing	Have we tested full-region, subregional, cross-boundary and multiple-UA scenarios against governance, secretariat, evidence, iwi/Māori and regional-function continuity?
Regional Function Continuity Schedule	For any non-full-region scenario, is there a schedule covering RSP, NEP, RLTP/RPTP, CDEM/EM, catchment/flood, water, biosecurity, science/monitoring, and compliance/enforcement interfaces?
Collective government interface	Have we specified how the CG position will be collected, authorised, communicated, and escalated behind any Ministerial appointee, including NZTA and possible RPSC roles?
Committee and secretariat reconstitution	Do draft ToR, process agreement clauses and secretariat instructions include review triggers and evidence-transfer rules if local-government structure changes?
National-instrument readiness	Can the region identify mandatory standardised provisions, implement nationally prescribed methods and make any authorised spatial/parameter choices without pausing mobilisation?

Statutory lifecycle readiness	Are the first-RSP timetable, implementation plan, annual reporting, section 68 downstream interfaces and section 74 review/new-information functions owned and resourced?
MWAR / iwi participation transition	Is there a plan for MWAR cessation, direct RSP/Treaty/JMA duties, relationship continuity and any future request-based iwi participation agreement?

Source documents and official references

Primary source documents (prepared by SMConsulting)

1. Info Paper - RMA Replacement Spatial Planning Implementation - Detailed Notes, 18 March 2026
2. Discuss Paper - Enabling organisational readiness for regional spatial planning, 20 March 2026
3. Discuss Paper - Readiness, Change Management and Evaluation, 23 March 2026
4. Info Paper - RSP Organisational Readiness - Stocktake Synthesis, 4 May 2026
5. Info Paper - RSP Organisational Readiness Stocktake Pilot - Executive Summary, 12 May 2026
6. Additional alignment sources: updated Briefing Notes 1-6, especially Note 2 on Head Start readiness, Note 4 on process agreements, Note 5 on RSP Committees and central-government representation, and Note 6 on secretariat establishment.
7. Regional Spatial Planning under the Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill - Legal commentary and implementation implications, as at 11 September 2026: current synthesis used for the further interpretive and organisational edits in this Note.

Official references

8. Least regrets work priorities during transition.pptx, Ministry for the Environment, 5 May 2026.
9. New Zealand Legislation, Planning Bill 235-3, as reported from the Committee of the whole House, 25 August 2026 - <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/bill/government/2025/235/en/latest/>
10. New Zealand Legislation, Natural Environment Bill 234-3, as reported from the Committee of the whole House, 25 August 2026 - <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/bill/government/2025/234/en/latest/>
11. Ministry for the Environment, Better planning for a better New Zealand - <https://environment.govt.nz/publications/better-planning-for-a-better-new-zealand/>
12. Ministry for the Environment, Resource management reforms - <https://environment.govt.nz/what-government-is-doing/areas-of-work/rma/rmreform/>
13. Ministry for the Environment, Transitioning into the new planning system - <https://environment.govt.nz/publications/transitioning-into-the-new-planning-system/>
14. Ministry for the Environment, Resource management update - December 2025 - <https://environment.govt.nz/news/resource-management-update-december/>
15. DIA Guidance for Head Start outline proposals released on 29 May 2026.

September 2026 legislative-update status and sources

16. Planning Bill 235-3, as reported from the Committee of the whole House, 25 August 2026: consolidated current pre-third-reading text incorporating the report-back and Committee-stage amendments - <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/bill/government/2025/235/en/latest/>
17. Climate Change Response Amendment Bill 2026 (Bill 334-1), introduced 15 July 2026, remains a separate legislative source stream. For this RSP briefing, Planning Bill 235-3 is now the primary statutory baseline and itself requires priority areas for planning adaptation to climate-change effects.

18. Planning Bill 235-3, Schedule 1 clause 21 and sections 198A-198E: all existing and initiated Mana Whakahono ā Rohe cease to have legal effect on the day after Royal assent; one or more iwi authorities may request one or more local authorities to enter iwi participation agreements, with hapū able to join as parties. Direct RSP consultation and Treaty-settlement duties remain separate.
19. MCERT, New Zealand's New Planning System - Testing the Approach to National Policy Direction, 25 August 2026: illustrative material, expressly not Government policy, used only as an implementation signal for likely RSP emphasis on growth/infrastructure sequencing, natural hazards, environmental/cultural values and conflict resolution.