

# Replacing the Resource Management Act 1991

## Key message bank for Local Government partners

### Introduction

This key message bank has been developed by the Ministry for the Environment (MfE) to support local government partners in communicating with their members about the replacement of the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA). It provides messaging to explain what is changing, why it matters, and what it means for councils and their communities.

The messages outline the current stage of the reform process, as of October 2025, and are intended to support conversations with elected members, council staff, and stakeholders on the lead up to the introduction of the new Planning and Natural Environment Bills (the Bills). The information contained within is drawn from publicly available sources.

MfE will provide a package of support material for councils when the Bills are introduced, expected to be before the end of the year, with a focus on making useful and practical submissions during the Select Committee phase.

### Context

MfE is leading the design and implementation of the reforms to replace the RMA. MfE's role is to ensure that the new legislative framework supports Government priorities such as housing, infrastructure, environmental protection, and climate resilience.

There is significant interest and anticipation around both the outcomes of the policy process and the pathway to implementation.

At this stage, Cabinet has not yet made final decisions on the reform package, so we're unable to share further details beyond what is already publicly available at this stage.

Engagement with a range of local government stakeholders is a key component of the reform process. We are actively engaging with local government through a series of established advisory groups to ensure there is a broad range of perspectives and expertise reflected in the work.

This collaboration is essential in shaping national direction instruments, spatial planning frameworks, and regulatory standards that will guide local decision-making under the new system.

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## Why is the Government replacing the RMA?

- In December 2023, the Government committed to replacing the RMA with a new resource management system.
- The Government sees transforming the planning and natural environment system as the single most important thing we can do to lift economic performance.
- It believes the old system has become too complex, too litigious, and too slow.

## What is the Government trying to achieve?

- The Government wants to:
  - unlock development capacity for housing and business growth;
  - enable the delivery of high-quality infrastructure for the future, including doubling renewable energy; and
  - support growth in the primary sector growth.
- At the same time, however, the Government recognises that we must also:
  - safeguard the environment and human health;
  - adapt to the effects of climate change and reduce our exposure to natural hazards; and
  - uphold Treaty of Waitangi settlements and other related arrangements.

## A phased approach to replacing the RMA

- The Government is taking a three-stage phased approach to replacing the RMA.

### Phase one: repealing the previous legislation

- Phase one was the repeal of the Natural and Built Environment Act and the Spatial Planning Act. This was completed in December 2023.
- Find out more: [Natural and Built Environment Act repeal changes](#)

### Phase two: three new Acts and a refocused package of national direction

#### Resource Management (Freshwater and Other Matters) Amendment Act 2024

- Enacted: 25 October 2024
- Purpose: To make targeted changes to freshwater and biodiversity regulations under the RMA.
- Key changes:
  - Temporarily removes the freshwater hierarchy from consenting while the NPS-FM is reviewed.
  - Repeals the low slope map and related stock exclusion rules.
  - Replaces intensive winter grazing rules with new setback regulations.
  - Aligns coal mining rules with other mineral extraction under NPS-IB, NPS-FM, and NES-F.
  - Suspends SNA identification requirements for 3 years and extends timeframes.
  - Speeds up national direction processes.
  - Clarifies discharge consenting where adverse effects already exist.
  - Pauses freshwater farm plan rollout pending system improvements.
  - Restricts notification of freshwater planning instruments until a new NPS-FM is in place or by 31 December 2025.

- For more information: [Resource Management \(Freshwater and Other Matters\) Amendment Act 2024 | Ministry for the Environment](#)
- Cabinet paper and minutes: [Cabinet paper and minutes – Resource Management \(Freshwater and Other Matters\) Amendment Bill | Ministry for the Environment](#)
- Link to legislation: [Resource Management \(Freshwater and Other Matters\) Amendment Act 2024 No 43, Public Act Contents – New Zealand Legislation](#)

### **Fast-track Approvals Act 2024**

- Enacted: 23 December 2024
- Purpose: The Act was aimed at establishing a permanent fast-track regime that would make it easier and quicker to gain approvals for development and infrastructure projects that would deliver regional and national benefits.
- Key features:
  - Combines approvals from the RMA and other Acts (including the Crown Minerals Act 1991, Conservation Act 1987, and Fisheries Act 1996).
  - Creates a streamlined ‘one-stop-shop’ approval process.
  - Aims to simplify and speed up consenting for large, complex projects.
- For more information: [Fast-track Approvals Act | Ministry for the Environment](#)
- Visit the Fast-track website: [Fast-track](#)
- Link to legislation: [Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 No 56 \(as at 30 May 2025\), Public Act Contents – New Zealand Legislation](#)

### **Resource Management (Consenting and Other System Changes) Amendment Act 2025**

- Enacted: 21 August 2025
- Purpose: To deliver short-to medium-term improvements to the RMA ahead of broader reform.
- Focus areas:
  - Infrastructure and Energy: Easier consenting for new infrastructure and renewable energy.
  - Housing: Supports faster housing development.
  - Farming and Primary Sector: Enhances support for rural industries.
  - Natural Hazards and Emergencies: Improves responsiveness.
  - System Improvements: Streamlines planning processes (see Plan Stop).
- Next Steps: Further changes will follow via updates to national direction instruments.
- For more information (including factsheets and guidance): [Resource Management \(Consenting and Other System Changes\) Amendment Act 2025 | Ministry for the Environment](#)
- Cabinet paper and minutes: [Cabinet paper and minutes – Resource Management \(Freshwater and Other Matters\) Amendment Bill | Ministry for the Environment](#)
- Link to legislation: [Resource Management \(Consenting and Other System Changes\) Amendment Act 2025 No 41, Public Act Contents – New Zealand Legislation](#)

### **National direction programme**

- In March 2025, the Government confirmed a refocused package of national direction under the current RMA. This would be progressed as part of Phase 2, with a focus on proposals that have an immediate effect on the resource management system while Phase 3 is progressed.
- MfE consulted on the four packages proposed to update national direction:

- Package one: includes proposals to prepare and amend national direction instruments in infrastructure and development.
- Package two: is focused on the primary sector.
- Package three: includes options to amend national direction for freshwater.
- Package four: aims to test how the first pillar of the Going for Housing Growth programme could fit into the new resource management system.
- The consultation phase ended on the 17 August 2025, advice is currently being provided to ministers based on submissions.

## Phase three: replacing the RMA

### Expert Advisory Group

- An Expert Advisory Group (EAG) was established in September 2024 to prepare a blueprint to replace the RMA.
- The group was made up of experts with relevant technical knowledge covering subjects, including resource management law, planning and te ao Māori.
- Cabinet agreed that the EAG should base its blueprint on 10 principles:
  1. Narrow the scope of the effects it controls.
  2. Establish two Acts with clear and distinct purposes – one to manage environmental effects arising from activities and another to enable urban development and infrastructure.
  3. Strengthen and clarify the role of environmental limits and how they are to be developed.
  4. Provide for greater use of national standards to reduce the need for resource consents and to simplify council plans, so that standard-complying activity cannot be subjected to a consent requirement.
  5. Shift the system focus from consenting before works are undertaken to strengthened compliance monitoring and enforcement.
  6. Use spatial planning and a simplified designation process to lower the cost of future infrastructure.
  7. Achieve efficiencies by requiring one regulatory plan per region jointly prepared by regional and district councils.
  8. Provide for rapid, low-cost resolution of disputes between neighbours and between property owners and councils, with a Planning Tribunal (or equivalent) providing an accountability mechanism.
  9. Uphold Treaty of Waitangi settlements and the Crown’s obligations.
  10. Provide faster, cheaper and less litigious processes within shorter, less complex and more accessible legislation.
- The EAG delivered its blueprint in early 2025, accompanied by a package of 21 key recommendations. Cabinet has agreed that the blueprint provides a workable basis for a new planning system.
- Cabinet has made in-principle decisions on a range of new features for the system, drawing upon the blueprint.
- For more information: [Expert Advisory Group | Ministry for the Environment](#)
- Read the EAG’s blueprint: [Report from the Expert Advisory Group on Resource Management Reform | Ministry for the Environment](#)
- Comparison: EAG Blueprint recommendations and Cabinet paper recommendations: [Factsheet -- Resource management reform.pdf](#)

## Proposed replacement of the RMA

- The Government is proposing to replace the RMA with two new laws.
  - A Natural Environment Act – focused on managing the natural environment.
  - A Planning Act – focused on planning to enable development and infrastructure.
- Establishing the two new Acts is the third and final stage of the Government’s legislative approach.
- The Natural Environment Act will focus on the use, protection, and enhancement of the natural environment. This includes our land, air, freshwater, coastal and marine water, and other natural resources.
- The Planning Act will focus on land-use planning and regulation. It will enable the urban and infrastructure development that New Zealand needs and align with the Government’s Going for Housing Growth plan and the 30-year National Infrastructure Plan.
- The Government aims to introduce two Bills in late 2025 with an aim for these to pass into law in mid-2026. The Select Committee process following introduction will be the main mechanism for public consultation. See more information on the Select Committee process below.
- For more information: [Approach to development of new legislation](#)
- Webinar: [Local government webinar about new resource management system](#)

## Reform objectives

The intention for this change is to:

- clearly separate land use planning from natural resource management
- rely on greater use of national standards to do the work in the system
- expand permitted activities
- enable a legislative framework for spatial planning with statutory weight to achieve longer term, integrated planning
- simplify the plan-making and consenting system to reduce the number of plans, speed up processes, and reduce the need for consents.
- For more information: [Changes to resource management | Ministry for the Environment](#)

## Proposed system changes

### Narrower scope

- The new legislation will narrow the scope of the resource management system and the effects it controls, with the enjoyment of private property rights as the guiding principle.
- A shift from a precautionary to a more permissive approach will unlock development, streamline processes, and help New Zealand to meet its housing, infrastructure, and environmental objectives.
- The new system will:
  - manage a narrower scope of effects
  - define more closely what effects may be considered
  - raise the threshold of effects that are permitted
  - not control activities if land use effects are borne solely by the party undertaking the activity.
- This means that there would be a higher bar for regulatory restrictions on property, enabling property owners to use their properties as they see fit.

## **Simplified national policy direction**

- There will be one set of national policy direction under each new Act to:
  - provide direction on the purpose of the primary legislation
  - simplify, streamline, and direct local government plans and decision-making
  - declutter the existing set of RMA national policy statements.
- This will help to ensure that councils and others implement the legislation in an efficient and nationally consistent way.
- It will also provide guidance on how to resolve conflicts between competing priorities.
- Direction under the new Natural Environment Act will cover matters including:
  - freshwater
  - indigenous biodiversity
  - coastal policy.
- Direction under the new Planning Act will cover matters including:
  - urban development
  - infrastructure (including renewable energy)
  - natural hazards.

## **Property rights**

- Both new Acts will include starting presumptions that a land use is enabled, unless there is a significant enough impact on either the ability of others to use their own land or on the natural environment.
- This will reduce the scope of effects being regulated and enable more activities to take place as of right.
- There will be clear protection for lawfully established existing use rights, including the potential for the reasonable expansion of existing activities over time where the site is 'zoned or owned'.
- There will be a requirement for regulatory justification reports if departing from approaches to regulation standardised at the national level.
- Compensation may happen for regulatory takings in some circumstances. There will be an expansion in the range of permitted activities.

## **Standardisation of the system**

- The new system will introduce nationally standardised land-use zones that councils select and apply in a combined district plan. This will:
  - help councils to take a similar approach to the same issues faced in other parts of the country
  - maintain local decision-making if bespoke requirements are needed to meet specific community needs or preferences.
  - provide system efficiencies and reduce the financial burden on communities.

## **Environmental limits and natural resource allocation**

- The EAG recommended a more deliberate framework for natural resource allocation and charging for use.
- The new system will provide a clearer legal framework for setting environmental limits to protect natural resources. It will also provide more certainty about where development can and should be enabled, whilst protecting the environment.

## **Streamlining the system**

- Under the new system, there will be one combined plan per region. Each combined plan will include:
  - a spatial planning chapter

- an environment chapter to regulate natural resource use
- one planning chapter for each territorial authority district to regulate land use and utilise standard zones.
- This will result in a smaller number of plans that will be simpler to use, and consistent across the country.
- Spatial plans will provide long-term, strategic direction to simplify and streamline the system. This will allow development within constraints, and better align land use, infrastructure planning and investment.
- Cabinet has agreed to reduce the number of plans and policies in the system.
- A combined plan will include a spatial planning chapter, an environment chapter and planning chapters (one per territorial authority district).
- Spatial plans will provide long-term, strategic direction to simplify and streamline the system. This will allow development within constraints, and better align land use, infrastructure planning, and investment.

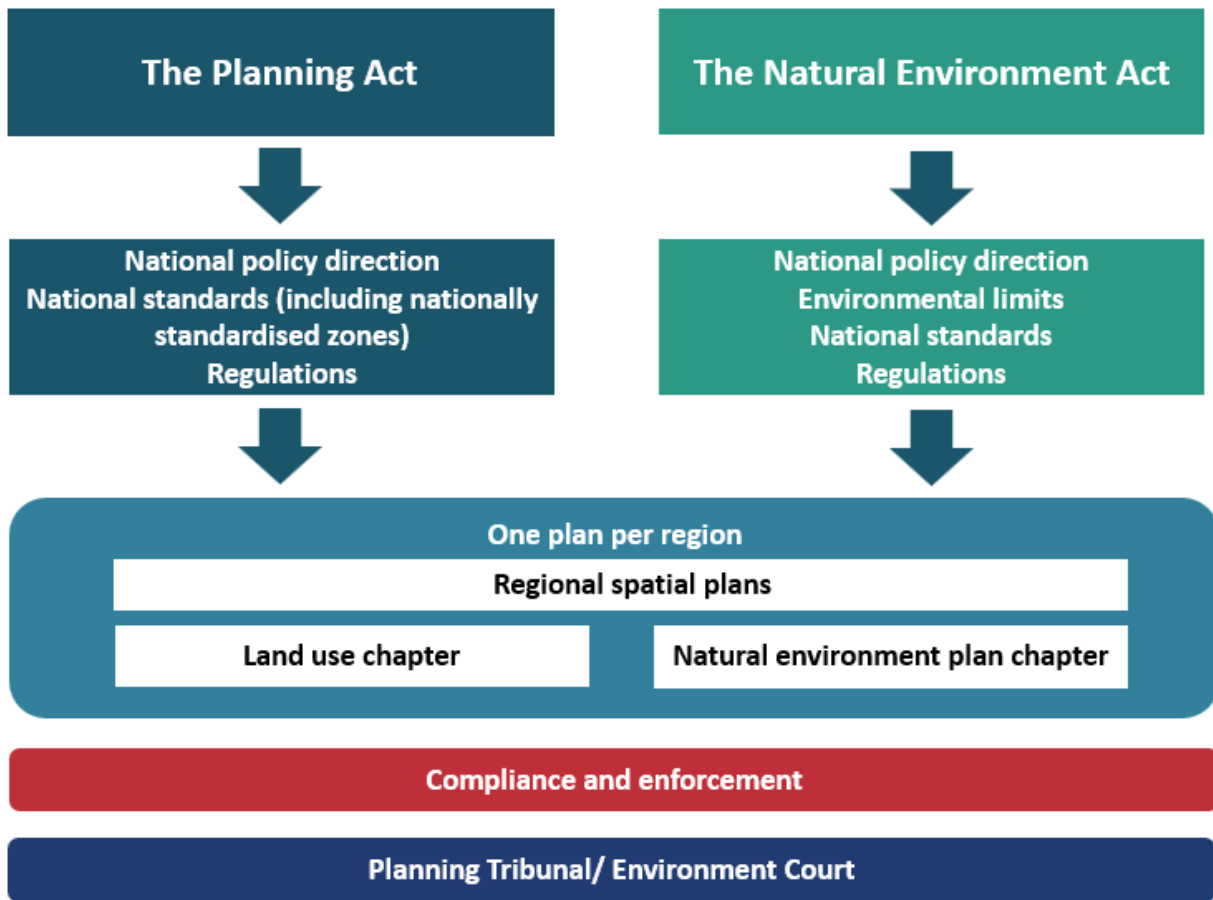
### **Resource consents**

- Fewer resource consents will be needed under the new system because there will be more permitted activities, nationally standardised land use zones and more national standards.
- There will also be a smaller number of consent categories, making it simpler and more certain for applicants.
- People who are not directly affected by an activity will not be able to object or relitigate an issue.

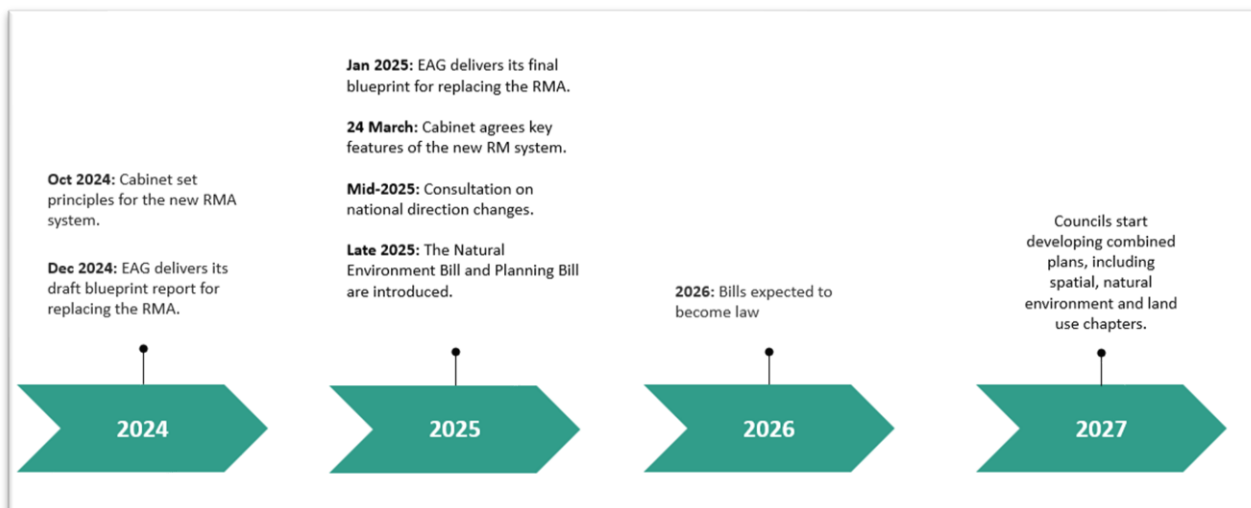
### **Compliance and enforcement**

- The effectiveness of compliance and enforcement varies, depending on the approaches that councils take and the resources they have available.
- There will also be changes to the consent compliance and enforcement regime to reduce variations in how this important function is applied.
- A national compliance and enforcement regulator may be set up to ensure a more consistent and effective approach. This would be done in a separate legislative process, and will not be a part of the two new Acts.
- The new regulator will reduce the lack of consistency in compliance and enforcement activities across regions and enable a more effective response to non-compliance.
- A new planning tribunal will provide for faster and low-cost dispute resolution and lessen reliance on the courts.

# What the proposed new system will look like



# Legislation timeline



## Transition and implementation

- The Government has said that it will release information, later this year, on how consents will be transitioned into the new system.
- Following enactment of the Bills (2026) Councils will begin work on their first spatial plan chapters under the new system, followed closely by work on regional combined plans.
- More information will become available as the legislation process progresses.

### Digital enablement

- MfE are establishing a digital enablement work programme that will be central to supporting implementation of the new resource management system.
- The digital enablement programme will draw on several years of collaboration and engagement with local government to inform its future work, and requirements under the new Planning and Natural Environment Acts.
- Consultation on the changes will be ongoing to give local government the opportunity to discuss their requirements, and the challenges and the opportunities they see ahead.

## Iwi/Māori

- Engagement Leads and support teams are currently confirming appointments to meet with PSGEs and Groups with arrangements related to the RMA, the primary focus for hui are:
  - To discuss the approach to upholding Treaty settlements, and
  - To provide an overview and information about the new system.

## Next steps: Select Committee Process

### Overview

- The Government intends to introduce the two new Planning and Natural Environment Bills in late 2025, with the goal of passing them into law by mid-2026, subject to the parliamentary process.
- Before becoming law, proposed legislation is referred to as a Bill. Once introduced to Parliament, each Bill undergoes a First Reading. If it passes, it progresses to the Select Committee stage.
- For more information: [Select Committee](#) | [Parliamentary Counsel Office](#)

## Links to further reading

[Speech on replacing the Resource Management Act](#) | [Beehive.govt.nz](#)

[RMA Reform](#) | [Beehive.govt.nz](#)

[Local government webinar about new resource management system](#)

Subscribe to the RMA reform newsletter: [RM Reform Update Subscription Form](#)

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# Appendix One: Plan Stop

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## Purpose

- The Resource Management (Consenting and Other System Changes) Amendment Act 2025 brought in changes to pause councils' work on review and change of their RMA plans.
- The intention is to prevent local authorities from investing resources in planning processes that may become obsolete with the upcoming replacement of the RMA by 2027, improving efficiency during the transition.
- Link to the Plan Stop information page of the website including the webinar: [Understanding Plan Stop | Ministry for the Environment](#)

## Scope of the policy

- Applies to:
  - Proposed plans and policy statements
  - Changes and variations to these instruments

## Timing

- From 21 August 2025:
  - Councils must seek an exemption to notify a draft planning instrument, if the draft planning instrument is not automatically exempt from the stop. Note that councils can apply for an exemption at any point between 21 August 2025 and 31 December 2027,
  - Councils with proposed planning instruments have 90 days to decide whether to:
    - Apply for an exemption, or
    - Withdraw the planning instrument

## Exclusions, Plan Stop does not apply to

- Non-RMA documents (e.g., Future Development Strategies under NPS-UD)
- Whole plan reviews where at least one topic has been heard
- Structure plans not yet notified as plan changes (though new related plan changes are paused unless exempted)

## Exemption applications

- Councils may apply to the Minister for an exemption if the planning instrument:
  - Supports essential water services (per Water Services Act 2021)
  - Fixes unintended consequences or inefficient provisions
  - Responds to RMA changes
  - Supports climate change management
  - Manages high-risk land (e.g., erosion)
  - Upholds Treaty settlement obligations
  - Responds to Environment Court recommendations
  - Is otherwise deemed appropriate by the Minister
- Councils intending to apply for an exemption should get in touch with MfE as soon as possible by emailing: [plan.exemptions@mfe.govt.nz](mailto:plan.exemptions@mfe.govt.nz).

## **Application requirements**

- Must include sufficient detail to assess eligibility – including which specific parts of the plan change meet specific exemption criteria
- May include other reasons for progressing the work
- A standard application form is provided
- The Minister may request further information
- Applications must be submitted by the local authority (with appropriate delegation or resolution)