Proposed National Policy Statement for Renewable Electricity Generation [2025]

As Recommended by the Electricity Sector Environment Group 7 May 2025

Authority

This National Policy Statement is issued by the Minister for the Environment under section 54 of the Resource Management Act 1991.

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New Zealand Government

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Part 1: Preliminary provisions

1.1 Preamble

This National Policy Statement replaces the National Policy Statement for Renewable Electricity Generation 2011 (NPS-REG 2011). The objective of the NPS-REG 2011 required the 'recognition' of the national significance of renewable electricity generation activities. While one of the policies sought that *"Decision-makers shall recognise and provide for the national significance of renewable electricity generation activities"*, the majority of the policies were about acknowledging and having particular regard to matters relevant to renewable electricity generation.

While the NPS-REG 2011 was intended to be 'enabling' of renewable electricity generation, experience has shown that the weight attributed to its provisions have been regularly overridden by the more directive provisions of other planning instruments that seek to protect aspects of the environment. Further, the weight given to, for example, local visual and amenity effects have often been allowed to outweigh the national benefits of renewable electricity generation. This has resulted in significant costs and restrictions associated with renewing consents for existing renewable electricity generation activities and consents being declined for significant new renewable electricity generation activities.

Climate change is arguably the biggest threat to the natural environment including all aspects of biodiversity. If New Zealand does not urgently and significantly increase the development of renewable electricity generation activities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions as part of the global response to climate change, there will be significant adverse consequences for biodiversity and the wider natural environment. Alongside that, a clean, secure, diverse and resilient electricity supply is essential for social and economic wellbeing. These benefits of renewable electricity generation are nationally significant and must be provided for under the Act accordingly.

To ensure a supply of affordable clean energy and achieve New Zealand's climate change goals and electricity generation targets, at least a doubling of the amount of renewable electricity is required. In achieving that outcome, this national policy statement seeks to address the 'Energy Trilemma' - striking the balance between affordability/cost, security and sustainability.

The reality is that renewable electricity generation activities need to be located in places where the resources they utilise are located. For example, hydro generation can only be located in lakes and rivers (or at least use the water from lakes and rivers), wind farms need to be located in windy locations, and geothermal power stations and associated steamfield activities need to be located on geothermal systems. Many of these locations are within, or contain, areas that are identified as Significant Natural Areas, Outstanding Natural Landscapes, Outstanding Natural Features or Outstanding Natural Character, or otherwise fall within areas that are of national importance under s 6 of the RMA.

This NPS-REG therefore needs to provide effective and comprehensive consenting pathways for renewable electricity generation activities in the type of areas noted above. This is to ensure that it will both maintain existing generation capacity and enable it to be significantly increased at the pace and scale needed for New Zealand to achieve its energy and emission reduction targets and commitments while growing New Zealand's economy. This pathway approach needs to include a high level of flexibility as to the way in which, and the level to which, the environmental effects of renewable electricity generation activities are able to be addressed, particularly if they cannot be

practically avoided because of requirements of functional or operational need.

To address the above, this National Policy Statement in intended to be a 'one-stop shop' in terms of the matters to be addressed when planning decisions are made relating to renewable electricity generation. That is, planning decisions for renewable electricity generation are to be in accordance with this national policy statement and lower order plans that give effect to it, not any other national or lower order policy statement or plan.

1.2 Title

(1) This is the National Policy Statement for Renewable Electricity Generation 2025.

1.3 Commencement

(1) This National Policy Statement comes into force on the day that is 28 days after notification in the New Zealand Gazette.

(2) See Part 4 for timeframes for complying with this National Policy Statement.

1.4 Interpretation

(1) In this National Policy Statement:

Act means the Resource Management Act 1991.

Allow means:

(a) In the case of a plan or as directed in a policy statement, to provide for the activity as permitted or controlled, subject to standards;

(b) In the case of a notice of requirement, to confirm the requirement subject to conditions imposed, or proposed or agreed to by a requiring authority under s171(1B) of the RMA;

(c) In the case of a resource consent application, to grant the resource consent, subject to conditions imposed, or proposed or agreed to by an applicant under s104(1)(ab) of the RMA.

Ancillary activities means all supporting activities needed to provide the investigation, construction, operation, maintenance, monitoring, replacement, upgrading, repowering and decommissioning of REG assets, including but not limited to vegetation clearance, tree trimming, earthworks, the construction, maintenance and upgrading of access tracks and roads, power supply, and telecommunications.

Areas of National Importance or ANI means:

(a) Areas of the coastal environment with outstanding natural character as identified or mapped in any plan or policy statement;

(b) Outstanding water bodies, that are identified or mapped in any plan or policy statement, and any water bodies that are included within significant natural areas under (c) below.

(c) Significant natural areas as defined in the National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity 2023 (excluding geothermal SNAs) that are identified or mapped in any plan or policy statement.

(d) Outstanding natural features and landscapes identified or mapped in any plan or policy statement.

(e) Sites of historic heritage identified or mapped in any plan or policy statement.

(f) Sites of significance to Māori including wāhi tapu identified or mapped in any plan or policy statement, or through consultation or engagement by an applicant for resource consent or notice of requirement for an REG activity.

Commencement date means the date on which this National Policy Statement comes into force, as identified in clause 1.2(1).

Community-scale REG means renewable electricity generation supplied to a community where the primary purpose is to provide benefits to that community.

Decision-maker means any person exercising functions or powers in making planning decisions under the Act.

Existing REG assets means REG assets that have either been established at the time a planning decision is being made, or which can lawfully be established pursuant to a resource consent, designation or other authorisation granted and which remains in force (has not lapsed).

Functional need has the meaning set out in Policy 5 of this national policy statement.

Geothermal drilling means the construction, maintenance and upgrading of wells associated with geothermal resource exploration , development or use, including drilling rigs, well pads, well heads, well testing, drilling ponds, accessory buildings, structures and equipment, concrete batching, water intake structures, water supply, temporary ancillary accommodation, fencing, and the storage, use and handling of hazardous substances.

Geothermal significant natural area or Geothermal SNA means an SNA that includes one or more geothermal ecosystems.

Nationally significant benefits means the benefits of renewable electricity generation which include, without limitation, any or all of the following:

(a) avoiding, reducing, and displacing greenhouse gas emissions to enable New Zealand to meet its emission reduction targets.

(b) contributing to the security, resilience, independence, affordability and diversity of electricity supply at national, regional, and local levels including so as to provide greater resilience to the effects of climate change and natural hazards.

(c) using renewable rather than finite resources.

(d) avoiding reliance on imported fuels for the purpose of generating electricity.

(e) providing for the social, economic, cultural, health and well-being of people and communities.

(f) the reversibility of the adverse effects on the environment of some renewable electricity generation technologies.

Operational need has the meaning set out in Policy 5 of this national policy statement.

Planning decision means a decision on any of the following:

(a) a resource consent application or a Notice of Requirement for a designation.

(b) a proposed regional policy statement of a proposed change or variation to a regional policy statement.

(c) a proposed regional plan or a proposed change or variation to a regional plan.

(d) a proposed district plan or a proposed change or variation to a district plan.

REG activities means:

(a) the investigation, development, operation, maintenance, replacement or upgrading and/or repowering, of REG assets.

(b) all other land or resource use activities forming part of or associated with renewable electricity generation including geothermal drilling and any ancillary activities.

(c) the storage or distribution of electricity through connection to the transmission network, distribution network or direct to end users.

For the avoidance of doubt, and unless the context otherwise requires, REG activities includes those associated with community and small-scale REG.

REG or renewable electricity generation means the generation of electricity from solar, wind, water, geothermal, biomass, tidal, wave, or ocean current energy sources.

REG assets means the physical components and structures required for renewable electricity generation along with the infrastructure and ancillary activities required to generate and store the generated electricity and connect it to transmission or distribution networks or direct to end users.

For the avoidance of doubt, and unless the context otherwise requires, REG assets includes those associated with community and small-scale REG.

Repowering, in relation to existing REG assets generating electricity from wind or solar resources, means their whole or partial replacement or upgrading to maintain or increase generation output and extend the operational life of the asset.

Significant natural area or SNA means as defined in the National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity but excludes geothermal significant natural areas.

Small-scale REG means renewable electricity generation where the primary purpose is to provide electricity for on-site use, at an individual site or landholding level.

Upgrading in relation to existing REG assets means increasing their capacity, resilience, efficiency, security, reliability, flexibility, longevity or safety.

(2) Terms defined in the Act and used in this National Policy Statement have the meanings in the Act, unless otherwise specified.

(3) Terms defined in the National Planning Standard issued under section 58E of the Act and used in this National Policy Statement have the meanings in that Standard, unless otherwise specified.

1.5 Relationship with other National Policy Statements, Regional Policy Statements and Plans

(1) The provisions of this national policy statement prevail over the provisions of any other national policy statement if there is a conflict between them.

(a) For the avoidance of doubt:

(i) a planning decision may allow an REG activity as defined by this policy statement, despite anything to the contrary in another national policy statement or the provisions of a policy statement of plan or proposed policy statement or plan giving effect to that other national policy statement;

(ii) the Effects Management Framework set out in this NPS applies to any planning decision involving an REG activity, not the effects management hierarchy or framework in any other national policy statement, or the provisions of a policy statement of plan or proposed policy statement or plan giving effect to that other national policy statement; and

(iii) Where there is a conflict between them, this NPS does not prevail over Te Ture Whaimana – the Vision and Strategy for the Waikato River.

1.6 Application of section 55(2A) of Act

(1) The change to regional plans or district plans required by the following clauses are amendments referred to in section 55(2) of the Act (which, because of section 55(2A), means that the changes must be made without using a process in Schedule 1 of the Act):

(b) Section 2.2 – Policy 2.

(c) Section 3.1(1)(a).

Part 2: Objective and policies

2.1 Objective

To secure, maintain and significantly increase renewable electricity generation in New Zealand as a nationally significant matter of priority and urgency, in order to:

(a) Reduce the rate of climate change and severity of its effects by reducing greenhouse gas emissions;

(b) Achieve New Zealand's energy and emission reduction targets as defined by legislation or central government policy documents or plans;

(c) Provide greater security of supply and resilience to the effects of climate change and natural hazards; and

(d) Sustain and enhance the social, economic, cultural, health and well-being of people and communities.

2.2 Policies

Policy 1: Planning decisions must recognise and enable the delivery of the nationally significant benefits of existing, upgraded, repowered or new renewable electricity generation at any scale, giving priority to those benefits over local adverse effects.

Policy 2: Planning decisions must secure, maintain, and protect existing REG assets and resources including by:

(a) Recognising and providing for the operational and/or functional needs of REG activities;

(b) Avoiding reverse sensitivity effects on REG activities;

(c) Avoiding the loss of existing renewable electricity generation output and operational flexibility, including through planning decisions involving existing REG assets;

(d) Avoiding any reduction in the potential utilisation of renewable resources resulting from incompatible subdivision, use or development;

(e) Enabling the timely and efficient upgrading and repowering of existing REG assets; and

(f) Assuming an existing environment that includes the operation of the existing REG asset when considering consent or designation renewals under the Act.

Policy 3: Planning decisions and processes must be effective and efficient and

deliver approvals for renewal of existing, upgraded, repowered or new REG activities at the necessary pace and scale to meet the objective including by:

(a) Enabling cumulative increases of REG capacity at any scale; and/or
(b) Recognising and providing for the operational and/or functional needs of new REG activities.

Policy 4: Planning decisions must recognise that REG activities need to be located where the renewable energy resource is located and provide for them in those areas.

Policy 5: Planning decisions allow REG activities on sites in Areas of National Importance, where any adverse effects of the activity are managed through the following Effects Management Framework:

(a) Adverse effects are avoided where practicable;

(b) Where adverse effects cannot practicably be avoided because:

  (i) For new REG activities, there is a functional or operational need for the activities to be on the site proposed in an ANI; or

  (ii) For existing REG activities, they are already in an ANI;

  they are mitigated where practicable; or

(c) Where adverse effects are not mitigated, they are remedied where practicable; or

(d) Where significant residual adverse effects on ANI's (a) to (c) are not avoided, remedied or mitigated, offsetting is provided; or

(e) Where significant residual adverse effects on ANI's (a) to (c) are not offset, compensation is provided.

(f) For the purposes of (b)(i) above, the functional or operational need for a new REG activity to be on a site in an ANI:

  (i) must be determined by considering, as applicable, the extent to which the site:

    - gives access to the renewable energy resource required for the REG activity, at a scale, level or quality needed to sustain the activity proposed;
    - enables the REG activity to locate close to demand and/or to connect to supporting infrastructure, such as transmission or distribution networks;
    - has sufficient and suitable land available to enable the effective operation of all activities required to support the generation, storage, transmission or distribution activities;
    - enables co-location with other REG activities and assets and/or other related infrastructure and activities (including electricity storage systems);

- is proximate to key resources, including but not limited to a sufficient workforce; and/or
- is accessible for construction, operation, maintenance, relocation, and upgrading purposes, but

(ii) does not require an assessment of alternative sites either within or outside the ANI

(g) For the purposes of (d) and (e) above, offsetting or compensation is not required to demonstrate net gain or no net loss but must minimise the net residual effect to the extent reasonably achievable while meeting the functional or operational needs of the activity.

Policy 6: Planning decisions allow REG activities on sites that are not within Areas of National Importance, where any adverse effects are avoided, remedied or mitigated to the extent practicable.

Policy 7: Māori interests in relation to REG activities are to be recognised and provided for, including through early engagement, protection of sites of significance in accordance with this policy statement, and through enabling REG activities.

Part 3: Implementation

3.1 Efficient Decision Making

(1) Decision-makers must, in giving effect to this National Policy Statement, and in making planning decisions regarding REG activities, adopt and apply plan provisions, consenting processes and decision making that:

(a) Provide for the ongoing existence of REG assets and the renewal, upgrading and repowering of existing REG activities as permitted or controlled activities, and new REG activities as either permitted, controlled or restricted discretionary activities, or as directed by any relevant national environmental standard.

(b) Provide for resource consent applications for REG activities to be processed and determined without limited or public notification, to the greatest extent permissible under the Act.

(c) Process and determine resource consent applications and designations for REG activities within the statutory timeframes set under the Act, and not waive or extend any such time limit, without the express consent of the applicant or requiring authority.

(d) Ensure that any requests for further information made including under s41 and s 41C or s92 of the Act are reasonable and proportionate to the scale and significance of the effects of the activity on the environment.

(e) Include as default policies that lapsing dates for resource consents and

designations for REG activities are set at 10 years, with consent durations being at least 35 years, or the maximum provided for under the Act (whichever is the greater).

3.2 Existing Environment

(1) Irrespective of the status of REG activities as determined by the provisions of any applicable national environmental standard or regional or district plan for the purposes of assessing the effects on the environment associated with renewal of resource consents or designations for existing REG activities, the existing environment is deemed to include the existing REG assets. In the context of a dam, the existing environment includes the impoundment of the water behind the dam and the changes the hydrological regime caused by that impoundment and any change in natural flows in the waterbody below the dam.

(2) The scope of enquiry in the context of any reconsenting of REG activities, for the purposes of making a planning decision including determining consent conditions, is to be limited to the operational aspects and environmental effects associated with the proposed ongoing operation of the REG activities in accordance with the provisions of this national policy statement, and any material new, different or additional effects arising. For the avoidance of doubt, this does not include any past effects associated with the original establishment and/or continued existence of existing REG assets.

Part 4: Timing

4.1 Time by which National Policy Statement to be implemented

(1) This National Policy Statement applies from the commencement date.

(2) Provisions required by this National Policy Statement to be inserted into regional plans, and district plans must be inserted within six months of the commencement date of this National Policy Statement.