



Mahinga kai and other Māori freshwater values factsheet

Essential Freshwater is part of a new national direction to protect and improve our rivers, streams, lakes and wetlands. The Essential Freshwater package aims to:

- stop further degradation of our freshwater
- start making immediate improvements so water quality improves within five years
- reverse past damage to bring our waterways and ecosystems to a healthy state within a generation.

Te Mana o te Wai is fundamental to all freshwater management

Te Mana o te Wai recognises the vital importance of water. It expresses the special connection that New Zealanders have with freshwater. By protecting the health of freshwater, we protect the health and well-being of people and our ecosystems. When managing freshwater, Te Mana o te Wai ensures the health and well-being of the water is protected before providing for human needs or enabling other uses of water. Through discussions with regional councils, tangata whenua and communities will have a say on how Te Mana o te Wai is applied in freshwater management locally. More information can be found in the [Te Mana o te Wai factsheet](#).

Who should read this factsheet

This factsheet is part of a [series](#) and provides information on the new mahinga kai compulsory value, and other Māori values in the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020 (NPS-FM 2020). It is intended for council staff, land users, iwi, the wider agricultural industry, farm advisors and consultants, and anyone else with an interest in freshwater policy.

What are the policies?

The NPS-FM 2020 requires regional councils to provide for values related to mahinga kai that tangata whenua hold for waterways in their region. In some regions, councils and tangata whenua may also agree to identify additional Māori freshwater values. These may include (but are not limited to):

- wai tapu
- transport for tauranga and waka
- natural form and character.

Councils must work with tangata whenua to identify Māori freshwater values¹ and then identify measures of freshwater health, also known as attributes (eg, eel numbers), and desired environmental outcomes. Freshwater values and attributes must then be incorporated into regional freshwater planning and decision-making regarding freshwater management, including the National Objectives Framework process.

Mahinga kai is one of four compulsory values in the NPS-FM 2020. More information about other values can be found in the [Values and attributes factsheet](#).

What does mahinga kai mean in the NPS-FM 2020?

The mahinga kai value comprises two main components as outlined below.

Kai is safe to harvest and eat

Mahinga kai generally refers to freshwater species that have traditionally been used as food, tools or other resources. It also refers to the places those species are found and to the act of catching them. Mahinga kai provide food for the people of the rohe and these sites give an indication of the overall health of the water. For this value, kai would be safe to harvest and eat. Transfer of knowledge is able to occur about the preparation, storage and cooking of kai. In freshwater management units (FMUs)² that are used for providing mahinga kai, the desired species are plentiful enough for long-term harvest and the range of desired species is present across all life stages.

Kei te ora te mauri (the mauri of the place is intact)

In FMUs or parts of FMUs that are valued for providing mahinga kai, customary resources are available for use, customary practices are able to be exercised to the extent desired, and tikanga and preferred methods are able to be practised.

When do the policies apply?

Councils need to notify their plans by 31 December 2024, with final decisions made and plans operational no later than two years after notification (or three years if they are granted an extension).

Why these policies?

Since the NPS-FM 2017, submitters, councils and advisory groups advocated for stronger direction for regional councils to engage with tangata whenua and incorporate Māori values into regional freshwater planning and management.

¹ Māori freshwater values include the compulsory value for mahinga kai **and** any other values identified by tangata whenua for a particular freshwater management unit (FMU) or part of an FMU through collaboration between tangata whenua and the regional council.

² Freshwater management unit or FMU: means all or any part of a water body or water bodies, and their related catchments, that a regional council determines as an appropriate unit for freshwater management and accounting purposes.

Elevating mahinga kai to a compulsory value promotes Māori measures of freshwater health to the same status as other biophysical values. The provisions also acknowledge that tangata whenua are the experts for the values and knowledge they hold for their local waterbodies and provide an avenue for the te ao Māori to be recognised in the freshwater management system.

More about the Essential Freshwater package

An overview of the Essential Freshwater package, including when different aspects commence or must be implemented, can be found in this [summary and milestones](#).

The package includes several new national rules and regulations including:

- new [National Environmental Standards for Freshwater](#)
- new [stock exclusion regulations](#) under section 360 of the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA)
- amendments to the [Resource Management \(Measurement and Reporting of Water Takes\) Regulations 2010](#)
- the [National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020](#), which replaces the NPS-FM 2017
- [amendments to the RMA](#), to provide for a faster freshwater planning process
- [amendments to the RMA](#), to enable mandatory and enforceable freshwater farm plans, and the creation of regulations for reporting nitrogen fertiliser sales.

Factsheets in this series

The full set of Essential Freshwater factsheets is available on our [website](#).

Find out more and give us feedback

Contact us by emailing freshwater@mfe.govt.nz, or visit the [Essential Freshwater page](#) on our website.

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