

## Guidance for District Plans Structure and Chapter Standards

This document provides guidance on the following standards:

- *4. District Plan Structure Standard*
- *6. Introduction and General Provisions Standard*
- *7. District-wide Matters Standard*
- *9. Designations Standard.*

This guidance is intended to help you understand and interpret the above planning standards so you can implement them efficiently and effectively. It should be read alongside the [Recommendations on submissions reports 2C District Plan Structure Standard](#) and [2E Chapter Standard](#) for further context.

The guidance is intended to be read as a whole because the issues it covers are cross-cutting and interrelated. We have developed this guidance based on our experience to date and will update it with more examples as councils begin to implement the planning standards.

### District Plan Structure

All parts in the *4. District Plan Structure Standard* are compulsory, as are all chapters shown in bold.

You must include chapters and sections shown in grey if they are relevant to the content in the district plan.

Headings are titles that group together one or more chapters of a common theme. These headings are included for ease of use and navigation. Headings have no provisions separate to their underlying chapters. If a chapter is included under a heading, that heading must also be included.

Additional chapters are allowed under most headings. There are several headings where you can include chapters you consider appropriate. These headings are *Tangata whenua/mana whenua*, *Strategic direction* (except *Urban form and development* which is required), *Energy, Infrastructure and Transport* and *Subdivision*. When you add extra chapters, or choose the chapters, you must add these in alphabetical order.

You can add sections and subsections where appropriate.

We expect most councils will need to make changes to their documents to align the form of their plans with the structure of the standards. However, we don't anticipate these changes to affect plan outcomes or impose new duties, functions or obligations on councils.

The range and names of land-use zones that can be used in district plans are set out and described in *8. Zone Framework Standard*. See *Guidance for the District Spatial Layers Standard* and *Zone Framework Standard* for more information about how the Zone Framework Standard works.

Direction 6 of the *4. District Plan Structure Standard* requires the zones used in a plan to be set out in the prescribed order under *Part 3 – Area-specific matters* heading. 'Grouping' chapters – for example, residential, rural, commercial and mixed use, industrial, open space and recreation, and special purpose zones – can contain provisions that apply to all zones within that grouping. For instance, provisions that apply to all residential zones could be located in a 'Residential zones – RESZ chapter', with provisions specific to particular zones located in their respective zone sections, for example, 'Medium density residential zone'. Alternatively, if there are no provisions that apply to all zones, the grouping chapter could effectively function as a heading. If only one zone is used from the grouping, that zone section is elevated to chapter level.

We expect most provisions that relate specifically to a zone will be located within the individual zone section as opposed to the zone grouping chapter.

## 6. Introduction and general provisions

### Introduction

The introduction provides a location for information including a foreword or mihi, table of contents, purpose of the plan and a description of the district. None of the chapters in the introduction section are mandatory. They should only be included if you consider them useful plan components.

A description of the district can include 'key information (including issues) about the district relevant from a resource management perspective' (referred to in direction 4). This may include information on the district's:

- history
- geography
- geographic area
- demography
- population
- services
- transport routes
- tangata whenua/mana whenua<sup>1</sup>
- natural hazards
- urban, rural and natural environment
- major industries and resources.

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<sup>1</sup> This is likely to be basic, introductory information and may be cross-referenced to the *Tangata whenua/mana whenua* heading.

Although all of the above examples could be included in this part of the plan, it is important you only include information that helps the policy and rule framework that follows. The requirements of section 18A of the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) apply to all plans and state that plans “include only those matters relevant to the purpose” of the Act and be “worded in a way that is clear and concise”.

## How the plan works

The *How the plan works* heading provides a location for statutory information relevant to plans, including pending and existing Treaty of Waitangi settlement legislation. This legislation, or related statutory documents (referred to in direction 5c), includes legislation and documents that have not been through a full settlement process. You don’t have to include these documents in plans, however if you choose to refer to them in a plan you must place that information under the *How the plan works* heading.

## Relationships between spatial layers

The *Relationships between spatial layers* chapter must be included in plans because it is considered necessary to explain and clarify the relationships between spatial layers for plan users.

The [Guidance for National Planning Standards: 12. District Spatial Layers](#) provides guidance on how spatial layers relate to one another that can help you write this chapter (referred to in direction 8).

## Interpretation

The *Interpretation* heading must be included in plans as the *Definitions* and *Abbreviations* chapters are compulsory. The *10. Format Standard* and *14. Definitions Standard* provide the structure, form and some content of the definitions chapter. Therefore, guidance for the *Definitions* chapter is included within [Guidance for National Planning Standards: 10. Format](#) and [Guidance for National Planning Standards: 14. Definitions](#).

An *Abbreviations chapter* must be included and contain at least the abbreviations included in *Table 7: Abbreviations*. This is because the abbreviations are used in the tables that must be included in the *National direction instruments* chapter. If you use abbreviations in your plan (in accordance with directions 5 and 8 and the unique identifiers in Table 16 of *10. Format Standard*) you should also include them in the abbreviations table.

## National direction instruments

The *National direction instruments* heading is compulsory and requires you to include the content of tables 9–12 under the prescribed chapters.

In table 9, you must insert your choice from the options in directions 17 and 23 for national policy statements and the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement and, when relevant to the local setting, table 12 for water conservation orders. The options provide plan users with an indication of when you have last reviewed your plan in relation to each individual piece of national direction. You may or may not have actually initiated an associated plan change.

You can format the tables to suit the individual ‘look and feel’ of your plan. The formatting of the tables is not directed by the planning standards.

The Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act 2000 is included in table 9 because sections 7 and 8 of this Act are treated as a national policy statement and New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement. The Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act 2000 will only be a relevant consideration for a few councils.

Directions 19 and 21 of 6. *Introduction and General Provisions Standard* requires you to update tables 10 and 11 in your plan, either when the relevant table in the planning standards is updated, or when new national direction takes effect. You must also include table 9 in your plan and should also update this table when new national policy statements take effect, so long as you keep the format of this table. This allows you to provide an up-to-date list of all national direction tools in your plan, with a corresponding comment as to whether the plan has been updated to reflect specific national direction tools.

A Schedule 1 process is not necessary to include any new national direction instruments with associated links, as this will be a part of the mandatory planning standards and including links is considered to be a minor change.

## **Tangata whenua/mana whenua**

The *Tangata whenua/mana whenua* heading and chapter provides a location for context and process-related tangata whenua/mana whenua provisions.

The term tangata whenua/mana whenua is used in the planning standards as a title for this heading. You are not required to use this term and can determine an appropriate term locally. If you cannot decide on an appropriate term then you can use either the term tangata whenua or mana whenua.

The 'matters to consider for provisions under the *Tangata whenua/mana whenua*' heading in direction 28 are included as a starting point for councils to consider when deciding what to include in the associated chapters. The content is not required but, if used, can be placed under the heading in any location. This flexibility is intended to give you the ability to determine with local tangata whenua/mana whenua the way these provisions are incorporated into your plan.

Recommended headings under this chapter include:

- recognition of hapū and iwi
- tangata whenua/mana whenua – local authority relationships
- hapū and iwi planning documents
- involvement and participation with tangata whenua/mana whenua.

The location of content under the *Tangata whenua/mana whenua* heading has also been kept flexible to enable information relating to tangata whenua/mana whenua resource management to be located outside of the plan (such as on a council website) and hyperlinked within the plan.

The *Tangata whenua/mana whenua* heading must only include context and process-related provisions. It is intended other tangata whenua/mana whenua provisions are incorporated throughout the plan, to encourage integration.

We expect councils will engage with tangata whenua/mana whenua to create provisions under the *Tangata whenua/mana whenua* heading, and other parts of the plan that relate to their interests, as part of the plan-making process, even when a Schedule 1 process is not required.

You should locate all provisions relating to sites of significance to Māori in the *Sites of significance to Māori* chapter. You should only include details of such sites following agreement with Māori.

Information on good practice for engagement with tangata whenua is available from:

- [Guidelines for engagement with Māori](#), prepared by Te Arawhiti
- [consultation with tangata whenua](#) on the quality planning website
- the [Te Aranga](#) principles
- the [An Everyday Guide to the RMA](#) series on our website.

## 7. District-wide matters

Part 2 of district plans sets out district-wide matters. It addresses common planning matters that can be usefully addressed in topic-based chapters and that don't conform to zone boundaries. These typically relate to values, risks and specific activities such as noise and temporary activities.

The structure consists of seven headings with chapters under each. Some chapter names are fixed while you can determine the names of others, as needed. You should consolidate and locate topic-based provisions in the relevant *District-wide matters* chapter (rather than in *Area-specific matters* or a *Zone*). For example, you must locate noise rules relating to a General residential zone in the *Noise* chapter of District-wide matters, not in the General residential zone. Any provision in a *District-wide matters* chapter may be supported by higher-level objectives and policies in another *District-wide matters* chapter, as long as the line of sight between them is clear.

Sometimes, a plan's provisions will not fall neatly into one of the chapters, and you will need to decide the most appropriate location. To help with that, we suggest you consider the following approach.

### What is the overall purpose of the provision?

Does the purpose of the provision relate to protecting a value or managing a risk where the appropriate heading is already provided in the structure, even though the provision may also relate to something else?

For example, signage on heritage buildings: is the purpose of the provision mainly to preserve heritage values? If yes, then *Historical heritage* will be the best location. But if this provision is more about wider effects or an overall strategic approach, it should be placed in the *Signs* chapter. Include a cross-reference between the chapters so the provisions can be found from either location.

### What are the effects being managed?

Does the provision relate to specific places of value? For example, an 'avoid' policy relating to earthworks in outstanding natural landscapes would most likely belong in the *Natural features and landscapes* chapter. Alternatively, if the policy was more concerned with managing the general adverse effects of earthworks wherever they occurred, the *Earthworks* chapter would be more appropriate. Again, use cross-referencing to the 'subsidiary' chapter.

Direction 38 of 7. *District-wide Matters Standard* allows councils to include additional chapters to address other matters on a district-wide basis. For example, a chapter could be included to manage papakāinga and contain specific provisions relating to it that apply district wide.

Another example is the location of financial contributions, as there is no specific location for these in the district plan structure. You could place these in the subdivision chapter, for example, if that is what they solely relate to. Alternatively, they could be included as a new district-wide 'financial

contributions' chapter. Additional chapters must be included alphabetically under the *General district-wide matters* heading.

## Strategic direction

The *Strategic direction* heading provides a location for the high-level direction that district councils are working towards for their city and/or district. This is an area of emerging best practice in second-generation plans. Strategic direction is often supported with objectives and policies that tend to relate to the whole city and/or district and may include cross-cutting issues.

Some examples of strategic issues identified in such chapters include:

- recognising special characteristics of a city or district
- recognising the impacts of climate change and climate change mitigations adopted in the plan
- significant investment in transport that will in turn influence land-use change over the life of the plan
- strategic resource management issues specific to the city and/or district (eg, tourism and energy).

The *Strategic direction* heading requires an *Urban form and development* chapter. This is mandatory because we expect this is where councils will put content relating to the National Policy Statement on Urban Development (NPS-UD).

The NPS-UD requires councils to plan well for growth and ensure a well-functioning urban environment for all people, communities and future generations.

This includes:

- ensuring urban development occurs in a way that takes into account the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi (te Tiriti o Waitangi)
- ensuring that plans make room for growth both 'up' and 'out', and that rules are not unnecessarily constraining growth
- developing, monitoring and maintaining an evidence base about demand, supply and prices for housing and land to inform planning decisions
- aligning and coordinating planning across urban areas.

The objectives and high-level policies of the NPS-UD 2020 apply to all councils that have all or part of an urban environment within their district or region. However, some policies apply only to tier 1 or tier 2 councils.

Direction 1.d provides a location for information about how resource management issues of significance to iwi authorities are addressed in your plan. You should consider this content in relation to the content included in 7. *Introduction and general provisions* directions 5.b and c (Māori-related RMA provisions and Treaty of Waitangi settlement legislation) and information included under the *Tangata whenua/manā whenua* heading. Content should also focus on the issues that tangata whenua/manā whenua identify as significant in the district. You can cross-reference content from other headings if necessary, to avoid repetition.

## Energy, infrastructure and transport

You can decide what the relevant chapters should be under this heading. One example would be having one chapter for each topic, that is, an energy chapter, an infrastructure chapter and a transport chapter. Alternatively, you could combine these issues in one chapter, with several sections.

When you choose your chapter names you will also need to choose a unique identifier for that chapter that meets the requirement of *10. Format Standard* (see *National Planning Standard Guidance 10. Format* for further information on chapter identification).

You should locate most provisions related to energy, infrastructure and transport under this heading unless they are addressed in a specific, special purpose zone (such as a port or mining zone). This means these chapters may include provisions to do with issues such as earthworks when they are related to infrastructure. This is your choice. Any provisions that relate to another topic within these chapters must be cross-referenced to the relevant other chapter (earthworks in this example) for ease of use and navigation.

## Hazards and risks

Any methods used to identify risk and the effects of natural hazards within the *Natural hazards* chapter should also consider the effects of climate change. You may wish to address a range of hazards in your plan and could use sections to do this.

You must place provisions relating to coastal hazards in the *Coastal environment* chapter under the *General district-wide matters* heading. Cross-references to these provisions in the *Coastal environment* chapter should be included under the *Natural hazards* chapter for ease of use and navigation.

Hazardous substances has not been included in the *4. District Plan Structure Standard* as this chapter should only be included when you are addressing a gap in legislation or regulation.

Any provisions within the *Contaminated land* chapter should only address issues not covered by the Resource Management (National Environmental Standard for Assessing and Managing Contaminants in Soil to Protect Human Health) Regulations 2011.

## Historical and cultural values

In the planning standards, historic heritage has the same meaning as in the RMA Section 2:

1. means those natural and physical resources that contribute to an understanding and appreciation of New Zealand's history and cultures, deriving from any of the following qualities:
  - a. archaeological:
  - b. architectural:
  - c. cultural:
  - d. historic:
  - e. scientific:
  - f. technological; and
2. includes—
  - a. historic sites, structures, places, and areas; and

- b. archaeological sites; and
- c. sites of significance to Māori, including wāhi tapu; and
- d. surroundings associated with the natural and physical resources.

All provisions relating to sites and areas of significance to Māori should be located in the *Sites of significance to Māori* chapter. Sites and areas of significance to Māori are distinguishable from historical heritage as they require a particular process of identification and may require ongoing management, rather than protection. You should only include site details with the agreement of Māori. You should also place earthworks provisions relating to sites of significance to Māori, and/or archaeological sites in this chapter. This is because the adverse effects being controlled relate more directly to the effects on the sites than they do to the normal adverse effects of earthworks generally. Cross-referencing of these provisions to the *Earthworks* chapter should be provided.

The definition of site in the *14. Definitions Standard* doesn't apply to the definition of sites of significance to Māori, which are defined in the RMA. This recognises that sites and areas of significance to Māori vary in size and may cover large areas.

An explanation of the term 'cultural landscapes' used in direction 17a can be found on the [quality planning website](#). The term 'regulatory processes' in direction 17e refers to any processes set out in legislation, such as in the RMA or in any existing or pending Treaty of Waitangi settlement legislation or related statutory documents.

Where provisions address cultural values and general district-wide matters (eg, signs on a heritage building or culturally significant biodiversity), we consider it appropriate for councils to decide the best location for these provisions, depending on the main outcomes sought from them. In this instance, cross-referencing should be provided.

## Natural environmental values

This heading includes chapters for *Ecosystems and indigenous biodiversity*, *Natural character*, *Natural features and landscapes*, and *Public access*.

A chapter on public access is included under the *Natural environmental values* heading as issues associated with public access are an RMA Part 2 matter. This chapter is the right location for esplanade provisions, if these are provided for public access reasons, and other provisions that maintain and enhance public access to, and along, the coastal marine area, lakes and rivers.

The natural character chapter is intended to contain provisions that protect the natural character of wetlands, lakes and rivers and/or margins. Where interconnected provisions exist between the natural character and public access chapters, cross-references to relevant provisions could be included to clarify relationships between such provisions for plan users.

## Subdivision

The directions for this heading mainly require all district-wide provisions specific to subdivision to be located under the *Subdivision* heading. This approach has been taken because current plans typically include all subdivision provisions in one location. Therefore, we consider consolidating provisions with cross-referencing a better approach than separating and, in some cases, duplicating provisions.

There will be instances when subdivision provisions may be supported by higher-level objectives and policies in other district-wide chapters. For example, direction 21 requires provisions that protect and manage outstanding natural features and landscapes – including from inappropriate subdivision,



use and development – to be included in the *Natural landscapes and features* chapter. This means some objectives and policies may be in other chapters with related rules in the *Subdivision* chapter/s. In this instance, cross-referencing should be provided.

You have discretion on how to group provisions under the *Subdivision* heading. You can either group all:

- provisions in one subdivision chapter, or
- over-arching subdivision provisions, and apply more specific subdivision-related chapters. For example, a separate chapter on boundary adjustments.

## General district-wide matters

### Activities on the surface of waterways

The *Activities on the surface of waterways* chapter includes provisions that address council functions under section 31(1)(e) of the RMA. This can include provisions that manage amenity effects from activities on the surface of water bodies and from activities generated by new structures on, or adjacent to, these water bodies (such as noise and visual amenity effects).

### Coastal environment

The *Coastal environment* chapter is located under the *General district-wide matters* heading because issues in this chapter can cover a wider range than just natural environmental values (where this chapter was previously located).

All provisions relating specifically to the coastal environment, and any relating to coastal hazards, must be located in the *Coastal environment* chapter. Coastal hazard provisions are specifically required to be included in this chapter to ensure councils are consistent with the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement 2010, and to achieve integration in the area of coastal hazards.

Provisions relating to the coastal environment but that mainly relate to matters with another ‘home’ in the structure (eg, hazardous substances, biodiversity, subdivision, earthworks, noise and light, energy, infrastructure and transport) must be located in the relevant topic chapter and cross-referenced in the *Coastal environment* chapter.

### Earthworks

The directions for the *Earthworks* chapter mainly require all earthworks provisions to be located in that chapter. This is because earthworks is an activity with effects that are common and occur or apply across a district. Therefore, we consider consolidating provisions with cross-referencing a better approach than separating and duplicating provisions.

Two examples of where exceptions to this approach could apply are for provisions relating to energy, infrastructure or transport, and to sites of significance to Māori and archaeological sites.

- For the *Energy, infrastructure and transport* chapter(s), the intention of the planning standards structure is to locate infrastructure-related provisions in one place in a plan. This is to provide clarity regarding the location of infrastructure provisions for councils, plan users and infrastructure providers. Centralising these provisions makes it easier for landowners who live adjacent to infrastructure corridors to understand their responsibilities around earthworks on or near their property. Direction 30 requires cross-referencing in the subdivision chapters to the relevant provisions under the *Energy, infrastructure, and transport* heading when this occurs.

- For sites of significance to Māori and archaeological sites, earthworks provisions related to these are not placed in the *Earthworks* chapter. This is because the adverse effects being controlled by the provisions relate more directly to the effects on the sites than they do to the normal adverse effects of earthworks generally. Cross-referencing of these provisions to the *Earthworks* chapter should also be provided.

## Noise

The directions for the *Noise* chapter mainly require all noise provisions to be located in this chapter. This is because plans typically include noise provisions that apply to noise-related activities as well as some that apply to specific topics or zones. Therefore, we consider consolidating provisions with cross-referencing a better approach than separating and, in some cases, duplicating provisions.

An example of the exception to consolidating noise provisions in the planning standards is energy, infrastructure or transport provisions. This is for the same reasons as noted above in the guidance on the *Subdivision* heading. Direction 35 requires a cross-reference in the *Noise* chapter to the relevant provisions under the *Energy, infrastructure and transport* heading when this occurs for ease of use and navigation.

## 9. Designations

Designations are required to be included under one heading in *Part 2 Area-specific matters*.

Each requiring authority must have its own chapter under this heading. Each chapter must include a table for each designation of that requiring authority. The table must meet the requirements set out in the *9. Designation Standard*.

This table needs to include a row for 'other information' for any other information you consider appropriate, for example, whether the designation is a roll-over designation or a legacy plan reference.

The *9. Designation Standard* includes *Table 14 designations*, which references designation hierarchy under section 177 of the RMA. Table 14 requires you to insert the term 'primary', 'secondary' or 'varies' in each designation table. While section 177 of the RMA does not include reference to primary, secondary or varies designations, these terms are intended to establish priority where there are overlapping designations, for example:

- Primary – where the designation is the primary one on site and all other designation holders must request permission. This is also relevant for when there is only one designation.
- Secondary – where the designation is not the primary designation, they must obtain permission from the primary designation holder.
- Varies – where the status of the designation is primary in some parts and secondary in others.

The *9. Designation Standard* also includes *Table 15 requiring authority unique identifiers*. This table includes unique identifiers for a number of requiring authorities considered common across the country. You must create your own unique identifiers for other requiring authorities relevant to your district. The identifiers created must meet the requirements of *10. Format Standard*.

## Appendices and maps

Part 4 must be included and named “appendices and maps”, “appendices” or “maps”, depending on the content. You may include appendices in this part or within the relevant chapter. This is for you to decide, but the length of the appendix may be a deciding factor.

Appendices may include schedules that are not included within the relevant chapter. The *10. Format Standard* sets out the minimum requirements for all schedules in district plans. For further detail, refer to the *Guidance for National Planning Standards: 10. Format*. You may add more detail to schedules if you consider this appropriate.

In its submission on the draft planning standards, Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga (Heritage New Zealand) set out the information it considers should be included in historical and cultural schedules. As we decided to make the requirements for schedules minimum requirements, we have included the information Heritage New Zealand requested as guidance. Therefore, in addition to the requirements of direction 14 of the *10. Format Standard*, we note here, as guidance, that Heritage New Zealand would like to see the following matters in historical and cultural-related schedules:

For all historical and cultural schedules:

- coordinates (excluding sites of significance to Māori)
- reference to the study and/or material used for identification (eg, heritage assessments) and, where available, links to heritage assessments
- New Zealand Heritage List/Rārangi Kōrero reference number and status
- New Zealand Archaeological Association (NZAA) reference number (where the site is also an archaeological site).

In addition, for heritage buildings the heritage classification (eg, Group A or B) would be useful. For Māori heritage and archaeological sites, the heritage classification (eg, wāhi tapu site, wāhi tapu area, wāhi tūpuna) would be helpful.

## Disclaimer

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**Making Aotearoa New Zealand**  
*the most liveable place in the world*  
Aotearoa – he whenua mana kura mō te tangata

**New Zealand Government**