



Minister	Hon Chris Bishop	Portfolio	RMA Reform
Name of package	Material relating to Petition of John Hearnshaw	Date to be published	7 April 2025

List of documents that have been proactively released		
<i>Date</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>
24 February 2025	<u>CAB-519: Government Response to the Report of the Petitions Committee on the Petition of John Hearnshaw</u>	Ministry for the Environment

In Confidence

Office of the Minister Responsible for RMA Reform

LEG - Cabinet Legislation Committee

Government Response to the Report of the Petitions Committee on the Petition of John Hearnshaw: New Zealand needs a national law to limit light pollution and promote dark skies

Proposal

- 1 In accordance with Standing Order 256, this Cabinet paper seeks approval of the Government's response to the Petitions Committee's (the Committee), Report on the petition of John Hearnshaw: *New Zealand needs a national law to limit light pollution and promote dark skies* (Appendix 1).

Background

- 2 *Introduce legislation to limit light pollution* (the petition) was submitted to the House by John Hearnshaw¹ on 16 May 2023. It received 1,368 signatures from the public.
- 3 The petition requested "that the House of Representatives introduce legislation to limit light pollution following similar laws in France and Croatia, covering public and private exterior illumination and ensuring light is only used where and when it is essential".
- 4 The petitioner stated in their petition that "light pollution from artificial light at night can harm human health by disrupting circadian rhythm and the production of hormones such as melatonin. Artificial light at night has an adverse impact on many species of fauna and flora".
- 5 The petition was referred to the Committee in May 2023. It received written and oral submissions from the petitioner, Royal Astronomical Society of New Zealand, Ministry for the Environment, Department of Conservation, Forest & Bird Eastern Bay of Plenty, Lighting Council New Zealand. The Committee's report (the report) was released on 15 November 2024 (Appendix 2).

The Petitions Committee recommendations

- 6 The report outlines the actions proposed in the petition. The report highlighted some of the benefits of reducing light pollution, including better human health, benefits to flora and fauna, economic and environmental benefits from less wasted electricity, better safety at night and making it easier to see the stars.
- 7 The Committee provided three recommendations:
 - 7.1 that Government investigates how to limit growth of artificial light at night in New Zealand, including considering the option of establishing a set of national guidelines that could be voluntarily adopted by local councils;

¹ Prof John Hearnshaw, Emeritus Professor of Astronomy at the University of Canterbury.

- 7.2 that Government begins work in 2025 because developing an appropriate solution will take some time, and artificial light at night in New Zealand is increasing significantly each year;
- 7.3 if the Government develops a set of national guidelines for light at night, the guidelines focus on the development of new facilities, buildings, and streets.

Comment on the Petitions Committee recommendations

- 8 The Government has considered the recommendations in the report. At this time the Government is not proposing to develop guidelines for local councils on artificial light. The Resource Management Act (1991) (RMA) provides flexibility for districts and regions to manage this at a local level. As noted in the Ministry for the Environment written submission, some councils already have in place guidelines on lighting to support their region as a dark sky area or reserve. Different areas of the country have different objectives and considerations for artificial lighting, whether that be for dark skies or for promoting safety in urban areas. Therefore, any national approach would need to reflect and allow for those differences.
- 9 The Government has a comprehensive work programme on the resource management system. Phase 2 includes amendments to national direction and Phase 3 replaces the RMA with a new resource management system. Any review of how artificial light is controlled would sensibly follow these phases of reform. Given the timeframe and scale of work involved in Phase 2 and Phase 3 of reform, priority cannot be given to specifically addressing artificial light during this time.
- 10 Due to other priorities on the Government's resource management work programme, the Government is not proposing any additional action in response to the report, at this time.

Financial Implications

- 11 There are no financial implications arising from the recommendations in this paper.

Legislative Implications

- 12 Based on the recommendations by the Committee, and Government response to the Committee's report, legislation is not required.

Impact Analysis

- 13 There are no regulatory proposals in this paper, therefore Cabinet's impact analysis requirements do not apply.

Consultation

- 14 Departmental consultation included Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE), Department of Conservation, and Department of Internal Affairs. MBIE provided feedback and suggested minor inclusions to the Government Response on the benefit of dark sky regions for tourism. No other feedback was received.

Publicity

- 15 The attached Government response will become publicly available following tabling in the House.

Proactive Release

- 16 I intend to proactively release this Cabinet paper within 30 working days of Cabinet making its decision.

Recommendations

The Minister Responsible for RMA Reform recommends that the Cabinet Legislation Committee:

- 17 **note** that on 15 November 2024, the Petitions Committee published its report entitled “Petitions of John Hearnshaw: New Zealand needs a national law to limit light pollution and promote dark skies”;
- 18 **approve** the Government Response to the Petitions Committee report, attached as Appendix 1;
- 19 **invite** the Minister Responsible for RMA Reform to present the Government response to the House in accordance with Standing Order 256;
- 20 **invite** the Minister Responsible for RMA Reform to write to the petitioner enclosing a copy of the Government response to the report of the Petitions Committee on the petition, after the response has been presented to the House;

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Chris Bishop

Minister Responsible for RMA Reform

Please note: Appendices 1 and 2 are withheld in line with section 18(d) of the Official Information Act 1982.

Appendix 1: Government Response to Report of Petitions Committee on Petition of John Hearnshaw: New Zealand needs a national law to limit light pollution and promote dark skies is publicly available at: <https://bills.parliament.nz/v/4/ce40643d-587f-4681-6807-08dd59d6b7a6>

Appendix 2: Petitions Committee - Petition of John Hearnshaw: New Zealand needs a national law to limit light pollution and promote dark skies is publicly available at: <https://selectcommittees.parliament.nz/v/SelectCommitteeReport/c6405a05-ac61-4cb1-3062-08dd04fb765a>