Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions & Transport

PROACTIVE RELEASE COVERSHEET

Minister	Hon Chris Bishop	**Portfolio**	Minister Responsible for RMA Reform
Name of package	Cabinet paper and minutes for Illustrative National Policy Direction	**Date to be published**	23/10/2026

List of documents that have been proactively released		
Date	***Title***	***Author***
19/08/2026	Illustrative National Policy Direction: Approval to Engage	Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport
19/08/2026	ECO-26-MIN-0154 Cabinet Economic Policy Committee Minute of Decision	Cabinet Office
24/08/2026	CAB-26-MIN-0277 Cabinet Minute of Decision	Cabinet Office

Information redacted **YES**

Any information redacted in this document is redacted in accordance with the Official Information Act 1982. Where this is the case, the reasons for withholding information are listed below. Where information has been withheld, no public interest has been identified that would outweigh the reasons for withholding it.

Summary of reasons for redaction

Some information has been withheld from CAB-26-MIN-0277 Report of the Cabinet Economic Policy Committee as it is out of scope of this proactive release.

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Office of the Minister Responsible for RMA Reform

Office of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary to the Minister Responsible for RMA Reform

ECO - Cabinet Economic Policy Committee

Illustrative National Policy Direction: Approval to Engage

Proposal

1 This paper seeks Cabinet agreement to release an illustrative National Policy Direction (NPD) for public engagement. The purpose of the public engagement is to test the design and usability of the illustrative NPD and build confidence in the new planning system.

Relation to Government Priorities

2 The Government is establishing a new planning system that will make it easier to deliver housing, infrastructure, farming and economic growth while protecting the environment.

3 NPD will sit at the top of the national instrument hierarchy of the new planning system. It particularises the goals of the primary legislation and directs decision-makers how to achieve them. As such, it will support a range of Government priorities, including:

3.1 Freeing up land for development and removing unnecessary planning barriers as part of the Going for Housing Growth programme (National Party policy, Coalition Agreement National Party/ACT Party).

3.2 Making it easier to build new infrastructure, including renewable energy, houses, and enhancing the primary sector (2023 Speech from the Throne, Coalition Agreement National Party/New Zealand First, Coalition Agreement National Party/ACT Party).

3.3 Removing the regulatory burden for farmers and replacing the National Policy Statement for Freshwater. (National Party policy, Coalition Agreement National Party/New Zealand First).

Executive Summary

4 The Government is establishing a new planning system that will unlock housing, infrastructure, farming and economic growth by making development faster, simpler and more certain, while continuing to protect the environment. The Planning and Natural Environment Bills (the Bills) that underpin this new system are on track to be passed in September 2026, though many submitters and stakeholders noted they want more visibility of how the system will work in practice; the proposals in this paper will respond to that feedback.

5 We propose releasing an illustrative NPD (Appendix 1) for public engagement in August 2026 before the Bills are enacted.

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6 The NPD will sit at the top of the national instrument hierarchy established by the Bills and will be the key mechanism for translating legislative intent into nationally consistent direction that gives effect to the Government's priorities.

7 Public engagement on an illustrative NPD will test the design and usability of the new framework, build confidence in the new planning system, and will inform the statutory development of NPD under the new legislation once it is passed. This will show the public how the new system will look and feel different.

8 The illustrative NPD is structured around key themes, including housing and development, infrastructure, primary production, resources and public values. The illustrative NPD content draws on the changes we have made to national direction under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) over the last two years, as well as initiatives such as Going for Housing Growth and Electrify New Zealand.

9 The illustrative NPD is provided for engagement purposes only and has been developed on the basis of existing Government policy. No policy decisions are sought in this paper. It will not replace the statutory consultation and decision-making processes required under the new legislative framework.

Background

10 The Planning Bill and the Natural Environment Bill were reported back to the House by the Environment Committee on 20 July 2026. They both require the development of an NPD. The NPD sets the direction for the system - making clear how the goals of each Bill are to be delivered, identifying national priorities, and providing guidance on how to manage trade-offs where competing objectives arise. It will also guide the preparation of national standards, regional spatial plans, land use plans, and natural environment plans.

11 Over the last few months, submitters on the Bills and key stakeholders across the planning system have been clear that they want early visibility of how the new system will work in practice. There is strong interest in seeing an illustrative version of the NPD to better understand how decisions will be made under the new framework. This engagement will provide an early indication of how the system could function in practice, including the matters councils may be required to plan for and the role of national instruments in shaping future regional spatial planning.

What the Illustrative NPD proposes

12 The illustrative NPD provides an example of how NPD could be structured and expressed in the new planning system. It brings together direction on the Government's key priorities within a single framework that can be tested with system users before the statutory process begins.

13 We have decided to develop a single illustrative NPD that combines the goals of both Bills rather than preparing a separate one for each Bill. This approach ensures a more coordinated and cohesive framework, reduces duplication and supports a consistent approach to achieving the intended outcomes.

14 The illustrative NPD is organised around five themes that reflect the Government's priorities for the planning system:

14.1 Housing and development

14.2 Infrastructure

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14.3 Primary production and the rural economy

14.4 Resources: quarrying, mining and waste

14.5 Public values.

15 Bringing direction together within a theme-based framework allows users to better understand how priorities are intended to operate alongside one another, including where competing objectives may need to be balanced. Some cross-cutting direction for the goals in the Bills on reverse sensitivity, natural hazards and providing for Māori interests is included at the front of the document and incorporated within themes where appropriate.

16 Public engagement will help us test whether this approach is clear, practical and capable of supporting implementation of the new system. Feedback will inform decisions about the final design and structure of NPD following enactment of the legislation.

17 The content of the illustrative NPD generally reflects our existing priorities (including Going for Housing Growth and the Phase 2 national direction programme). However, the NPD for this engagement is illustrative only and it is not proposed Government policy.

Public Engagement

18 As the NPD is a key instrument in the new planning system, we propose to undertake public engagement ahead of enactment. Engagement will occur for eight weeks starting in August 2026. An accompanying explainer document (Appendix 2) will be released alongside the illustrative NPD to help stakeholders understand the structure of the new system, and how the various components of the new planning system work together.

19 The illustrative NPD will be clearly identified as indicative only, and the engagement process will be described as non-statutory. It will also provide an indicative list of national standards under each theme to help submitters understand how the two national instruments could work together. This approach will support early feedback and build stakeholder understanding of the new system, while avoiding any implication that decisions have been made ahead of the Bills being enacted or the future statutory decision-making process for national instruments.

20 Feedback from this engagement will help inform the development of the NPD for statutory consultation in 2027.

Next Steps

21 We intend to publicly announce the engagement following Cabinet agreement. Engagement will run for eight weeks starting in August 2026.

22 Following engagement, officials will analyse feedback to inform the development of the NPD for Cabinet consideration, ahead of statutory consultation in 2027.

Cost-of-living Implications.

23 The new planning system is intended to lower the cost of getting things done by reducing complexity, improving consistency, and enabling housing, infrastructure and economic growth. NPD is a key mechanism for delivering these benefits by providing clear and nationally consistent direction across the planning system.

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Financial Implications

24 The proposals in this paper do not entail financial implications for the Crown.

Legislative Implications

25 We are not proposing any legislative amendments as part of this engagement. The Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill are expected to be enacted in September 2026. Once enacted, they will establish the statutory process for developing, notifying, and finalising NPD.

Impact Analysis

Regulatory Analysis Summary

26 A Regulatory Analysis Summary is not required because this paper does not seek decisions on regulatory proposals or the content of the NPD. The engagement is non-statutory, exploratory in nature, and will not pre-empt future policy decisions. A Regulatory Analysis Summary will be provided to support Cabinet consideration of statutory NPD proposals in 2027.

Climate Implications of Policy Assessment

27 The Climate Implications of Policy Assessment (CIPA) team has been consulted and confirms that the CIPA requirements do not apply to this policy proposal at this time. The CIPA team will be consulted again when the proposal reaches a later stage, at which point a CIPA assessment will be prepared if required.

Population Implications

28 NPD is intended to support a planning system that better enables housing, infrastructure, environmental management and economic development outcomes for communities across New Zealand. Further analysis on population implications will be provided to support Cabinet consideration of statutory NPD proposals in 2027.

Human Rights

29 There are no direct human rights implications resulting from this paper. Consistency with the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 and the Human Rights Act 1993 will be assessed as the work programme is implemented and through further Cabinet decisions.

Use of External Resources

30 One planning consultant has been engaged by the Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport (MCERT) for approximately ten months to contribute to the development the illustrative NPD.

Consultation

31 Officials have tested the high-level structure with key stakeholders and partners, including local government, iwi/Māori, industry, infrastructure, practitioners and environmental groups and sought feedback on their aspirations for the NPD. This has informed the development of the illustrative NPD.

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32 The following agencies were consulted on this Cabinet paper and some agencies provided feedback that has been considered: Department of Conservation, Department of Corrections, Land Information New Zealand, Ministry for Business, Innovation and Employment, Ministry for Culture and Heritage, Ministry for Primary Industries, Ministry for Regulation, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice, Parliamentary Counsel Office, Te Puni Kōkiri, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Office of Treaty Settlements and Takutai Moana - Te Tari Whakatau, and the Treasury.

33 In addition to the agencies above, MCERT has worked with Kāinga Ora, Health New Zealand, Natural Hazards Commission, National Emergency Management Agency, the New Zealand Environmental Protection Authority, New Zealand Transport Agency, and Te Waihanga: New Zealand Infrastructure Commission in developing the illustrative NPD.

34 Te Puni Kōkiri expressed concern that they have had limited input into the content of the illustrative NPD.

35 The purpose of releasing the illustrative NPD now is to elicit feedback. There will be further opportunities for agency involvement in the development of the NPD ahead of statutory consultation next year.

Communications

36 An announcement will be supported by a media release on the beehive.govt.nz website, media engagement, and targeted communications through council, iwi and stakeholder networks. The public will be directed to the engagement material and the online engagement portal.

Proactive Release

37 This Cabinet paper and related Cabinet minutes will be proactively released when the non-statutory engagement material is published and will be subject to redaction as appropriate under the Official Information Act 1982.

Recommendations

The Minister Responsible for RMA Reform and Parliamentary Under-Secretary to the Minister Responsible for RMA Reform recommend that the Committee:

1 **Note** the Government is reforming the resource management system to make it easier to deliver housing, infrastructure and economic growth while protecting the environment by passing the Planning and Natural Environment Bills

2 **Note** National Policy Direction will sit at the top of the national instrument hierarchy established by the Planning and Natural Environment Bills and will give practical effect to the Government's priorities for the new planning system

3 **Agree** to release an illustrative National Policy Direction and supporting material for non-statutory public engagement for eight weeks commencing in August 2026

4 **Note** the engagement is non-statutory and will not pre-empt future decisions

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5 **Authorise** the Minister Responsible for RMA Reform and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary to the Minister Responsible for RMA Reform to make necessary changes to the supporting material prior to non-statutory public engagement commencing

6 **Note** further advice following non-statutory public engagement will inform further development of National Policy Direction.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Chris Bishop
Minister Responsible for RMA Reform

Simon Court MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary to the Minister Responsible for RMA Reform

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Appendices

1. Illustrative National Policy Direction

2. New Zealand's new planning system testing the approach to National Policy Direction –engagement collateral

[Available via the link at the bottom of this page: https://www.mcert.govt.nz/news/have-your-say-on-the-illustrative-national-policy-direction-for-the-new-planning-system/

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ECO-26-MIN-0154

Cabinet Economic Policy Committee

Minute of Decision

This document contains information for the New Zealand Cabinet. It must be treated in confidence and handled in accordance with any security classification, or other endorsement. The information can only be released, including under the Official Information Act 1982, by persons with the appropriate authority.

Illustrative National Policy Direction: Approval to Engage

Portfolio **RMA Reform**

On 19 August 2026, the Cabinet Economic Policy Committee:

1 **noted** that the Government is reforming the resource management system to make it easier to deliver housing, infrastructure, and economic growth while protecting the environment by passing the Planning and Natural Environment Bills;

2 **noted** that National Policy Direction will sit at the top of the national instrument hierarchy established by the Planning and Natural Environment Bills, and will give practical effect to the Government's priorities for the new planning system;

3 **agreed** to release the illustrative National Policy Direction and supporting material, attached under ECO-26-SUB-0154, for public engagement for eight weeks commencing in August 2026;

4 **noted** that the above engagement is non-statutory and will not pre-empt future decisions;

5 **authorised** the Minister Responsible for RMA Reform and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary to the Minister Responsible for RMA Reform to make any necessary changes to the illustrative National Policy Direction and supporting material prior to release;

6 **noted** that further advice following public engagement will inform further development of National Policy Direction.

Rachel Clarke
Committee Secretary

Present: (see over)

Present:
Hon David Seymour
Rt Hon Winston Peters
Hon Nicola Willis (Chair)
Hon Chris Bishop
Hon Brooke van Velden
Hon Shane Jones
Hon Paul Goldsmith
Hon Louise Upston
Hon Tama Potaka
Hon Simon Watts
Hon Casey Costello
Hon Nicola Grigg
Hon Andrew Hoggard
Hon Mark Patterson
Hon James Meager
Hon Scott Simpson
Hon Cameron Brewer
Simon Court MP

Officials present from:
Office of the Prime Minister
Office of Hon Chris Bishop
Office of Hon Simon Watts
Ministry of Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport
Officials Committee for ECO

CAB-26-MIN-0277

Cabinet

Minute of Decision

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Report of the Cabinet Economic Policy Committee: Period Ended 21 August 2026

On 24 August 2026, Cabinet made the following decisions on the work of the Cabinet Economic Policy Committee for the period ended 21 August 2026:

Out of scope

ECO-26-MIN-0154 **Illustrative National Policy Direction: Approval to Engage** CONFIRMED
Portfolio: RMA Reform

Out of scope

Out of scope

[redacted]

Rachel Hayward
Secretary of the Cabinet