



# Climate change and local government

## What the national adaptation plan means for you

### Adapt and thrive: Building a climate-resilient New Zealand

**Our first national adaptation plan will help New Zealanders adapt to the effects of climate change now, and better protect us against changes to come.**

Many impacts are already with us, with unstable and unpredictable weather, worsening floods, droughts and storms, and rising sea levels. We can expect more changes will happen. Lowering emissions can reduce the impacts of climate change but won't eliminate them all.

The national adaptation plan sets out what actions the Government will take over the next six years to help all New Zealanders adapt and thrive in a changing climate. It has actions relevant to every sector and community in New Zealand, and addresses the priority risks that need action now.

Climate change risks and the costs of adapting will need to be shared across society, but through the actions in the plan we can reduce the long-term costs across the motu.

#### Managing risk now and for the future

In 2020, the National Climate Change Risk Assessment set out 43 risks New Zealanders face from the impacts of climate change up to 2026.

These include risks to people's health and property, risks to our infrastructure like roads or water supplies, and risks to our natural environments.

This national adaptation plan is the first in a series. It will be updated every six years to respond to changing climate risks.

# Local government is on the front line of climate change

Councils have statutory responsibilities to avoid or mitigate natural hazards and to have regard to the effects of climate change when making certain decisions. They are also responsible for civil defence and emergency management, as well as improving community resilience through public education and local planning.

Around the country, many councils are already working with communities and iwi/Māori to address the climate change impacts. Some are developing adaptation plans and long-term adaptive pathways to proactively manage future risk. However, climate preparedness varies from region to region.

## What you told us during consultation on the draft adaptation plan

During consultation on the draft adaptation plan, local government submitters:

- sought more detail about who would lead actions and called for increased clarity about the roles and responsibilities of local government versus central government
- emphasised that they are best placed to serve their own communities and would require data, tools, information and funding
- emphasised that smaller, less well-resourced local councils with small ratepayer bases may require additional central government support for adaptation planning and implementation.

## How actions in the plan will help local government adapt to climate change

The plan outlines a programme of work to support local councils to take action and adapt to climate change. It brings together existing actions and proposed future work to:

- enable better risk-informed decisions
- drive climate-resilient development in the right places
- lay the foundations for a range of adaptation options including managed retreat
- embed climate resilience across government policy.

## Enabling better risk-informed decisions

The actions in the plan provide information, guidance and tools about climate change threats and responses. These can help local government understand and assess the risks they face and develop suitable adaptation strategies and solutions. Some of the key actions include:

- Action 3.1 Provide access to the latest climate projections data: this will give New Zealanders the regional and local data they need to assess future climate risks.
- Action 3.2 Design and develop risk and resilience and climate adaptation information portals: these will provide information and data about natural hazards and climate change risks. They will help communities make informed decisions and design adaptation solutions.
- Action 3.23 Develop 3D coastal mapping: this will help councils assess the impact of sea-level rise, tsunami and storm surges on their communities, infrastructure and biodiversity.

- 3.6 Improve natural hazard information on Land Information Memoranda (LIM): this will give councils greater certainty about what hazard information to include on the LIM.
- Action 3.7.5 Regularly update adaptation guidance for local government will support local government to consider adaptation in planning and decisions.

## **Driving climate-resilient development in the right locations**

Buildings and infrastructure have a long lifespan. Decisions we make today about how and where we develop really matter.

The plan will improve planning, infrastructure and decision-making frameworks to guide climate-resilient development in the right locations. This includes taking account of changing risks – such as exposure to sea-level rise, flooding, heat stress, coastal inundation, and wildfires.

Councils will need to have regard to the national adaptation plan in their plan making process from November 2022. Local government feedback on the draft plan sought clearer guidance around climate change scenarios, so the plan advises the use of recommended climate change scenarios when making or changing policy statements or plans under the Resource Management Act 1991, including to give effect to the provisions of the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement 2010.

- Action 4.1 Reform the resource management system: this will include objectives to better prepare for adaptation and risks from natural hazards, and better mitigation of emissions contributing to climate change. While the reform will play an essential role in ensuring future development occurs in the right places, there are also some near-term changes that will help drive suitably placed development during the transition to the reformed system. For example, action 3.6 to improve natural hazard information on LIMS and action 3.1 providing access to projections data.
- Action 4.2 Set national direction on natural hazard risk management and climate adaptation through the proposed new National Planning Framework: this will set clear direction for local authorities on how to achieve the climate resilience outcomes in the proposed Natural and Built Environments Act.
- Action 4.5 Reform institutional arrangements for water services: this will create new water entities that will work with councils and communities to improve health and wellbeing outcomes and protect the environment for generations to come.

## **Adaptation options including managed retreat**

Many communities are already under threat from natural hazards events. Successfully adapting will be vital as climate impacts worsen. Some people and communities may have to alter how and where they live.

One option is managed retreat, which may be necessary to reduce or eliminate exposure to intolerable risk. It's a carefully planned and managed process of relocating assets, activities and sites of cultural significance away from at-risk areas.

The plan will support councils to understand the adaptation options available. Key actions include:

- Action 5.1 Pass legislation to support managed retreat: this will address the complex issues around retreating from at-risk areas exposed to climate hazards.
- Action 5.2 The future for local government review: this is likely to include recommendations on what local government does, how it does it, and how it pays for it. This will include what

should change in funding and financing to ensure viability and sustainability, fairness and equity, and maximum wellbeing.

- Action 5.3 Complete case study to explore co-investment for flood resilience: this will focus on addressing the challenges facing small local authorities and vulnerable communities in funding flood risk management.
- Action 5.5 Publish the programme of work on how Aotearoa meets the costs of climate change and invests in resilience: this will investigate additional investment from public and private sources to respond to the growing risks from climate change.
- Action 5.6 Scope a resilience standard or code for infrastructure: this will encourage risk reduction and resilience planning in existing and new assets
- Action 5.9 Prioritise nature-based solutions: this will investigate how to ensure nature-based solutions are considered in planning and regulations, where possible, for both carbon removals and climate change adaptation.

Other actions in this chapter relevant to local council action include:

- Action 5.11 Encourage and support the evaluation of climate risks to landfills and contaminated sites.
- Action 5.12 Explore funding options to support the investigation and remediation of contaminated sites and landfills vulnerable to the effects of climate change.
- Action 5.13 Connect communities to wider response and recovery support.

## **Embedding climate resilience across government**

The Government will embed climate resilience across all its strategies and policies. The following chapters in the plan have actions relevant to local government:

### **Natural environment**

- Action 6.2 Engage with councils to implement the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement.
- Action 6.4 Implement the proposed National Policy Statement on Indigenous Biodiversity.

### **Homes, buildings and places**

- Action 7.4 Update regulatory requirements to ensure buildings are designed and constructed to withstand more extreme climate hazards.

### **Infrastructure**

- Action 8.6 Invest in public transport and active transport.
- Action 8.8 Support knowledge sharing and the implementation of adaptation actions across the sector.

### **Communities**

- Action: 9.1 Modernise the emergency management system.

### **Economy and Financial System**

- Action 10.9 Identify the impacts of climate change on regional economies.
- Action: 10.14 Deliver the Tourism Industry Transformation Plan.
- Action 10.15 Review the settings for the International Visitor Conservation and Tourism Levy

### **Future engagement during implementation**

As the plan is implemented, more targeted engagement with different stakeholders, including local government, will take place.

Inclusive engagement, particularly with those disproportionately affected by climate change, will help to ensure actions lead to equitable climate resilience.

We are taking the same approach with the implementation of the emissions reduction plan, and encouraging engaged and active public participation.

## **Find out more**

Read [Aotearoa New Zealand's first national adaptation plan](#)

