



Climate change and rural communities

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, including rural communities, 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 the main 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 and water supplies, and risks to our natural environment.

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

Impacts of climate change on rural communities

Everyone is affected by climate change. But some people are more vulnerable to climate change impacts than others.

Rural communities are often isolated and more at risk of extreme climate events and gradual changes such as sea-level rise. In the wake of disasters, emergency response and recovery efforts can be challenging and take longer.

Climate change affects productive land, water supplies and other important resources and services that farmers and growers rely on.

Extreme weather events and climate-related risks can cause long-term disruption to rural communities, and to vital networks and support services. Some communities may need to relocate, either temporarily or permanently.

Many Māori live in rural areas and have strong connections to land, environment and taonga that are at threat from the impacts of climate change.

What you've told us

During consultation on the draft adaptation plan, submitters from rural communities or who represent them showed support for:

- central government funding and leadership support
- tools, guidance and methodologies created in consultation with the rural sector and communities
- support and financial resourcing for rural communities to take local adaptation action, including Māori communities living on papakāinga
- central government adaptation support to initially focus on areas of higher socio-economic deprivation
- investment in regional infrastructure to strengthen community resilience
- engagement at the local level during implementation of the plan's actions, so that the diverse needs of rural communities are met.

How this plan will build climate resilience for rural communities

The plan outlines a programme of work to support and encourage all New Zealanders to adapt. It brings together existing actions and proposed future work.

Enabling better risk-informed decisions

The plan includes actions that will provide information, tools and guidance about climate change threats and responses. Rural communities can use these to assess the risks they face and decide how best to adapt. Key actions include:

- Action 3.2: Design and develop risk, resilience and climate adaptation information portals: this will collect and make available data and information on social and equity risks. The portals will also help assess people's vulnerability to climate change, including disproportionately affected groups such as isolated and rural communities.

- Action 3.4: Raise awareness of climate hazards and how to prepare: this will deliver public education campaigns and provide information to help rural communities get ready for emergencies. This will help ensure people know what to do and have what they need to get through.
- Action 3.6: Improve natural hazard information on Land Information Memoranda (LIM): this will help people make better-informed decisions about natural hazard risks when buying a property. It will also clarify what hazard information councils should include on LIMs.
- Action 3.8: Develop guidance for assessing risk and impact on physical assets and the services they provide: this will ensure that the needs of rural communities (and others who may be disproportionately affected by climate events) are considered by infrastructure owners.
- Action 3.13: Provide a forestry planning and advisory service: this will help to reduce climate-related risks by providing advice and planning tools for both harvest and non-harvest forestry. The service will support land management, economic development, and job creation.
- Action 3.14: Deliver an Integrated Farm Planning Programme: this will make it easier for farmers and growers to meet all their regulatory and business requirements. It brings together many broader work programmes, including a biodiversity planning module, upskilling for primary industry advisors and planning for adverse events and resilience.

Adaptation options including managed retreat

Many communities are already under threat from natural hazards. Successfully adapting to these risks 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.

Key adaptation options actions include:

- Action 5.1: Pass legislation to support managed retreat: the new law will address the complex issues around retreating from at-risk areas exposed to climate hazards. This includes addressing the unique challenges that managed retreat could cause for rural communities.
- Action 5.13: Connect communities to wider response and recovery support: this will continue work with central and local government and communities to support effective, joined-up disaster response and recovery efforts.

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 rural communities.

The **natural environment chapter** sets out actions that show how the plan supports a thriving natural environment, which is intrinsic to New Zealand's lifestyle, industry, wellbeing, and cultural identity.

- Action 6.6: Implement the Water Availability and Security programme: this will help food and fibre businesses and rural communities adapt to increasingly variable freshwater availability. Taking its lead from the National Policy Statement on Freshwater Management, the programme will help restore and maintain the health of fresh waterways. It will also support ways to reduce demand and make the best use of available water supplies.

- Action 6.10: Implement the Sustainable Land Management Hill Country Erosion Programme: this will support efforts to improve erosion-prone land, including the planting of trees in areas that were previously bare (afforestation). This can reduce soil loss and other damage suffered by farmers and rural communities during heavy weather events.

The **communities chapter** sets out how communities around New Zealand, including rural communities, will be supported in adapting to climate change now and in the future. Key actions include:

- Action 9.6: Build community resilience through social cohesion: this work will lessen instability and community disruption caused by climate change. It will help everyone, including rural communities, to feel safe and belong, and to access opportunities.

The **economy and financial system chapter** focuses on how we will adapt and build resilience to the economic and financial impacts of a changing climate. Some actions will also help identify new economic opportunities. This is part of Aotearoa New Zealand's wider transition to a high-wage, low-emissions economy that provides economic security in good times and bad.

- Action 10.7: Continue delivering the Sustainable Food and Fibre Futures Fund: this supports innovation in New Zealand's food and fibre sector by co-investing in initiatives that bring economic, environmental and social benefits for all New Zealanders. Projects include applied research which delivers tangible solutions for primary industries.
- Action 10.9: Identify the impacts of climate change on regional economies: this involves modelling the effect of climate change on regional economies, and providing guidance for assessing climate impacts in local economic decisions. It will help regions make informed assessments of their risks and reduce their exposure to climate-driven economic disruptions.

Future engagement during implementation

As the plan is implemented, more targeted engagement with different stakeholders, including rural communities, 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](#).

