



Freshwater Farm Plans

Changes introduced by the Resource Management (Consenting and Other System Changes) Amendment Act 2025

These changes, which passed into law on 20 August 2025, belong to a wider programme of resource management reform. Visit the Ministry for the Environment's [webpage about the new Amendment Act](#) for more information.

Context

What is a freshwater farm plan?

Freshwater farm plans (FW-FPs) are an established tool used by industry and councils to help farmers and growers manage their farms in a way that reduces environmental impacts.

A FW-FP does this by helping farmers identify the freshwater risks on their farm and plan practical on-farm actions they can take to manage those risks. A plan will typically include:

- the identification of on-farm areas of risk (like waterways and critical source areas)
- actions to manage those risks (such as a plan to strategically fence or exclude stock from waterways, or actions to manage intensive winter grazing).

The type of actions in an FW-FP will be tailored to the individual farm, taking into account the type and scale of the farm, operational practices and local catchment context.

Previous system

Part 9A of the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) was introduced in 2020 to support a consistent approach to freshwater farm planning. FW-FPs are a regulatory tool that supports farmers to identify, manage and reduce on-farm risks to freshwater in a way that is tailored to individual farm conditions and wider catchment needs.

Under the previous system, the RMA required that FW-FPs must be held and implemented on all farms with:

- 20 hectares or more of land in arable or pastoral use
- 5 hectares or more of land in horticultural use
- 20 hectares or more of land in combined use.

All farmers who meet these thresholds were also required to have their FW-FP plan certified and audited.

How Part 9A previously recognised industry programmes to deliver FW-FP services

Industry organisation assurance programmes (like the New Zealand Good Agricultural Practices programme) support farm operators to demonstrate compliance with regulations and international market requirements. Stakeholders have expressed that these industry organisation programmes should be recognised in the FW-FP system.

Part 9A of the RMA was amended in August 2023 to enable regional councils to approve industry organisations to provide certification or audit services under the Resource Management (Freshwater Farm Plans) Regulations 2023 (the FW-FP Regulations).

Key changes

- Sections 54–58 of the Amendment Act amend Part 9A of the RMA.

The Resource Management (Consenting and Other Changes) Amendment Act 2025 (the Amendment Act) supports industry organisations to deliver FW-FP assurance services to their members, by making changes to Part 9A of the RMA, to allow for:

- the Minister for the Environment (the Minister), rather than regional councils, to approve (and revoke the approval of) industry organisations to deliver FW-FP certification and audit services
- the FW-FP Regulations to specify the criteria for approval of industry organisations, and the approval process steps (and the process for revoking approval).

In light of stakeholder feedback, the Amendment Act changes:

- the size of the land-use thresholds that set out which farm operations are required to have a FW-FP
- who needs to get their FW-FP certified (only certain farms would need to have their plan certified).

Process for the Minister approving industry organisations

The Amendment Act enables the Minister, rather than regional councils, to determine whether an industry organisation meets the requirements for approval.

When approving an organisation, the Minister would need to be satisfied that the industry organisation meets any eligibility requirements set out in regulations. The Minister would need to consult with relevant regional councils and the Minister of Agriculture when making an approval decision.

Monitoring the performance of appointed industry organisations

Regional councils would monitor the performance of industry organisations and would notify the Minister of significant or persistent performance concerns.

The Minister would have the power to revoke the approval of an industry organisation if satisfied that an approved industry organisation is no longer performing to the required level.

Changing the thresholds for which farms must have a freshwater farm plan

The Amendment Act provides that a FW-FP is required only for:

- farms with 50 hectares or more of land in pastoral, arable or mixed land use (currently 20 hectares)
- farms with 50 hectares or more of land in viticultural or orcharding land use (currently 5 hectares)
- farms with 5 hectares or more of land in horticultural land use other than viticultural or orcharding land use (currently all horticultural land uses over 5 hectares), or
- farms that are undertaking commercial dairy supply.

Changing who needs to have their plan certified

The Amendment Act aims to ensure that farm operators are only required to submit their FW-FP for certification if they:

- are undertaking activities that are identified in regulations as requiring a certified FW-FP
- are using their FW-FP to meet some other regulatory requirement, or
- operate a farm located in a catchment prescribed in regulations as requiring a certified FW-FP.

Regulations will prescribe the kinds of farming activities or catchments that require a FW-FP to be certified. Farm operators may voluntarily have their FW-FP certified.

