

Environmental limits and targets

A flourishing environment
for every generation.

**He taiao tōnui mō
ngā reanga katoa.**

Kia ora

Thanks for your interest in the work we are doing to improve our environmental management system. We are inviting people to tell us what they value most about te taiao, our natural environment. We will use this information to help decide what environmental limits and targets are needed to protect and improve our air, indigenous biodiversity, freshwater, coastal waters, estuaries and soil. This fact sheet provides information about this work.

Our environment is degraded and making us ill

We depend on the natural environment for the necessities of life, but human activities are causing pollution and putting ecosystems under pressure as the facts below show:

- air pollution, mostly caused, by cars, contributes to the premature deaths of about 3,300 people in Aotearoa New Zealand each year and hospitalises more than 13,100 people¹
- almost 4,000 of our native species are threatened with extinction²
- three people were killed, 45 hospitalised and 5,500 became ill in 2016 after bores that supply Havelock North's drinking water supply became contaminated³
- about 45% of Aotearoa New Zealand's total river length is unsafe for swimming⁴
- about 192 million tonnes of eroded soil (mostly from farmland) ends up in our rivers and harbours each year, polluting water and impacting the health of kaimoana⁵.

¹ [Health and Air Pollution in New Zealand 2016 \(HAPINZ 3.0\)](#)

² [New Directions for Resource Management in New Zealand: Report of the Resource Management Review Panel](#), June 2020

³ [Government Enquiry into Havelock North Drinking Water Report](#)

⁴ [Our Freshwater 2023](#) (report produced jointly by the Ministry for the Environment and Statistics New Zealand)

⁵ [Environment Aotearoa 2022](#) (a report produced jointly by the Ministry for the Environment and Statistics New Zealand)

What are we doing about this?

Our current resource management system limits environmental protection to managing the negative effects of human activities instead of setting and achieving desired outcomes. This has made it difficult to manage the harmful effects of activities, which individually have a small impact on the environment and people, but collectively have a big impact over time and space. A key goal of the new resource management system is to protect human health and restore the natural environment for current and future generations. One of the ways the new system will do this is by setting, monitoring and enforcing limits and targets for the use and development of the environment.

Explaining limits and targets

Setting limits for environmental characteristics (attributes) in a geographic area (management unit) will help to protect human health and stop the environment from becoming worse than its current state. Setting measurable targets and giving a timeframe for achieving these will help to improve human health and restore the environment. The Government may set limits and targets in the new National Planning Framework (NPF) or it may require that regional planning committees set them in natural and built environment plans. The framework and plans must direct what actions need to be taken to achieve targets and stay within limits.

How limits and targets could work

Particulate matter 2.5 (PM2.5) is airborne pollution from household fires, motor vehicles and industry. It is small enough to breathe in and can reach deep into the lungs and bloodstream, causing minor to life-threatening health problems. A maximum limit could be set for PM2.5 levels in an urban area to stop the health risk becoming worse. A target could be set to reduce PM2.5 to safe levels.

We are phasing in limits and targets

We are taking a staged approach to developing limits and targets and proposing a small set of attributes across air, freshwater, coastal water, soil, indigenous biodiversity and estuaries. We will engage with iwi/Māori and stakeholders to develop a broader set of attributes for human health and the natural environment for inclusion in future versions of the NPF.

Get more information

Read our state of the environment report [Aotearoa 2022](#)

Find out about [resource management system reform](#)

Read our [Long-term Insights Briefing 2023](#) about the future wellbeing of land and people