



The New Planning System

Transitioning into the new planning system

There will be a phased transition to the new planning system, so it's clear what's changing when, and there is plenty of support for those who are implementing the changes. That is explained here.

Two new Bills with clear roles

The new planning system is set out in two new Bills. Once passed, these will replace the current Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA):

- **The Planning Bill** lays out the framework for how land can be used and developed.
- **The Natural Environment Bill** is focused on managing the use of natural resources and protecting the environment.

The Bills introduced to Parliament today include three clear transitional provisions that will apply to all resource consents:

- There will be **urgent legislation** to immediately extend consents currently stuck in RMA processes or expiring soon.
- **Most consents will be extended until around 2031.** Consent expiry dates will be extended to two years after the end of the transition period for the new system.
- **New consent applications can still be made during the transition period** and will follow an amended RMA process.

The urgent legislation is a temporary measure so that consents expiring before RMA replacement legislation is in place can continue without disruption and be managed under the new planning system. This Bill will be passed before the end of this year.

The Planning Bill and the Natural Environment Bill will establish longer-term arrangements in relation to consent expiry dates (with the benefit of input from the Select Committee process). These Bills will extend the consent expiry until 24 months after the new system is fully in place.

Getting there: the transition

The new planning system will be fully operational by 2029. A transition period will allow councils to continue to make decisions on consents while aspects of the new system are rolled out.

- **A transitional consenting regime** begins one month after royal assent of the legislation, allowing some benefits of the new planning system to be realised sooner. It continues, but modifies, regulatory processes under the RMA. At the same time, planning processes will need to start as quickly as possible under the new legislation.
- **Transitional national rules** developed under both Bills will apply to this transition period. These may include rules on vegetable growing, constructing water storage and constructing wetlands, for example.
- **Top-down design:** National instruments are set first, followed by spatial plans, then the remaining components of the regional combined plans (land use and natural environment plans).
- **Transition period ends:** Once all plans are notified the Minister will make an Order in Council stating the date that the transition period ends. The Minister may choose the date the system turns on. On that date all operative and notified plans have legal effect, and the full new system is 'switched on'. Consenting begins under the full new system.

A staged approach to national instruments

National instruments for the new planning system will be delivered in two main stages, so councils and spatial planning committees get timely and targeted guidance. More technical national standards needed for land use and natural environment plans will be developed and introduced later.

1. **First suite (by late 2026):** The national policy directions for both Bills, instruments onsetting limits for life-supporting capacity and human health, national standards for regional spatial plans including ways to decide how many new homes should be built in a region, and some national rules to support the transitional consenting regime.
2. **Second suite (in 2027):** National standards for making land-use plans and standardised plan content (including zones for different types of land use and special areas and human health environmental limits) for land and soil.

Pre-notification:

The Bills prescribe process steps to develop national instruments, including setting out pre-notification with iwi authorities.

- **First suite:** 20 working days consultation, including with iwi authorities as part of wider public consultation.
- **Second suite:** Full public consultation process.
- **Minor technical changes:** Streamlined process set out in the Bills.

Adapting elements of the current legislation

Not all national instruments will be developed from scratch. The Government will repurpose compatible elements of existing (or soon to exist) national direction under the RMA, reassessing and restructuring them to ensure alignment with the new Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill.

Managing the transition

To give people certainty through transition, expiring RMA resource consents will be extended until at least mid-2031, including those that have recently expired and a new application has been made. Consent holders will have flexibility to either apply for replacement consents under the transitional regime or wait until the new planning system is in place.

During the transition period, a transitional consenting framework will be used, allowing new national instruments to have an impact even while councils are updating their plans into the new planning system. Much of this applies outside of the transition period too.

- **Transitional national rules:** Apply to new consents under the RMA during the transition period.
- **Scope of effects:** Councils will not be able to consider specific identified effects that are out of scope of the new planning system, such as the internal and external layout of buildings. During the transition, councils will be able to confirm the activity is a permitted activity.
- **Special circumstances:** Councils will no longer consider special circumstances warranting notification when deciding whether to publicly notify.
- **Spatial plans:** Once decisions are made on a new spatial plan, councils must have regard to this. For example, a spatial plan identifies a greenfield area for future development, but this is not yet zoned within the land use plan.
- **Procedural principles:** These apply to consenting and permitting processes. For instance, this means that councils will need to act in a timely and cost-effective manner, and proportionately to the scale and significance of the matter.

Obligations under Treaty settlements and related arrangements will continue to apply during the transition period.

For those who work in the system this means:

- **Fewer plans**
Councils and communities will work with a smaller number of comprehensive, combined plans – making it easier to navigate requirements and avoid duplication.
- **Fewer consents**
Many activities will be permitted or streamlined under clear national standards, reducing the need for consents and saving time for everyone.

- **Clearer rules and expectations**
Stronger national instruments mean less ambiguity, fewer surprises, and more certainty for decision-making.
- **Less relitigation**
Decisions are 'front-loaded' and stick – meaning once goals and standards are set, they flow down and can't be revisited at every stage.
- **Consistent processes**
Standard templates, definitions, and technical guidance mean councils across New Zealand are working from the same playbook.
- **More time for what matters**
With less time spent on paperwork and process, there's more opportunity to focus on delivering good outcomes for communities and the environment.
- **Support for transition**
The new planning system is being rolled out in stages, with clear guidance and support for those implementing the changes

For more information, visit environment.govt.nz.

