



# The New Planning System

## *Role of local government*

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Councils will have statutory functions in the new planning system to:

- jointly make and maintain a spatial plan for the region
- make and maintain a regulatory plan (a regional council makes a natural environment plan, each territorial authority makes a land-use plan, and a unitary authority prepares both)
- administer and implement their regulatory plans including consenting/permitting, monitoring and enforcing compliance, and regulating and managing effects.

Regional entities will also set environmental limits for the region and undertake state of the environment monitoring.

The spatial plan, natural environment plan and land-use plans are proposed to be brought together into a combined regional plan.

## **The new planning system will reduce the burden on councils**

The new planning system will have benefits to local government and reduce the costs of operating the system. In particular:

- there will be fewer plans, fewer consent categories, and fewer consents overall
- greater use of standardisation (like zoning) will make planning and consenting much simpler and clearer for councils to implement and will reduce chances for conflict and litigation
- a new Planning Tribunal will offer lower cost and faster ways for councils to resolve disputes.

There are also plans to establish a national compliance-monitoring and enforcement regulator in a later phase of the reform.

## **Consultation is underway on simplifying local government**

Regional councils will have a significantly reduced role as part of this new planning system.

The Government is therefore proposing two changes to our existing system of local government:

- Step 1: Instead of electing separate regional councillors, the mayors you already vote for will collectively lead regional issues and govern the regional council. This would be called a combined territories board (CTB).
- Step 2: This board of mayors will develop future-focussed plans for how the councils in your region can work together more effectively and efficiently. These plans will be developed in consultation with you, examined independently, and be approved by the Government.

Consultation is underway on this proposal until February 2026 and the Government will consider feedback before making final decisions.

## How will this impact the new planning system?

The proposal to simplify local government has been designed to support the new planning system.

## How will this be coordinated with RM reform?

Timing of local government reform is expected to be lined up with implementation of the new planning system reform so that the new CTBs will lead key milestones in the new planning system. No final decisions on timing and establishment of the CTBs have been made.

## What role will the CTBs have in the new planning system?

The Government has agreed to replace the Resource Management Act 1991 with two new Bills: the Planning Bill and the Natural Environment Bill. These Bills will require regional councils to:

- participate in the development of a region-wide spatial plan chapter of a combined regional plan
- develop and agree a natural environment plan chapter of a combined regional plan.

If the local government reforms proceed, Ministers have decided that CTBs should be the decision-making body for both these new planning instruments. Voting arrangements CTBs use to make decisions on these two new instruments will require that both:

1. CTB members representing more than 50% of the population support the resolution.
2. More than 50% of CTB members with a voting mandate for decisions on spatial plan chapters and/or natural environment plan chapters support the resolution.

This two-stage voting arrangement ensures that decisions reflect both population weight and broader district and rural interests. It also ensures that national level interests can have a 'voice' and influence on decisions where necessary. This approach is different to the standard voting system CTBs will use, which will be primarily population based.

For more information, visit [environment.govt.nz](https://environment.govt.nz).

