



The New Planning System

Increasing certainty for the marine sector

Simpler planning to support marine businesses

New Zealand's new planning system will make it easier to build the houses and infrastructure our country needs, let farmers and growers get on with doing what they do best, and boost our primary sector while protecting the environment.

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 new planning system is made up of more than just new Bills. National instruments – including national policy directions and standards – will provide specific requirements for councils to develop their plans and make consenting decisions. These national instruments will include direction on how the Coastal Marine Area is used and developed, replacing the old New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement. The new planning system will include helpful changes made under recent changes to the RMA.

Easier, more certain conditions for the marine sector

The Government is making it easier for the marine sector to grow, thrive and contribute to New Zealand's economy. The new planning system will remove unnecessary rules, streamline processes, and create a more integrated and effective approach to managing the marine environment, including aquaculture, ports, marine infrastructure and fishing. It recognises that responsible resource use underpins jobs, exports and regional prosperity.

For those in the marine sector, this means:

- there will be less red tape and more certainty if you're an aquaculture or port operator
- improvements to planning and consenting processes for marine activities are retained

- you'll benefit from smarter, long-term planning through mandatory spatial planning in the Coastal Marine Area (CMA)
- national instruments and environmental limits that are stable and evidence-based will guide the sustainable use of marine resources, to provide confidence to innovate while looking after what matters
- Māori interests are recognised, and aquaculture settlement provisions are upheld.

What's changing – Aquaculture

The Bills build on recent RMA changes that made things easier for marine farmers, recognising the potential to get even more value from existing farms. Under the new planning system, you'll keep the benefits of longer permits and simpler consent processes, with even more certainty and flexibility for your aquaculture business.

- If you already run a marine farm, you can keep operating under coastal permits that have been extended by 20 years. This means fewer renewals and less cost for you.
- We are also in the process of retaining new law to make it easier for marine farm consent conditions to be changed or cancelled so that it will be easier to innovate and grow.
- More activities will be allowed without needing a consent if they have only minor effects. If your activity has only slight or barely noticeable effects, you won't need a consent if you are using a permitted aquaculture activity at an existing farm – unless those effects add up over time.
- If you're a new aquaculture operator, you'll need to apply for a permit under the new planning system. Decisions about trade-offs and priorities will be made earlier, not during each consent process.

What's changing – Fishing

The new system will carry forward recent RMA updates about how councils are required to manage the effects (the impacts to people and the environment) of plan rules on fishing, including:

- If you're involved in fishing, councils must consider your rights and interests when proposing rules that affect fishing under a notified plan.
- Any new rules controlling fishing must be agreed to by the Ministry for Primary Industries, before a plan is notified, to make sure they don't have undue adverse effects on customary, recreational or commercial fishing.
- Rules that control fishing do not have immediate legal effect when a proposed plan is notified.
- If you're involved in Māori customary fishing, your rights are protected under other legislation.

A smarter system for managing our coastal marine area

The coastal marine area including the foreshore, seabed, coastal water, and air space above the water out to 12 nautical miles, will be largely managed under the Natural Environment Bill. Regional councils will be responsible for managing the CMA through the natural environment chapters of regional combined plans.

The new planning system introduces several key changes:

- **Clear environmental limits will be set for coastal waters.** These are boundaries for things like water quality and ecosystem health, to protect people's health and the environment.
- **Councils and the Government will monitor environmental limits.** If a limit is exceeded, councils must prepare an action plan to bring resource use back within the limit over time. If there is no risk of a limit being broken, there will be fewer rules for you to follow.
- **Only effects that are minor or more than minor will be regulated.** If your activity has only slight or barely noticeable effects, you won't need to worry about extra controls – unless those effects add up over time.
- **National policy instruments (NPI) now sets clear priorities** for how the CMA is used and developed, replacing the old New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement.
- **Spatial planning is now required**, helping manage overlapping activities, reducing conflict, and supporting key developments and assets in the CMA.
- **New tools to allocate coastal resources** can be switched on by resource or by region helping use resources like sand, shingle or space in the CMA more efficiently – if national standards allow it, guided by environmental limits.
- For **regulatory planning**, instead of a separate regional coastal plan, under the Natural Environment Act, each plan chapter will contain a coastal part.
- Aquaculture **settlement provisions** will be carried over to the new planning system.

What happens next?

Before they become law, the public gets to have a say about the new Bills through select committee hearings in early 2026 – this is an opportunity to make improvements.

Once the Bills are in place, the next step is to confirm the national instruments needed to guide spatial planning. People will also get a chance to submit on this. There will be transitional arrangements for existing resource consent holders:

1. All consents under the RMA will be extended until at least mid-2031.
2. You can obtain a new consent under the transitional system from mid-2026.
3. A new National Policy Statement – Freshwater will be introduced by mid-2026, which will assist anyone who wishes to obtain a new consent early.

The first spatial plans are expected within a set period after the law is enacted. Government hopes to have the transitional system up and running in the middle of 2026, and the full system working by 2029.

For more information, visit environment.govt.nz.

