

Updating National Direction: Changes to the National Policy Statement for Electricity Networks

December 2025

Recent changes have been made to national direction under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) to make the resource management system work more effectively.

Changes to national direction for New Zealand's electricity networks will better enable electrification of the economy, support energy security and recognise the importance of electricity distribution to electricity networks.

Context

The National Policy Statement on Electricity Transmission 2008 (NPS-ET) and National Environmental Standards for Electricity Transmission Activities 2009 (NES-ETA) were established to provide a high-level framework for the development and maintenance of the national grid.

Increasing the efficiency of electricity network delivery will help to deliver on the Government's commitments to climate change mitigation and improve New Zealand's energy security and electricity affordability. To support this work, the scope of the NPS-ET has been broadened to include the electricity distribution network, as well as the electricity transmission network. As a result, the NPS-ET has been renamed as the National Policy Statement for Electricity Networks (NPS-EN).

The NPS-EN provides objectives and policies to recognise New Zealand's electricity networks as nationally significant. This positioning will enable them to be developed, upgraded and maintained efficiently, while managing environmental impacts and support climate and renewable energy goals.

Key changes

Summary of key changes to the National Policy Statement for Electricity Networks

- Rename the national policy statement and expand its scope to cover both electricity transmission and electricity distribution.
- Strengthen policy direction to create a more certain consenting environment.
- Recognise the national significance of electricity networks.
- Recognise the operational and functional need to locate in particular environments.
- Enable routine maintenance and upgrade work.
- Recognise the role of electricity networks in well-functioning urban areas.
- Manage adverse effects of electricity network activities on the environment.
- Recognise Māori interests and provide for early engagement to identify and protect cultural values.
- Protect the electricity network from the adverse effects of third-party activities.
- Align with other national direction, particularly renewable electricity generation and infrastructure instruments.

Renaming and expanding scope

The National Policy Statement on Electricity Transmission 2008 will be renamed as the National Policy Statement for Electricity Networks 2008 (amended 2025). This change signals its expanded scope in providing national direction for the entire electricity network – both the electricity transmission network and the electricity distribution network.

Recognising national significance and benefits

The amendments require decision-makers to give greater recognition to the national significance and wider economic, climate and community benefits of the electricity network, relative to localised adverse effects.

Decision-makers will be directed to consistently consider the electricity network's importance at national, regional and local scales, including its role in supporting social, cultural and economic well-being, economic development, renewable electricity, energy security and resilience to climate change and natural hazards.

Providing for electricity network activities

The amendments recognise that electricity network activities may have a functional or operational need to locate in particular environments, such as the coastal environment, in order to deliver and operate their services, maintain connectivity and manage risks from natural hazards. There are also new provisions encouraging councils and network providers to work together to identify existing and proposed network assets in planning processes, where appropriate.

Policies have been updated to enable the routine operation, maintenance and upgrade of electricity network assets, provided that, where practicable, adverse effects are managed. This change aims to provide certainty that essential work can be undertaken and streamline consenting.

The NPS maintains the existing NPS-ET ‘seek to avoid’ direction for new network development in rural areas. This sets a high bar for network providers to demonstrate that avoidance has been considered through the route, site and method planning processes. Where network activities are planned in rural locations, or could impact places and values that are protected under the RMA, the NPS-EN be considered together with other relevant national direction and local and regional plans. If it is not possible to avoid these areas, the effects of these activities must, where practicable, be avoided, remedied or mitigated as required by the RMA.

Managing adverse effects

The NPS includes new and amended policies to guide how adverse environmental effects of network activities are managed. Policies cover recognition of route, site and method selection processes, operational and technical requirements, urban environment considerations, and taking into account recognised standards and best practice. The standards for electric and magnetic fields have also been updated to align with current international practice.

Recognising and providing for Māori interests

A new policy will require decision-makers to recognise and provide for Māori interests. For example, they will need to consider the outcomes of engagement with Māori, avoidance of sites of significance to Māori and recognise opportunities for Māori involvement where electricity network activities may affect sites and issues of cultural significance, and opportunities for Māori enterprise or partnership in distribution infrastructure.

Local authorities must remain aware of their responsibilities under other legislation, including the Local Government Act 2002, Te Ture Whenua Māori Act 1993, Treaty settlement legislation and iwi participation legislation, and under the Treaty of Waitangi. Obligations under Mana Whakahono ā Rohe agreements with relevant hapū and iwi should also be observed.

Stronger protection from third-party activities

The NPS-EN includes clearer policies to protect the electricity networks from direct effects and reverse sensitivity effects that arise from incompatible third-party activities, such as development too close to transmission lines. Amendments also cover buffer corridors, and set requirements for councils to engage with electricity network providers and to map and protect network assets.

Aligning with other national direction

The NPS-EN will be implemented alongside other national policy statements (eg, for renewable electricity generation, infrastructure, coastal policy) but will not override protections for matters of national importance under the RMA. In situations where these values apply, decision-makers must consider enabling and protection provisions side by side.

Implementation considerations

Immediate steps

Once the amended NPS-EN comes into effect, decision-makers must apply it when making decisions under the RMA. This policy statement is applicable to all individuals and entities exercising powers and functions under the RMA. The objectives and policies are intended to guide decision-makers on resource consent applications, designations, heritage orders, water conservation orders and other relevant powers under the RMA. They also offer guidance for local authorities in plan-making.

Due to the RMA 'Plan Stop' amendments passed in August 2025, plans and policy statements will not be updated to give effect to the NPS-EN until the end of 2027, when the new planning and environmental management system is intended to be in effect (unless a relevant exemption applies).

Transition to the new planning system

All existing national direction under the RMA will be reassessed and restructured to ensure it aligns with the goals and framework of the new planning system that will be established by the Planning and Natural Environment Bills.

The policy intent of the changes to national direction under the existing RMA will be transferred to the new system as appropriate.

For further information

For more information, see this website.

Ministry for the Environment. [National Policy Statement on Electricity Transmission](#).

