



Updating National Direction: Changes to the National Policy Statement for Highly Productive Land

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.

Amendments to the National Policy Statement for Highly Productive Land (NPS-HPL) allow more greenfield areas to be developed for housing, which could help improve housing affordability and ease the housing crisis.

Context

The NPS-HPL aims to protect land that is especially suitable for primary production, both now and for future generations.

However, the way that the NPS-HPL currently defines highly productive land (HPL) places too many limits on urban development. Including Land Use Capability (LUC)¹ class 3 land in the NPS-HPL has resulted in major restrictions on land that could otherwise be developed for housing. Until HPL is mapped, the definition of HPL has been amended to exclude urban development and rezoning on LUC 3 land from the restrictions of the NPS-HPL.

Urban development and rezoning on LUC 3 land are now exempt from the NPS-HPL restrictions, making more land available for housing. The timeframes for mapping HPL are extended until the end of 2027. The existing mapping criteria for HPL is retained (including LUC 3) but this is likely to be reviewed under the new planning and environmental management system.

¹ Land Use Capability (LUC) is a classification system that ranks land based on its physical characteristics and limitations to determine its suitability for different types of use, such as cropping, horticulture and grazing. LUC 3 land has moderate limitations that restrict the range of crops and intensity of use, but it is still suitable for arable farming, horticulture and pastoral grazing. It is considered productive land, though less versatile than LUC 1 and LUC 2 land.

Changes immediately make development easier

Key changes to the National Policy Statement for Highly Productive Land

The NPS-HPL:

- exempts urban development and urban rezoning on LUC 3 land from the NPS-HPL restrictions with immediate legal effect (clauses 3.5(7) and 3.6)
- allows improvements to the New Zealand Land Resource Inventory (NZLRI) undertaken post-2022 to be used to assess what land the NPS-HPL applies to (clause 3.5(7))
- suspends the requirement to map highly productive land in regional policy statements until 31 December 2027, aligning with the 'Plan Stop' timeframe (clause 4.1(2))
- amends quarrying and mining provisions to align definitions and consenting processes.

The amendments to the NPS-HPL will make it easier for urban development to occur on LUC 3 land by removing some restrictions.

Once the amendments are in force, councils will need to take these new rules into account when making consent decisions. That includes considering how they identify HPL before any maps of HPL are published in regional policy statements.

It is appropriate to suspend or pause requirements for councils to notify HPL maps in regional policy statements until the end of 2027, because that aligns with the Plan Stop timeframe.² The existing mapping criteria for HPL are likely to be reviewed under the new resource management system.

Amendments have also been made to align definitions and consent processes for quarrying and mining in the NPS-HPL, in line with other national direction (see the fact sheet [Updating National Direction: Changes to Multiple Instruments for Quarrying and Mining Provisions](#)).

Restrictions will remain in place for land with the highest productive potential, ensuring its availability for primary production.

Implementation considerations

Immediate steps

Once the amendments to the NPS-HPL are in force, local authorities must apply the amended NPS HPL when making decisions on resource consents and private plan changes. This means:

- NPS-HPL restrictions on urban development on LUC 3 land will not apply
- the urban rezoning tests (in clause 3.6) will not apply to applications to rezone LUC 3 land
- approaches and decisions about what activities are appropriate on LUC 3 land may differ among local authorities subject to other relevant plans and policies.

² The Plan Stop temporarily pauses most council-led planning work until the end of 2027. This means that councils generally cannot start or continue plan changes unless they obtain an exemption. Mapping of HPL is unlikely to qualify as an exemption.

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 established by the new Planning and Natural Environment Bills.

The policy intent of the changes to national direction under the existing RMA will be transferred to the new resource management system as appropriate, as will the intent of other changes previously considered.

For further information

For more information, see these websites.

Ministry for the Environment. [National Policy Statement for Highly Productive Land](#)

Ministry for Primary Industries. [National Policy Statement for Highly Productive Land](#)

