

# Updating National Direction: New National Environmental Standards for Detached Minor Residential Units

**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.

This fact sheet explains the new national direction that make it simpler to build new detached minor residential units (DMRUs) for residential use if certain requirements are met.

## Context

As communities change, demand is growing for smaller, affordable dwellings that support diverse living arrangements. Current rules are inconsistent across the country and even across different zones within districts or cities. The time and costs involved in seeking a resource consent for these smaller dwellings could be limiting the uptake of this type of development.

To help address this issue, the Government has introduced the National Environmental Standards for Detached Minor Residential Units (NES-DMRU). These national environmental standards are part of a broader commitment to make it easier and more affordable to build small homes, complementing recent changes to the Building Act 2004. The NES-DMRU establishes a consistent, nationwide framework that enables the construction of DMRU that have an area of up to 70 square metres without the need for resource consent, provided certain conditions are met.

## What the National Environmental Standards for Detached Minor Residential Units include

The NES-DMRU establishes a consistent, nationwide framework that allows homeowners to build detached minor residential units – also known as granny flats – that have an area of up to 70 square metres without needing resource consent, provided they meet specified standards.

## Definition of a detached minor residential unit

- The definition of a 'minor residential unit' is "a self-contained residential unit that is ancillary to the principal residential unit, and is held in common ownership with the principal residential unit on the same site".<sup>1</sup>
- The NES-DMRU applies only to **detached** minor residential units.

## Zones in which the NES-DMRU applies

- The NES-DMRU applies in residential, rural, mixed-use and Māori-purpose zones, where specified permitted activity standards are met.

## Key parts of the NES-DMRU

- The **permitted activity rule** sets out the requirement that one DMRU per site is a permitted activity so long as all permitted activity standards and other requirements are met.
- The **permitted activity standards** specify the standards that a DMRU must meet in order to be a permitted activity.

### The permitted activity standards for detached minor residential units require a DMRU to:

- have a maximum internal floor area of 70 square metres
- in residential zones, have a maximum of 50 per cent building coverage
- in residential zones, have a minimum front, side and rear boundary setback of 2 metres
- in rural zones, have a minimum front boundary setback of 10 metres, and side and rear boundary setbacks of 5 metres
- be set back 2 metres from the principal residential unit.

If the detached minor residential unit you're proposing doesn't meet the permitted activity standards, then district plan rules apply.

## Other existing plan rules and standards may apply

Some rules in local councils' district plans or unitary plans still apply when building a DMRU. These include rules about:

- subdividing land
- protecting important natural or cultural sites
- using the DMRU for non-residential purposes
- papakāinga (communal Māori housing)
- earthworks
- any health and safety requirements that also apply to the main house – such as managing natural hazards, setbacks (distance from) from utilities or industrial sites
- any specific infrastructure requirements.

All relevant regional plan rules will apply to all DMRU.

<sup>1</sup> Ministry for the Environment. 2019. *National Planning Standards*. Wellington: Ministry for the Environment, p 60.

## **Council plans can retain more lenient permitted activity standards**

The NES-DMRU allows district plans to retain more lenient permitted activity standards than those in the NES-DMRU. For example, if you are building a DMRU and the relevant district plan permits a floor area of 80 square metres, then you can build a DMRU of 80 square metres as a permitted activity as long as you meet all other requirements in the NES-DMRU.

Note: Varying your DMRU to meet more lenient standards in a district plan may mean you no longer meet the building consent exemption conditions in Schedule 1A of the Building Act 2004.

## **Councils cannot regulate some matters in relation to DMRU**

If an existing district plan (or unitary plan) sets rules about minimum outdoor space, privacy, sunlight access, glazing or parking, then a DMRU that you are building under the new NES-DMRU will not need to meet those requirements.

## **Implementation considerations**

### **Immediate steps**

The NES-DMRU has immediate effect once it comes into force. Councils will not be required to make a plan change to give effect to the NES-DMRU, as rules under national environmental standards override existing plan provisions 28 days after being gazetted.

Guidance material for the NES-DMRU be prepared in early 2026 and will be published on the Ministry for the Environment's website.

### **Considerations for homeowners**

If you want to build a detached minor residential unit on your property, you should check the NES-DMRU and your local council's rules. This will help you find out if:

- your DMRU meets the permitted activity standards in the NES-DMRU
- your local council has more lenient rules you can use
- you need to apply for resource consent to build your DMRU.

We recommend you check any proposed building work with your local council to confirm any building consent requirements before proceeding with building your DMRU.

### **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 these websites.

Ministry for the Environment. [National Environmental Standards for Detached Minor Residential Units](#).

Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment. [Granny flats exemption: Guidance and resources | Building Performance](#)

