

Updating National Direction: New National Policy Statement for Natural Hazards

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.

The Government has introduced national direction on managing natural hazard risk, while the new planning and environmental management system is being developed and implemented.

Context

New Zealand's location and geography make it highly vulnerable to a range of natural hazards, which are being intensified by climate change. The RMA can manage these risks by guiding where and how development occurs.

National reviews and recent severe weather events have shown that the current resource management system is not being used effectively to manage natural hazard risk. Development continues to occur in areas that are exposed to natural hazards and inappropriate risk-averse approaches to natural hazards can prevent much-needed new development.

The National Policy Statement for Natural Hazards (NPS-NH) sets out a balanced way for councils to manage natural hazard risks in new developments, based on the level of risk involved. Making new development safer helps to reduce future costs and make communities more resilient.

What the National Policy Statement for Natural Hazards includes

The NPS-NH requires local authorities and decision-makers to assess and manage natural hazard risks in a consistent, risk-based and proportionate manner. It has a strong emphasis on avoiding very high risks, using the best available information. It also considers long-term natural hazard risk, and requires decision-makers to consider mitigations. It sets a national baseline but allows for more conservative local provisions.

Policies

- **Risk assessment.** Natural hazard risks must be assessed using a specified risk matrix, taking into account mitigation.
- **Proportionate management.** Risk management must be proportionate to the assessed level of risk.
- **Avoidance of very high risk.** Subdivision, use or development with very high risk must be avoided.
- **Avoiding or mitigating increased risk on other sites.** Any activity that increases significant risk on other sites must avoid or mitigate that risk proportionately.
- **Best available information.** Decisions must use the best available information, even if that information is uncertain or incomplete.
- **Climate change.** Consider impacts of climate change at least 100 years into the future.

Implementation provisions

- **Risk-based assessment** uses likelihood and consequence tables to determine risk as low, medium, high or very high, and considers mitigation measures and residual risk.
- **Proportionate management** applies to the scale and detail of information necessary to assess the risk; and the cost-effectiveness of mitigation measures relative to the size of the risk.
- **No delay for uncertainty.** Decisions must proceed even if information is incomplete.

The risk reduction measures within the NPS-NH aim to ensure new development is more resilient, which will lower the social, economic, cultural and environmental costs of future natural hazard events. They also ensure that new development (except for infrastructure and primary production) occurs only where risks are managed, making communities safer and more resilient.

The only hazards that the NPS-NH applies to are flooding, landslips, coastal erosion, coastal inundation, active faults, liquefaction and tsunami.

Other hazards are not covered by the NPS-NH policies either because they are already managed effectively under existing laws like the Building Act 2004, or because there isn't enough guidance or data for them to be managed effectively using the NPS-NH methodology.

The NPS-NH does not apply to infrastructure. Managing natural hazard risks for infrastructure – such as roads, rail and utilities – requires a more flexible approach than the NPS-NH provides. It is often impractical to avoid all hazards when developing or maintaining essential services. Infrastructure owners already have strong incentives to manage and mitigate risks to protect assets and maintain service continuity. The NPS-NH also does not apply to primary production activities.

Policies

The policies in the NPS-NH require natural hazard risk for new developments (except for infrastructure and primary production) to be assessed using a standard method. This method considers likelihood and consequences, taking into account mitigations and climate change scenarios at least 100 years into the future.

The policies require the response to be proportionate: very high risks must be avoided, while medium or high risks need to be either avoided or reduced through mitigations. If a development creates or increases significant risk on neighbouring sites, that increased risk must also be managed proportionately.

The policies also recognise the need for decisions to proceed even when data and information are incomplete.

Implementation provisions

Part 3 of the NPS-NH (Implementation) explains how the policies should be put into practice. It requires risks from natural hazards for new developments to be assessed using a standard method that looks at both how likely a hazard is and how serious the consequences of the hazard could be for that development.

Decision-makers must consider not just the risk itself, but also any existing or planned measures to reduce that risk, and what happens if any mitigation measures fail. The potential impacts of climate change at least 100 years into the future need to be considered in determining the risk levels.

Part 3 also makes it clear what it means to manage natural hazard risks from subdivision, use and development proportionately. It clarifies that decision-making must continue, even if the information it is based on isn't perfect or complete, so that action isn't delayed by uncertainty.

Implementation considerations

Immediate steps

Once the NPS-NH is in force, local authorities must have regard to the NPS-NH when making consent decisions.

The new NPS-NH does not require councils to make plan changes within a specific timeframe; however, if plan changes related to natural hazards are developed, they are expected to incorporate the approach used by the NPS-NH.¹

The NPS-NH does not preclude decision-makers from managing natural hazard risk from other natural hazards and activities not otherwise covered by the policies. It also does prevent local authorities from applying a more conservative approach to managing natural hazard risks.

Connection with the National Adaptation Framework

The NPS-NH is intended to complement the National Adaptation Framework, which focuses on adapting existing communities and assets by limiting future exposure to hazards. Together, the NPS-NH and the National Adaptation Framework will work together to strengthen resilience and minimise long-term costs from climate change and natural hazards.

Implications for landowners and developers

The NPS-NH may affect landowners and developers planning new projects. If the project needs a resource consent, the council might ask for information about natural hazard risks and how the developers plan to manage them.

¹ Plan changes related to natural hazards are exempt from the 'Plan Stop' requirements in the Resource Management (Consenting and Other System Changes) Amendment Act 2025.

Landowners and developers undertaking development activities in low and moderate natural hazard risk areas may see only marginal increases in costs. In some cases, those in high-risk areas may face increased expenses for risk assessment and design features to reduce risk to acceptable levels.

Councils will need to use their discretion about when further information is required, taking into account the best available information and proportionate management policies of the NPS-NH.

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 on the NPS-NH, see this website.

Ministry for the Environment. [National Direction for Natural Hazards](#).