

Freshwater fact sheet – national direction

The Government is consulting on four national direction packages which aim to amend 12 existing national direction instruments and introduce four new national direction instruments. These changes support local decision-making under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA).

- Package 1: Infrastructure and development
- Package 2: Primary sector
- Package 3: Freshwater (this fact sheet)
- Package 4: Housing

About national direction

There are over 20 existing national direction instruments under the RMA 1991. These include national policy statements, environmental standards, planning standards and section 360 regulations.

Freshwater package consultation

The Government is seeking feedback on options to amend the:

- National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020
- National Environmental Standards for Freshwater 2020

This is intended to be a two-stage process. This consultation is the first stage and submissions will inform advice to the Government on what to amend in these instruments.

The second stage will involve notification of an exposure draft of the proposals, expected later this year, under section 46A of the Resource Management Act.

Submissions on the freshwater package can be made until 11.59pm on 27 July 2025, through the [Ministry for the Environment's website](#).

National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020

Key policy changes with options to test include:

- Replacing the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management (NPS-FM) and National Environmental Standards for Freshwater (NES-F) and rebalance Te Mana o te Wai to reflect the interests of all water users to:
 - allow councils more flexibility in how they manage freshwater
 - enable councils to tailor monitoring and management to local conditions

- ensure planning is more relevant to local communities and allows for more effective and efficient use of resources.
- Providing better provisions for commercial vegetable growing to:
 - establish whether a new NPS-FM objective is needed to direct councils to ensure a stable domestic food supply, including providing for crop rotation through regional plans
 - look at options for standards that would permit commercial vegetable growers to grow food or rotate crops within a catchment without having to get resource consent.
- Enable the creation of water storage to:
 - help mitigate the impacts of droughts and climate change
 - manage water storage to support ecosystems by maintaining water flows during dry periods
 - reduce the need for over-extraction from natural water bodies.
- Changing wetland regulation to:
 - make it easier to provide critical ecosystem services such as water filtration, flood control, and habitat for diverse species.
 - clarify the definition of a wetland by excluding unintentionally created ‘induced’ wetlands from the provisions
 - remove the ‘pasture exclusion’ from the wetland definition and instead permit farming activities that are unlikely to have an adverse effect (such as irrigation, on-farm water storage and fencing) in and around wetlands
 - define constructed wetlands, and including an objective, standards and consent pathway to enable and encourage constructed wetlands to be built
 - remove the requirements for councils to map wetlands by 2030.
- Protecting drinking water sources by:
 - mapping source water risk management areas to help safeguard drinking water sources from contamination so drinking water is safe for communities.
- Providing flexibility for the National Objectives Framework (NOF) to:
 - establish which elements of the NOF are critical at a national level (such as the need for compulsory freshwater values and attributes) and if so, which are critical for councils to manage
 - which attributes would require national bottom lines, and where they are not required
 - allowing councils to deviate from national bottom lines and monitoring methods to account for local circumstances (guided by specified criteria).

National Environmental Standards for Freshwater 2020

The freshwater discussion document contains options to deliver on the Government’s commitment to replace the National Environmental Standards for Freshwater (NES-F). The proposals follow last year’s changes to the NES-F to repeal intensive winter grazing rules.

Input is sought on ways to:

- simplify fish passage requirements to make it easier for councils and land users to comply while still providing appropriate protection for fish passage
- simplify rules and definition and information requirements in relation to wetlands and culverts
- simplify the nitrogen fertiliser requirements to establish if changes should be made to the information and requirements under the synthetic nitrogen fertiliser regulations.

