



Updating National Direction: Changes to the National Environmental Standards for Electricity Network Activities

August 2026

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

Amendments to the National Environmental Standards for Electricity Transmission Activities 2009 rename and expand the instrument as the National Environmental Standards for Electricity Network Activities (NES-ENA). These changes provide clearer, nationally consistent rules for electricity network activities, reduce consenting for routine activities, and better manage the effects of electricity network activities.

Context

New Zealand's electricity network needs major investment to meet growing demand, support renewable generation and enable electrification. The current standards only cover parts of the transmission network. Distribution activities and EV charging infrastructure are managed through local plans, creating inconsistent requirements, extra consenting costs and delays.

The amended standards will be renamed the National Environmental Standards for Electricity Network Activities (NES-ENA). They will set nationally consistent rules for transmission, distribution and EV charging infrastructure. The changes will make routine maintenance, upgrades and some new development easier where effects can be managed, while keeping consent requirements and controls for higher-risk activities.

The NES-ENA will also provide consistent protections for electricity infrastructure from nearby subdivision, buildings, earthworks and other activities. Overall, the amendments support a safer, more reliable and resilient electricity network while managing effects on the environment, historic heritage, sensitive activities and communities.

Amendments to establish permitted activity standards for EV charging infrastructure were made earlier in 2026¹.

¹ See [Updating National Direction: Changes to National Environmental Standards for Electricity Transmission Activities – Electric Vehicle charging](#)

Key changes in the National Environmental Standards for Electricity Network Activities

Expands and renames the standards to the National Environmental Standards for Electricity Network Activities (NES-ENA), covering transmission, distribution and EV charging infrastructure.

Enables more routine maintenance and upgrades without resource consent where national standards are met (regulations 5–21, 23–38, 46–54 and 56–57).

Introduces national rules for distribution assets, including lines, poles and cabinets (regulations 46–68).

Updates controls for asset dimensions, noise, earthworks, vegetation clearance and blasting to improve workability while managing effects (regulations 10A, 14–15, 25–26, 25A–25B, 30–36, 49–68, 81–82 and 87–88).

Introduces nationally consistent rules for development near electricity lines, including grid corridor and electrical safe-distance requirements (regulations 73–92).

Retains consent requirements and safeguards for activities with greater potential environmental effects (regulations 48, 52, 55, 58, 60, 62–63, 65, 67–68, 71, 80, 82–84, 86, 88, 90 and 92).

Expanding and renaming the standards

The existing National Environmental Standards for Electricity Transmission Activities will be renamed the National Environmental Standards for Electricity Network Activities (NES-ENA). Their scope will expand beyond existing transmission lines to include electricity distribution networks and electric vehicle charging infrastructure. This creates a broader national framework covering the infrastructure used to transmit and distribute electricity and support EV charging.

The amended standards introduce a nationally consistent approach for distribution networks and EV charging. The intention is to reduce regulatory uncertainty, support investment and help deliver the electricity infrastructure needed for electrification, energy security and network resilience.

Enabling more routine maintenance and upgrades

The amendments will allow more routine operation, maintenance, replacement and upgrade work to proceed without resource consent where specified permitted activity standards are met. This includes work on conductors, circuits, support structures, telecommunications equipment, vegetation and access to network assets. If those permitted activity standards are not met, the NES-ENA provides standardised consent pathways that focus decision-making on the relevant effects.

These changes respond to concerns that existing consent requirements can be disproportionate to the scale and effects of routine work. They aim to reduce consenting costs and delays, give network operators greater certainty and enable essential work to be completed more efficiently.

Environmental effects will continue to be managed through permitted activity conditions and resource consent requirements for activities with greater potential effects.

Introducing national rules for distribution assets

For the first time, the national standards will include rules for existing and new electricity distribution assets, including distribution lines, poles, mid-span poles, underground lines and cabinets. The rules will provide permitted activity pathways for specified work and controlled or restricted discretionary pathways where the relevant standards are not met.

The amendments also provide more practical limits for altering, relocating or replacing assets. These include greater flexibility for the height and width of poles and cabinets, a permitted height of up to 2.5 metres for new cabinets in land transport corridors, and clearer requirements for measuring cabinet noise near buildings containing sensitive activities. The changes aim to reflect modern network equipment and safety requirements, reduce unnecessary delays for network upgrades while retaining controls for environmental and amenity effects.

Updating controls for asset dimensions, noise, earthworks, vegetation and blasting

The amendments update a range of technical standards that apply to network operation and maintenance. They provide:

- more flexibility for the dimensions and relocation of replacement assets
- revised requirements for earthworks, vegetation clearance, blasting and protective coatings
- updated rules for conductors and communications equipment
- more practical controls for conductor and cabinet noise.

For transmission lines operating at or above 220 kV, the amendments include a modelled conductor-noise threshold and require the best practicable option to minimise noise where that threshold is exceeded.

More routine work will be enabled where relevant standards are met, while additional controls will continue to apply in natural areas, historic heritage places or areas, and near water bodies, roads and occupied buildings. Blasting within specified setbacks will require environmental and site-specific management plans and council notification.

Collectively, these changes aim to make the rules more workable and better aligned with established network practices while managing environmental, heritage, safety and amenity effects.

Introducing consistent rules for development near electricity lines

The NES-ENA will introduce National Grid Yard and National Grid Subdivision Corridor provisions to manage buildings, subdivision and other activities near transmission infrastructure. These national provisions are intended to apply along the National Grid, except in Auckland, where the Auckland Unitary Plan approach will continue to apply.

The amendments will also introduce rules for buildings, structures, subdivision, earthworks and vertical holes near electricity distribution lines. These rules are consistent with the New Zealand

Electrical Code of Practice for Electrical Safe Distances 2001². They aim to reduce electrical safety risks, protect access to network assets and prevent nearby development from constraining the operation, maintenance or upgrading of electricity infrastructure.

Retaining safeguards for activities with greater potential effects

The NES-ENA will enable more activities through permitted standards, but it will not remove the need to manage significant environmental effects. Resource consent will continue to be required where an activity does not meet the relevant standards or has greater potential effects. Depending on the activity, the applicable pathway may be controlled, restricted discretionary, discretionary or non-complying.

The framework retains specific protections for natural areas, historic heritage places or areas, sensitive activities, water quality, land stability, ecological values and construction effects. This approach aims to balance faster and more certain delivery of electricity infrastructure with appropriate environmental, cultural, community and safety safeguards.

Implementation considerations

For local government

The NES-ENA will apply directly from its commencement date. Councils will need to:

- apply the new rules to relevant consent applications
- update staff guidance, checklists and assessment templates
- consider how the NES-ENA interacts with other plan rules, national direction and electrical safe-distance requirements
- train planning and compliance staff
- continue monitoring consents and responding to non-compliance.

The changes are intended to reduce consenting while maintaining environmental and safety safeguards. Councils should clearly explain the new requirements to applicants and record any implementation issues to support future monitoring and review.

National environmental standards apply directly to a relevant activity, so the RMA ‘plan stop’ requirements (see the Ministry for the Environment website’s page on [Understanding Plan Stop](#)) do not apply to the NES-ENA amendments.

For industry

Once the changes to the NES-ENA come into effect, electricity network operators, contractors and EV charging providers will need to:

- check whether proposed work is covered by the NES-ENA
- confirm that all permitted activity standards are met before work begins
- update internal procedures, design standards and compliance checklists

² See [New Zealand Electrical Code of Practice for electrical safe distances \(NZECP 34: 2001\)](#)

- consider other applicable plan rules, national direction and electrical safe-distance requirements
- prepare and retain any required modelling, management plans, notifications and compliance records
- apply for resource consent where the relevant permitted activity standards cannot be met.

Early engagement with councils will help clarify requirements where activities involve sensitive environments, development near electricity lines or more complex consent and compliance matters.

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 more information about the transition to the new planning system, see the Ministry for the Environment fact sheet [The New Planning System: Transitioning into the new planning system](#).

Further information

[National Environmental Standards for Electricity Transmission Activities](#) | Ministry for the Environment

