



Updating National Direction: Changes to the National Environmental Standards for Telecommunication Facilities

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 Telecommunication Facilities (NES-TF) will make it easier and faster to build and upgrade telecommunications infrastructure. The amendments update rules for poles, headframes, antennas and cabinets, and enable temporary facilities, renewable power for rural sites and fibre connections to heritage buildings, while retaining protections for sensitive areas. These changes will reduce consenting costs and delays, help improve urban and rural connectivity, strengthen network resilience, and encourage providers to consider sharing infrastructure.

Context

The National Environmental Standards for Telecommunication Facilities (NES-TF) provide consistent planning rules for installing and operating certain telecommunications infrastructure across New Zealand. Activities that meet the standards are generally permitted without a resource consent, helping reduce costs and delays. Local planning controls are retained in areas with significant natural, cultural or historic heritage values, except for certain new customer connections that meet the NES-TF requirements.

The NES-TF was last updated in 2016 and no longer fully reflects modern technology, increasing demand for connectivity or changes in urban development. It also does not provide national rules for some important activities, including temporary facilities and renewable electricity generation used to power rural sites. This means network operators may face different requirements across various planning documents, creating uncertainty and slowing network improvements.

The amendments update technical standards and enable a wider range of low-impact activities. They aim to make it faster and more cost-effective to improve urban and rural connectivity, strengthen network resilience and support infrastructure sharing, while continuing to manage environmental effects and protect sensitive areas.

Key changes to the National Environmental Standards for Telecommunication Facilities

Updated standards for telecommunications infrastructure and equipment (regulations 7(2), 20–22, 25, 27, 29, 31(4), 33, 35, 37 and 42).

New poles allowed in more locations (regulations 28, 32 and 33).

Temporary facilities enabled for emergencies and maintenance (new definition and regulated activity).

Renewable power enabled for rural sites and for temporary facilities (new definition and regulated activity, regulations 5(1), 5(2), 5B and 35(2)(d)).

Clearer rules for fibre connections to heritage buildings (regulations 39, 40, 46, 56–58 and 63).

Local protections retained for sensitive areas (new regulated activity, regulations 35(2)(d), 27(7), 33(5), 33(6) and 46).

Updated standards for telecommunications equipment and shared infrastructure

The amendments update the permitted size and height standards for telecommunication poles, antennas, headframes and cabinets. The new limits better reflect current equipment. They vary by zone so that larger facilities are generally enabled in commercial, industrial and rural areas, while smaller limits apply in more sensitive locations.

The changes make it easier to install modern technology and allow multiple network operators to share poles and other equipment. This is intended to improve coverage, reduce consenting costs and avoid the need for several separate facilities in the same area.

New poles allowed in more locations

New poles will be permitted outside road reserves in specified commercial, industrial, retail and centre zones, provided they meet the relevant standards. The requirement that any new pole in a road reserve must be within 100 metres of an existing pole has also been removed.

These changes give providers more flexibility to place poles where they can deliver effective coverage, including near growing urban areas and new housing developments. They will also reduce unnecessary resource consents and discourage poles from being clustered together.

Temporary facilities enabled for emergencies and maintenance

Temporary facilities help restore telecommunications services when permanent infrastructure is damaged, unavailable or being upgraded. The new standards allow temporary telecommunication facilities to operate for up to 12 months during emergencies such as the unplanned outage of an existing facility or for the maintenance, replacement or upgrade of an existing facility. Temporary facilities for events or periods of high demand may operate for up to three months. Solar panels and wind turbines will also be permitted to power temporary facilities, subject to the relevant standards.

The changes are intended to improve the reliability of services and help communities remain connected during emergencies and disruptions.

Renewable power enabled for rural sites and temporary facilities

Small-scale solar panels, wind turbines and battery storage will be enabled to power specified telecommunication facilities in rural areas outside the road reserve. The standards include limits on the number, height and size of renewable generation structures and require setbacks from specified buildings and activities.

The changes will make it easier to operate telecommunication facilities in remote or off-grid locations. Landowner permission or another lawful access arrangement would still be needed where the operator does not own or otherwise have authority to use the land. They aim to improve the reliability of rural connectivity and network resilience while supporting lower-emissions infrastructure and less reliance on fossil fuels.

Clearer rules for fibre connections to heritage buildings

The amendments provide nationally consistent rules for installing fibre and other customer connection lines on heritage buildings. New connections will be permitted on primary heritage features or front facades if they use existing lawfully established conduits and attachment points or are installed without modification of the primary heritage features or front facades. Connections that do not meet the permitted standards require a restricted discretionary resource consent.

The changes aim to improve access to modern telecommunications services while protecting important heritage features. They also provide a clearer consenting pathway where council oversight and heritage expertise are needed.

Local protections retained for sensitive areas

Local planning rules will continue to manage most telecommunications activities in sensitive areas, including areas with significant natural, cultural or historic heritage values. These include wāhi tapu, significant habitats, outstanding natural features and landscapes, visual amenity landscapes, and places adjoining rivers, lakes and the coastal marine area.

Retaining these protections balances the more enabling national standards with local decision-making. It allows councils and communities to manage infrastructure in ways that reflect the environmental, cultural and heritage values of sensitive locations.

Implementation considerations

For local government

The NES-TF amendments apply to consent decisions from their commencement date, irrespective of whether they have been applied to council plans. Councils should:

- review how the new rules interact with their plans
- remove any conflicting or duplicated plan provisions, as required
- continue applying local rules where the NES-TF allows them or does not cover an activity or effect
- check whether the changes affect resource consent applications already being processed
- train planning, consenting, compliance and customer-service staff
- update websites, guidance, checklists, templates and internal systems
- prepare to respond to enquiries from providers, landowners and communities
- review how permitted activities will be monitored and enforced.

Councils remain responsible for monitoring and enforcing the NES-TF. Local rules will continue to apply in many areas with significant natural, cultural or heritage values.

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-TF amendments.

For industry

Telecommunication network operators and facility operators should prepare to apply the amended NES-TF from its commencement date. They should:

- familiarise relevant planning, design, engineering and delivery teams with the new rules and permitted activities
- update internal guidance, design standards, compliance checks and approval processes
- check which activities are permitted and when local plan rules or resource consent requirements still apply
- apply the new zone-based standards for poles, antennas, headframes and cabinets
- confirm setbacks, location requirements and protections for environmentally, culturally or historically significant areas
- keep evidence showing that facilities meet the permitted activity standards
- meet existing radiofrequency reporting and exposure requirements
- engage with councils and communities where appropriate, including when consent is not required.

Network operators should also review planned and current projects to identify where the amended rules could enable co-location, temporary facilities, renewable power at rural sites or fibre connections to heritage buildings. Activities that do not meet the permitted standards may still require resource consent and must comply with relevant local rules.

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 Telecommunication Facilities](#) | Ministry for the Environment

