

National Policy Statement for Natural Hazards Implementation Guide



Ministry for the
Environment
Manatū Mō Te Taiao



Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Government

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Part 1: Introduction

National policy statements allow the government to prescribe objectives and policies for matters of national significance relevant to sustainable management under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA).

This guide provides a general overview of what the [National Policy Statement for Natural Hazards 2025](#) (NPS-NH) intends to achieve, along with detail to support implementation.

The NPS-NH is a temporary measure to address a gap in the RMA

Aotearoa New Zealand's location and geography make it highly vulnerable to a range of natural hazards, many of which are being intensified by climate change. The RMA can manage these risks by guiding where and how development occurs. Although the RMA requires local authorities to manage significant risk from natural hazards when making plans and assessing resource consent applications, it does not provide a process to follow.

At the time of writing this guide, the Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill are before the Environment Select Committee. These Bills are intended to establish a modern planning framework and include goals relating to the management of risk from natural hazards, and (if passed into law) will make up a new system to replace the RMA.

The NPS-NH came into force on 15 January 2026. The NPS-NH will operate during the transition to the new planning system and will be replaced by new national direction developed under the Planning and Natural Environment Bills, should they be passed into law. The policy intent of the NPS-NH will be carried over into the new system, with refinement and restructuring to ensure alignment with the objectives and framework set by the Planning and Natural Environment Bills.

The NPS-NH is part of a suite of changes to national direction under the RMA that simplify the system and cut red tape. To deliver on this objective – and recognising that, ideally, local authorities should not have to undertake major plan development or change processes before the new system is introduced – the NPS-NH was designed to apply primarily to resource consenting decisions.

Local authorities must have regard to the NPS-NH when making consent decisions. Local authorities are not required to introduce a plan change in order to give effect to the NPS-NH, but they are expected to have regard to the NPS-NH requirements if they do develop plan changes related to natural hazards.

Purpose and scope of guide

This guide has been developed to support local authorities in giving effect to the NPS-NH. Until it is replaced by more comprehensive national direction for natural hazards, the NPS-NH will have the most influence on consenting for subdivision and land-use. This guide is therefore focused on these decision-making processes. It may be useful for property owners, resource consent applicants and consultant planners when considering the subdivision, use and development of land that is exposed to natural hazards.

This guide is not intended to comprehensively detail the process for managing natural hazard risks under the NPS-NH and the RMA. Rather, it aims to clarify the intent of the policy and provide high-level recommendations on implementing particular aspects of the NPS-NH. Existing guidance documents are available that inform land-use planning practice for the management of natural hazard risk, including for specific hazards (see [appendix 1](#)).

This guide is consistent with, and expands on, the policy intent behind the NPS-NH, but it is not part of the NPS-NH and is not legal advice. It should be read alongside the information available on the Ministry for the Environment's website.¹

This guide is split into five parts.

Part 1: Introduction – explains the context and scope for the guide.

Part 2: Objective and policies – outlines the objective and policy approach of the NPS-NH.

Part 3: Application – explains what planning processes, natural hazards and activities the NPS-NH applies to, as well as how it is intended to interact with existing planning provisions for natural hazards.

Part 4: Implementation clauses – steps through each of the implementation clauses, explaining the components of a risk-based assessment, what the proportionate management of natural hazard risk means, and what best available information is and how it can be used in the risk assessment process.

Part 5: Interaction with other policies – explains how the NPS-NH interacts with other relevant legislation.

¹ Ministry for the Environment. [National Policy Statement for Natural Hazards 2025](#). Retrieved 30 March 2026.

Part 2: Objective and policies

The NPS-NH aims to improve decision-making

2.1 Objective

1. Natural hazard risk to people and property associated with subdivision, use and development is managed using a risk-based proportionate approach.

The aim of the NPS-NH is to maximise development while minimising losses from natural hazard events (in terms of injury, loss of life, and damage to land and buildings) by encouraging the right kind of development in the right locations. To achieve this, the NPS-NH directs that a risk-based proportionate approach be applied when managing the risk from natural hazards. This means first considering the likelihood of a natural hazard event and its potential consequences on people and property (rather than just the presence of a hazard), and then applying a management response that is proportionate to the level of risk posed.

The NPS-NH comprises six key policies

The six NPS-NH policies set out the core approaches for decision-making by consent authorities. These approaches follow best practice and are designed to maximise safe development, and they are likely to be carried over into the new planning system.

2.2 Policies

Policy 1: When considering natural hazard risk associated with subdivision, use or development, the risk level must be assessed using the risk matrix.

Policy 2: Natural hazard risk associated with subdivision, use and development must be managed using an approach that is proportionate to the level of natural hazard risk.

Policy 3: Where subdivision, use or development is assessed as having very high natural hazard risk, that risk must be avoided.

Policy 4: Where subdivision, use or development, including any associated mitigation measures, will create or increase significant natural hazard risk on other sites, that risk must be avoided or mitigated using an approach that is proportionate to the level of natural hazard risk.

Policy 5: Natural hazard risk assessment and decisions must be based on the best available information and must be made even when that information is uncertain or incomplete.

Policy 6: The potential impacts of climate change to at least 100 years into the future must be considered.

The NPS-NH does not direct exact outcomes, aside from the avoidance of 'very high' risk. This is because the management of risk from natural hazard is highly context specific – communities will have different risk exposure, social and economic drivers and tolerance to risk – and also because the primary opportunity to implement the NPS-NH is via resource consenting.

Part 3: Application

The NPS-NH is designed to apply to resource consenting

[Section 104\(1\)\(b\)\(iii\)](#) of the RMA requires decision-makers to have regard to any relevant national policy statements^{2,3} when deciding a subdivision or land-use consent. This applies until the decision is made, even if the consent application was lodged before the NPS-NH came into force. Whether the NPS-NH is considered relevant to a subdivision and land-use decision under section 104 will depend on whether the consent authority has the discretion to consider natural hazards at the time the decision is being made.

For discretionary and non-complying activities, all relevant matters can be considered under [section 104B](#) of the RMA. Therefore, consent authorities must have regard to any relevant provisions of the NPS-NH when considering whether to grant or refuse a discretionary or non-complying resource consent application.

Under [section 104A](#) (controlled activities) and [section 104C](#) (restricted discretionary activities) of the RMA, the consent authority can only consider the NPS-NH if natural hazards are explicitly included in the matters over which it has restricted the exercise of its discretion or control in its plan or proposed plan.

However, [sections 106 and 106A](#) of the RMA allow a consent authority to refuse to grant consent, or to grant consent subject to conditions, if it considers that there is a significant risk from natural hazards. Sections 106 and 106A can be used to consider significant natural hazard risk for any consent type. This includes controlled and restricted discretionary activities where natural hazards are not a matter over which a consent authority has restricted the exercise of its discretion or control in a plan.⁴

The NPS-NH is a tool for decision-makers to use when determining whether and how they will use the section 106 and 106A provisions of the RMA in deciding consent applications.

The NPS-NH applies to specific natural hazards

Clause 1.3(1) of the NPS-NH identifies that the NPS-NH applies to the natural hazards specified where relevant to a particular location. The natural hazards specified are those commonly managed by local authorities – in a land-use planning context, these are generally understood to be:

- flooding – referring to inundation of land that is normally dry, including:
 - fluvial flooding, where waterways overflow their banks due to excess water
 - pluvial flooding, where intense rainfall exceeds drainage capacity or soil absorption

² Bishop C. 2024. [RMA Reform Phase Two priorities and plan](#). *Beehive.govt.nz* 22 August.

³ As one of several matters that need to be considered.

⁴ [Section 87A\(2\)\(a\)](#) of the RMA provides an override of the section 104A requirement for a consent authority to grant consent for controlled activities where sections 106 or 106A apply.

- groundwater flooding, where the water table rises above the surface, often after prolonged rainfall
- landslips – referring to the downhill movement of soil, rock or debris under gravity, which may be triggered by rainfall or earthquake shaking (terms such as landslide, slippage and falling debris may also be used; types of landslip include rockfalls, topples, slides, flows, and creep)
- coastal erosion – referring to the retreat of the shoreline (either temporarily or permanently) due to tides and waves, including storm surges
- coastal inundation – referring to inundation of land by seawater (including by storm surges and high tides)
- active faults – referring to those faults that have ruptured the surface in the past and as identified in the [New Zealand Active Faults Database](#)
- liquefaction, including lateral spread – referring to where loose, water-saturated soils lose strength due to earthquake shaking
- tsunami – referring to a series of long-period waves, primarily those generated by underwater earthquake events from local, regional and distant sources where there is significant displacement of the seafloor.

These natural hazards have been specified based on the availability of consistent data to support a land-use planning response to the risk each natural hazard poses. Other hazards – such as volcanic activity or geothermal risks – were not included, because they require highly localised responses or are already addressed through other legislation (eg, the Building Act 2004). Decision-makers may apply the approach set out in the NPS-NH to hazards that are not specified in the NPS-NH, but are not required to.

The NPS-NH applies to all activities except infrastructure and primary production

The NPS-NH applies to all activities managed under the RMA except infrastructure (as defined under [section 2\(1\)](#) of the RMA) and primary production (as defined under the National Planning Standards⁵), which are described in the boxes below. These activities have been excluded because they require a more nuanced management approach.

⁵ Ministry for the Environment. 2019. *National Planning Standards*. Wellington: Ministry for the Environment. p 62.

Definition of infrastructure (section 2(1) of the RMA)

infrastructure means—

- (a) pipelines that distribute or transmit natural or manufactured gas, petroleum, biofuel, or geothermal energy;
- (b) a network for the purpose of telecommunication as defined in section 5 of the Telecommunications Act 2001;
- (c) a network for the purpose of radiocommunication as defined in section 2(1) of the Radiocommunications Act 1989;
- (d) facilities for the generation of electricity, lines used or intended to be used to convey electricity, and support structures for lines used or intended to be used to convey electricity, excluding facilities, lines, and support structures if a person—
 - i. uses them in connection with the generation of electricity for the person’s use; and
 - ii. does not use them to generate any electricity for supply to any other person:
- (e) a water supply distribution system, including a system for irrigation;
- (f) a drainage or sewerage system;
- (g) structures for transport on land by cycleways, rail, roads, walkways, or any other means;
- (h) facilities for the loading or unloading of cargo or passengers transported on land by any means;
- (i) an aerodrome as defined in section 5 of the Civil Aviation Act 2023;
- (j) a navigation installation as defined in section 5 of the Civil Aviation Act 2023;
- (k) facilities for the loading or unloading of cargo or passengers carried by sea, including a port related commercial undertaking as defined in section 2(1) of the Port Companies Act 1988;
- (l) anything described as a network utility operation in regulations made for the purposes of the definition of network utility operator in section 166.

Definition of primary production (as defined in the National Planning Standards)

primary production means:

- (a) any aquaculture, agricultural, pastoral, horticultural, mining, quarrying or forestry activities; and
- (b) includes initial processing, as an ancillary activity, of commodities that result from the listed activities in a);
- (c) includes any land and buildings used for the production of the commodities from a) and used for the initial processing of the commodities in b); but
- (d) excludes further processing of those commodities into a different product.

Any infrastructure not covered by the RMA definition will be subject to the NPS-NH. Although the [National Policy Statement for Infrastructure 2025](#) provides a definition for infrastructure, that definition is for the purpose of that instrument alone and should not be adopted for the application of the NPS-NH.

Regardless, the NPS-NH is not intended to be limiting, meaning local authorities can still apply an existing approach for managing the risk of natural hazards to infrastructure and primary production activities.

The NPS-NH does not automatically override existing planning provisions

The NPS-NH sets a national baseline for managing natural hazard risk through land-use planning, to lift practice. Many district plans include existing risk-based approaches that use different likelihood thresholds, consequence measures and risk matrices. It does not seek to replace these approaches where they are more conservative (clause 1.3(4)). This means that, where an approach under existing planning documents would prevent development that would be assessed against the NPS-NH risk matrix as being lower than 'very high' risk, decision-makers may choose to apply those planning provisions rather than follow the NPS-NH.

Local government planning documents are developed in consultation with local communities, reflecting their circumstances and views, so it may be entirely appropriate to follow their more conservative approach. Where a plan includes existing risk-based provisions for the management of natural hazards, a first step should be assessing these against the NPS-NH approach to determine whether they are more permissive, the same, or more conservative.

Part 4: Implementation clauses

Assess the risk

The NPS-NH directs local authorities to take a risk-based approach to subdivision, use or development – that is, assessing the risk to a specific activity from a specific natural hazard. This requires decision-makers to consider the location, type and design of the activity for which consent is sought.

Clause 3.2 of the NPS-NH identifies the key components required in a risk-based assessment, as detailed in the box below.

Clause 3.2 – Risk-based assessment

1. Natural hazard risk associated with subdivision, use or development must be assessed using:
 - (a) the likelihood of a natural hazard event occurring...; and
 - (b) the consequence of a natural hazard event for life and property...;to determine whether the level of natural hazard risk is low, medium, high or very high, in accordance with the risk matrix.
2. When assessing natural hazard risk, decision-makers must consider:
 - (a) existing and proposed mitigation measures; and
 - (b) residual risk that arises when design thresholds of any existing and proposed mitigation measures are exceeded.

Likelihood

Likelihood is the chance of something happening. When considering the likelihood of a natural hazard event, the likelihood table in the NPS-NH (reproduced here as [table 1](#)) uses the following measures:

- probability of exceedance – the probability that a natural hazard event of a certain size will occur, or be exceeded, in a given time period (if the time period is one year, it is referred to as an annual exceedance probability (AEP))
- average recurrence interval (ARI) – the average period of time between hazard events of a given magnitude, often referred to as return period (eg, a 1 in 100-year event).

The likelihood table includes seven levels based on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) likelihood scale,⁶ adjusted for common natural hazards management terminology used in New Zealand. The likelihood levels allow for greater nuance in the management of events at the higher end of the likelihood scale and provide a common language for risk across both climate change management and natural hazard risk management. Corresponding qualitative descriptors ranging from ‘almost certain’ to ‘very rare’ have been assigned to each likelihood threshold.

⁶ Mastrandrea MD, Field CB, Stocker TF, Edenhofer O, Ebi KL, Frame DJ, Held H, Kriegler E, Mach KJ, Matschoss PR, Plattner G-K, Yohe GW, Zwiers FW. 2010. *Guidance Note for Lead Authors of the IPCC Fifth Assessment Report on Consistent Treatment of Uncertainties*. Geneva: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Table 1, p 3.

Table 1: NPS-NH likelihood table

Likelihood level	Annual exceedance probability (AEP)	Average recurrence interval (ARI) or 'return period'
Almost certain	10% or more	Up to and including 10 years
Very likely	10% to 5%	Over 10 and up to and including 20 years
Likely	5% to 2%	Over 20 and up to and including 50 years
Possible	2% to 1%	Over 50 and up to and including 100 years
Unlikely	1% to 0.2%	Over 100 and up to and including 500 years
Rare	0.2% to 0.02%	Over 500 and up to and including 5,000 years
Very rare	Less than 0.02%	More than 5,000 years

District plans often do not seek to manage events with a likelihood more frequent than 1% AEP, and councils may not hold data on these events. In these circumstances, the use of best available information may be relied upon. If a council holds information for a particular natural hazard at a range of likelihoods, they should manage the impacts of the likelihood event that results in the highest level of risk under the matrix.

Consequence

Consequence generally refers to the impact of a natural hazard event on the built, social, economic or natural environments. The NPS-NH consequence table (reproduced here as [table 2](#)) focuses on the consequences to property (buildings and land) and people (injuries or fatalities).

Table 2: NPS-NH consequence table

Consequence level	Damage to property	Potential for injury or fatalities
Catastrophic	Severe damage to land and building(s), potential for collapse or total destruction of structures. Building(s) need to be demolished, rebuilt or relocated.	High threat to life safety, with probable fatalities and/or critical injuries.
Major	Major damage to land and building(s), including structural damage. Loss of use and substantial repair required.	Unsafe for people, with potential for many injuries, or critical injuries and/or fatalities.
Moderate	Some damage to land and non-structural damage to building(s). Limited loss of use, repairs required.	Unsafe for people, with potential for injuries, although expected to be minor.
Minor	Minor damage to land and building(s). No loss of use, minimal repairs required.	Isolated minor injuries possible.
Negligible	No loss of use, no building repairs required.	No injuries.

The severity of the consequences from a natural hazard is a function of the:

- characteristics of the hazard (eg, magnitude, duration)
- exposure of elements at risk (ie, what is in the way)
- vulnerability of elements at risk (eg, building design, age of individual).

When assessing the consequences of a natural hazard event, if a different consequence level results for each column, the level of risk should be determined by applying the highest consequence level in the risk matrix.

Risk level

Policy 1 of the NPS-NH directs that when considering the natural hazard risk associated with subdivision, use or development, the risk level must be assessed using the risk matrix (as reproduced in figure 1). This combines the likelihood and consequences of a particular natural hazard event to determine whether the level of natural hazard risk is ‘low’, ‘medium’, ‘high’, or ‘very high’.

Figure 1: NPS-NH risk matrix

		Likelihood Level						
		Almost certain	Very Likely	Likely	Possible	Unlikely	Rare	Very Rare
ARI (years)		Up to 10	10-20	20-50	50-100	100-500	500-5000	> 5000
AEP		10% or more	10% to 5%	5% to 2%	2% to 1%	1% to 0.2%	0.2% to 0.02%	< 0.02%
Consequence Level	Catastrophic	Very High	Very High	Very High	High	Medium	Medium	Medium
	Major	Very High	Very High	High	High	Medium	Medium	Medium
	Moderate	High	High	High	Medium	Medium	Low	Low
	Minor	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low	Low	Low
	Negligible	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low

Mitigation measures

Clause 3.2(2)(a) of the NPS-NH directs that an assessment of natural hazard risk must consider the impact of existing and proposed mitigation measures. This is to ensure the risk assessment fully considers the proposal, and to encourage proponents of development to consider including site-level mitigation measures where those will reduce the risk from natural hazards.

Residual risk

Clause 3.2(2)(b) of the NPS-NH requires decision-makers to consider the residual risk associated with any existing or proposed mitigation measures when assessing natural hazard risk. Residual risk is the risk that remains after risk treatment measures (ie, avoidance or mitigation) have been applied. This is because any new development in hazard prone areas, even with mitigation measures, will result in an increase in exposure and an increase in overall risk.

At the consenting scale, it is most often hard structural measures (eg, catch nets for slope instability) or design measures (eg, minimum floor levels for flooding) that are proposed to mitigate the risk from natural hazards. These are designed to protect against a particular likelihood event, and residual risk arises from the potential occurrence of a natural hazard event that is beyond the design threshold of the mitigation measure.

Decision-makers should be aware that extreme events that exceed design thresholds are possible, and they may need to prepare emergency management plans and other response strategies. Actions such as intensifying housing in areas protected from flooding by hard structures may increase risk to life in an extreme event which overtops defences, and local authorities should ensure they have planned to manage such events.

Impacts of climate change

Policy 6 of the NPS-NH requires a risk assessment to consider the potential impacts of climate change to at least 100 years into the future. The 100-year timeframe will apply when using existing hazard data and information for use in the risk assessment process. If information that includes climate change over the 100-year timeframe is not available or applicable, policy 5 (assessment and decisions must be based on the best available information) would apply.

The climate change scenarios and projections that are used in a risk assessment should reflect the decision-making process they are informing (e.g., spatial planning, zoning, consenting). This is consistent with a risk based, proportionate approach.

There is no single statutory requirement mandating the use of a specific future projection when assessing the risk from natural hazards impacted by climate change. Current expectations are set through national guidance and policy frameworks, including the national adaptation plan (NAP).

The NAP is principles-based rather than prescriptive, leaving judgement to decision-makers, who use this science for different purposes. The NAP recommends:

- consideration of a range of plausible future conditions; and
- tailoring the scenario used to suit the longevity and significance of the activity being considered.

The impacts of climate change will increase the likelihood of climate-sensitive hazards such as flooding and rainfall-induced landslips. This means that what is currently a 1 percent AEP event may in the future become a 2 percent AEP event, and at the same time have increased consequences – so what might be a low risk now might become a high risk in the future.

Changes to the risk profile of a hazard event under different climate change scenarios can be assessed by using the risk matrix in two ways – that is:

- by holding the event likelihood constant (eg, a 1 percent AEP event) and adjusting the consequence rating to reflect increased impacts under different climate scenarios (ie, a more severe flood associated with the same AEP in the future)
- by assessing how a hazard event of a given magnitude may increase in likelihood over time, such that an event currently defined as a 1 percent AEP may become more frequent (eg, becoming a 2 percent AEP event).

Manage risk proportionately

The NPS-NH directs decision-makers to respond proportionately to natural hazard risk, meaning that when risk is higher, stronger constraints on development are appropriate. Conversely, when risk is low, development should be enabled. The intended outcome of the proportionate approach is that new development likely to be badly damaged by natural hazards does not progress, and that any limitation on or required mitigation measures for new development is justified.

Clause 3.3(2) of the NPS-NH provides a framework for proportionate management under the NPS-NH, as detailed in the box below.

Clause 3.3: Proportionate management of natural hazard risk

1. Decision-makers must consider the scale and detail of information necessary to assess the risk by having regard to the anticipated level of risk.
2. When managing natural hazard risk associated with subdivision, use and development, decision-makers must apply mitigation measures, including location and design, for the purposes of ensuring that:
 - (a) very high natural hazard risk is avoided;
 - (b) high or medium natural hazard risk is avoided or mitigated proportionate to the level of risk; and
 - (c) any creation of, or increase in, significant natural hazard risk on other sites is avoided or mitigated proportionate to the level of natural hazard risk.
3. When applying the proportionate approach required by 2(b) and 2(c), decision-makers must take into account the cost effectiveness of mitigation measures relative to the level of anticipated risk.

The NPS-NH is not intended to limit the way decision-makers manage risks below the ‘very high’ threshold. Policies and rules in existing plans that avoid new development at a risk level below the ‘very high’ threshold will continue to apply. When deciding consents, decision-makers will need to have regard to the NPS-NH policies (in particular, the proportionate management approach of policy 2), as well as policies in existing plans (as provided in [section 104\(1\)\(b\)](#) of the RMA).

Managing risk on other sites

Clause 3.3(2)(c) of the NPS-NH requires that subdivision, use or development (including any associated mitigation measures) needs to avoid or mitigate the creation of, or increase in, significant risk on other sites. Whether this risk is to be avoided or mitigated depends on what approach is a proportionate response to the level of risk posed.

Significant natural hazard risk

Significant natural hazard risk is defined for the purposes of the NPS-NH as being natural hazard risk assessed as ‘medium’, ‘high’ and ‘very high’ using the risk matrix. This definition is based on a common understanding of significance – that is, something large or important enough to warrant attention. A significant risk from natural hazards is therefore one requiring some form of management response, including avoidance or mitigation.

Cost effectiveness of mitigation measures

Clause 3.3(3) of the NPS-NH requires decision-makers, in determining whether mitigation measures are a proportionate response to the risk posed, to consider their cost effectiveness. This may include consideration of:

- technical feasibility of the mitigation measures
- longevity of the measures (and the level of service provided over time)
- any ongoing maintenance or monitoring requirements.

Requirement for a detailed risk assessment

Under clause 3.3(1) of the NPS-NH, decision-makers must have regard to the anticipated level of a risk when considering the scale and detail of necessary information. In general, most natural hazard data held by a local authority is at a region- or district-wide scale and is either susceptibility or hazard information. This type of information can be used to indicate where an area is likely to be impacted by a natural hazard, and where making a decision on an application may require a request to an applicant for a further detailed assessment of the risk by a suitably qualified and experienced person (SQEP).

Risk assessment methodologies vary and have often been developed for specific natural hazards. Variations include the use of qualitative or quantitative data, the level of certainty reached in an assessment, the use of assumptions and the extent of area being analysed. However, any risk assessment prepared by an SQEP to support a consent application should align with the NPS-NH framework. Depending on the level of risk posed, it may also be appropriate for the consent authority to have the applicant's risk assessment peer reviewed by an SQEP prior to making a decision on the consent application.

As a general guide, an SQEP is a person who:

- is independent
- has a relevant professional registration (eg, chartered professional engineer)
- applies good professional practice
- undertakes a risk assessment in accordance with accepted industry practice and guidelines
- is willing to certify and stand by the conclusions of the report (eg, in the Environment Court).

Best available information

Clause 3.4 of the NPS-NH seeks to ensure decision-making is based on the best information available at the time, as detailed in the box below.

Clause 3.4: Best available information

1. When undertaking risk assessments and making decisions for the purposes of managing natural hazard risk, decision-makers must use the best information available at the time of making the assessment or decision.
2. When information is uncertain or incomplete, decision-makers must continue to undertake risk assessments and make decisions using the best available information and not delay making decisions solely because of uncertainty about the quality or quantity of the information available.

This means using complete and scientifically robust data where possible, but it does not preclude using information that is uncertain or incomplete.

This approach recognises that natural hazard information is continuously changing and improving, as well as recognising that some local authorities will have different levels of risk information available. The direction to use the best available information allows decision-makers to actively manage risks, even when the information is not perfect. The alternative –

delaying actions to manage risk because of uncertainty about the exact risk profile or trajectory – means people and property stay at risk.

Valid information does not necessarily have to be publicly available and may be held within a local authority's own internal geographic information system. This accords with recent amendments to the Local Government Official Meetings and Information Act 1987 requiring councils to disclose all known natural hazard information on Land Information Memoranda (LIM), whether publicly available or not.

As a guide, applying best information available involves the following:

- Use complete and scientifically robust data where possible.
- Best available information may also include information obtained from modelling, as well as partial data and information obtained from other sources.
- When using information that is uncertain or incomplete, give preference to sources of information that provide the greatest level of certainty, while taking all practicable steps to reduce uncertainty.
- If the information is uncertain, including when considering future conditions under climate change, interpret it in a way that gives effect to the proportionate risk-based approach required by the NPS-NH.

Local authorities should develop their own criteria for evaluating the suitability of information for consenting – for example:

- the age of the information
- advances in science or changes in the environment that have occurred since publication
- the qualifications and experience of the person who authored the information
- whether it was peer reviewed
- whether it follows best practice methods
- whether it remains consistent with good practice
- whether uncertainties and limitations are well documented.

As such, the proportionate approach also relates to the inputs into the risk assessment, such as the robustness or completeness of the information that is being used. The existing hazard-specific guidance (see [appendix 1](#)) offers insights into the suitability of natural hazard information for different land-use planning purposes.

Part 5: Interaction with other policies

In New Zealand, the management of natural hazard risk is addressed through a range of legislation, regulations, policies and plans – briefly:

- the Building Act 2004 addresses building requirements through the Building Code and related compliance pathways
- the Civil Defence Emergency Management Act 2002 focuses on preparing for, responding to and recovering from natural hazard events
- the Local Government Official Meetings and Information Act 1987 requires all known information on natural hazards held by a council to be included on LIMs.

The management of natural hazards also intersects with other national direction instruments, including:

- the [New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement 2010 \(NZCPS\)](#)
- the [National Policy Statement for Infrastructure 2025 \(NPS-I\)](#)
- the [National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020 \(NPS-UD\)](#)
- the [National Environmental Standards for Detached Minor Residential Units 2025 \(NES-DMRU\)](#)
- the [proposed National Environmental Standards for Papakāinga \(NES-P\)](#).

Clause 1.3(3) of the NPS-NH specifically directs that the NZCPS prevails where there is inconsistency in policy direction with regards to managing natural hazard risk in the coastal environment. This is because, in most cases, the NZCPS would provide a more specific policy direction for identifying, assessing and managing natural hazard risk for coastal environments. A more comprehensive review of management of natural hazard risks in the coastal environment is planned as part of the next phase of the planning system reform.

Given that infrastructure is exempted from consideration under the NPS-NH, the NPS-I will only apply when making a decision on a resource consent application for infrastructure that is not as defined in the RMA (ie, for additional infrastructure as defined in the NPS-I), or where existing planning provisions seek to manage infrastructure in areas subject to natural hazards.

The NPS-NH does not have precedence over the NPS-UD. In the decision-making process, both must be considered, and the outcomes sought by each must be balanced. In relation to the NES-DMRU and the proposed NES-P, the NPS-NH will only apply where resource consent is required and, in these situations, will guide decision-making as identified in [part 3](#) above.

Appendix 1 – Additional reference material

The following non-statutory documents are current at the time of this guide being published. They provide additional information on the risk-based planning approach and land-use planning for different hazards. Although some require updating and may include information that has been superseded by evolving best practice, they may still provide useful context when viewed with discretion to assist in implementing the NPS-NH.

- Beban J, Gunnell S, Saunders WSA. 2019. *Integrating tsunami inundation modelling into risk-based land-use planning: An update of guidance*. GNS Science miscellaneous series 132. Lower Hutt: GNS Science.
- de Vilder SJ, Kelly SD, Buxton RB, Allan S, Glassey PJ. 2024. *Landslide planning guidance: reducing landslide risk through land-use planning*. GNS science miscellaneous series 144. Lower Hutt: GNS Science.
- International Standard AS/NZS ISO 31000:2018. 2023. *Risk Management – Principles and guidelines*.
- Kerr J, Nathan S, Van Dissen R, Webb P, Brunson D, King A. 2003. *Planning for development of land on or close to active faults: A guideline to assist resource management planners in New Zealand*. Client report 2002/124. Prepared for the Ministry for the Environment by the Institute of Geological and Nuclear Sciences. Wellington: Ministry for the Environment.
- Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, Ministry for the Environment. 2017. *Planning and engineering guidance for potentially liquefaction-prone land: Resource Management Act and Building Act aspects*. Wellington: Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment.
- Ministry for the Environment. 2010. *Preparing for future flooding: A guide for local government in New Zealand*. Wellington: Ministry for the Environment.
- Ministry for the Environment. 2024. *Coastal hazards and climate change guidance*. Wellington: Ministry for the Environment 2024.
- Saunders WSA, Beban JG, Kilvington M. 2013. *Risk-based land-use planning for natural hazard risk reduction*. GNS Science miscellaneous series 67. Lower Hutt: GNS Science.
- Walker B, Davies W, Wilson G. 2007. *Practice Note Guidelines for Landslide Risk Management 2007*. *Australian Geomechanics* 42(1): 63–114.