

Summary document

Te whakawhanake i te pūnaha rīpoata taiao o Aotearoa

Improving Aotearoa New Zealand's environmental reporting system

Proposed amendments to the Environmental Reporting Act 2015

The Ministry for the Environment is seeking feedback on proposals to strengthen the Environmental Reporting Act 2015.

While the Environmental Reporting Act (ERA) has made positive changes to the way we report on the environment, we need to extend its functionality and breadth so environmental reports have more impact.

The ERA made environmental reporting mandatory for the first time in New Zealand, ensuring that reporting occurs on a regular basis and can be trusted by the public as independent, fair and accurate.

Under the ERA, the Ministry and Stats NZ report on the state of different aspects of our environment every six months, and our environment as a whole every three years.

After almost two full cycles of reporting and a review of the environmental reporting system by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment (PCE) in 2019, we have an opportunity to build on what we've learned to better report on what matters most and increase the influence environmental reporting has on decision-making.

By amending the ERA, we aim to:

- make reporting timelier, using a wider variety of formats and data
- clearly state the reasons why we are reporting under the ERA
- make reporting more cohesive and robust, using a fuller reporting framework, and produce scenarios showing future trends
- better reflect Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi) partnership with Māori and Māori data sovereignty, by stronger inclusion of te ao Māori and mātauranga Māori
- help decision-makers identify and implement positive actions for our environment.

About the Environmental Reporting Act

The ERA provides the framework for independent, structured and regular reports on the state of Aotearoa New Zealand's environment. This helps us understand how New Zealand's environment is tracking and the impacts of our activities over time, which is vital for good decision-making.

A key feature of the ERA is that it goes beyond reporting on the biophysical state of the environment. It covers dependencies and impacts related to social, economic, and cultural use and management of our natural resources.

The ERA requires the Ministry and Stats NZ to jointly produce and publish:

- five domain reports published over a three-year period (roughly two per year)
- a state of the environment (synthesis) report published every three years.

The most recent domain and synthesis reports to be published under the ERA are [Our air 2021](#) and [Environment Aotearoa 2019](#).

Why we're amending the Environmental Reporting Act

In contributing to and completing almost two full reporting cycles under the ERA, departments, experts and other agencies have found that report production could be improved so environmental reports have more impact.

While improvements continue to be made as each report is published, legislative change is now needed to allow a wider variety of reporting formats, additional tools and other data sources to be used.

In his 2019 report [Focusing Aotearoa New Zealand's environmental reporting system](#), the PCE highlighted a need to "evolve from the current treadmill of reporting (based on the largely passive harvest of data we happen to have) to reports and commentaries that draw on comprehensive time-series data to identify meaningful trends and help focus our stewardship of the environment in the right places."

Proposed amendments are an important first step towards the system shift needed to address issues in the broader environmental monitoring and reporting system. National environmental reporting will be crucial to the implementation and operation of the new resource management system.

Integrating te ao Māori

Beyond the 10 proposals listed below, we're also working with Māori to identify changes that give a stronger voice to te ao Māori within environmental reporting. This includes exploring how mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge), data, evidence, knowledge and science could be shared, collected, managed and protected in environmental reporting.

This will improve the coverage and effectiveness of environmental reporting and make it more meaningful and useful for Māori as well as broader communities, local and central government, and other organisations. This work could result in changes to current proposals and additional amendments being developed.

Proposed amendments

Informed by the PCE's recommendations, the Resource Management Review Panel's 2020 report *New Directions for Resource Management in Aotearoa New Zealand*, and findings from previous environmental reports, these proposed amendments will provide a stronger foundation to ensure we understand our environment and the impacts we're having on it to support good decision-making.

You can find out more about each proposal, including alternative options, costs, benefits and risks, in the full [consultation document](#).

Proposal	Rationale
1. Clarify the purpose of environmental reporting	Being clearer about why we report on the state of the environment and what the reports aim to achieve will better set the scene for interpreting and implementing the ERA.
2. Mandate a government response to synthesis reports	A mandatory government response will increase transparency and accountability for addressing environmental issues, closing the loop between reporting and action taken.
3. Add drivers and outlooks to the reporting framework	Extending the current pressure-state-impact framework to include drivers and outlooks will give a more complete view of environmental issues.
4. Adjust roles and responsibilities	Clearly defining the joint roles and responsibilities of the Secretary for the Environment and the Government Statistician will reduce overlap and ensure that each organisation's expertise is utilised.
5. Mandate a standing advisory panel	A mandated standing advisory panel will guarantee independent expert advice is provided across a range of perspectives and disciplines.
6. Replace environmental domains with cross-domain themes	Cross-domain themes will better represent the complexity and interrelation of environmental systems and better reflect a holistic te ao Māori view of te taiao.
7. Reduce the frequency of synthesis reports to six-yearly	As some rates of environmental change can be slow, moving to six-yearly cycle will achieve a more appropriate balance between reporting timeliness, rates of change and seeing connections between changes.
8. Replace domain reports with one commentary each year	Producing one theme-based commentary report per year will make the reporting cycle less resource intensive, encourage more in-depth analysis and reduce the risk of repetitive reporting.
9. Establish a set of core environmental indicators	Defining core environmental indicators in the regulations will provide a directive for implementing enduring core indicators, which will improve data collection abilities.
10. Strengthen the mechanisms for collecting data	New data collection provisions will help ensure the reporting programme has the data it needs to create a more comprehensive picture of the environment on an enduring basis.

Have your say

For full details on the proposals, the problems we are trying to solve and the options we considered, please read the full [consultation document](#).

Share your feedback until **5pm on Friday 18 March 2022** by:

- using our online survey to answer some or all of the questions set out in the consultation document
- writing your own submission.

For more information, visit consult.environment.govt.nz/environment/proposed-amendments-environmental-reporting-act/.

If you have any questions about the submission process, contact the team at era.consultation@mfe.govt.nz.

Next steps

We will analyse all the feedback we receive to inform final recommendations to the Government.

Once proposals are agreed, legislation will be drafted and an amendment to the ERA (through an amendment bill) will be introduced to Parliament, likely at the end of 2022.

A bill passes through several stages before it can become an Act of Parliament. You can find out more about the legislative process on the [New Zealand Parliament website](#).

Some issues may also be addressed through non-legislative change.

