



National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity

Exposure draft summary for the forestry sector

This information sheet supports the release of an exposure draft of the National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity (NPSIB). It focuses on how the NPSIB will work for forestry, alongside the National Environmental Standards for Plantation Forestry (NESPF).

This information sheet should be read alongside the exposure draft summary. Those wishing to gain a deeper understanding of the NPSIB should read the full exposure draft.

How the forestry provisions of the NPSIB fit in with the Government's wider priorities

The NPSIB supports New Zealand's national and international priorities under [Te Mana o te Taiao – Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020](#). It applies to all types of land and helps us work together across public, private and Māori land to ensure nature can thrive. It also helps set the foundational architecture needed for Māori and the Government to work together to protect taonga.

Forestry plays a strong role in responding to the climate crisis, whether by reducing emissions or adapting to climate change.

The NPSIB supports work under the emissions reduction plan to address barriers to regenerating and protecting native ecosystems and to create better incentives for restoring native forests. It is intended to provide a framework which allows plantation forestry to play its role in addressing climate change, while recognising the impacts (positive and negative) on biodiversity.

What the NPSIB means for the forestry sector

Plantation forests provide important habitat for indigenous species. At the same time, these forests are productive ecosystems, with ongoing management and harvesting requirements.

The NPSIB directs councils on how to carry out their Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) responsibilities, mainly through developing objectives, policies and methods (such as rules) in council

plans. For example, by identifying Significant Natural Areas (SNAs) and including provisions in plans to manage the adverse effects of new activities on them.

Under the NPSIB, existing activities can continue, as long as they don't increase or cause further degradation. With regard to forestry, the NPSIB aims to provide for production activities to continue, while protecting the rarest species.

The NPSIB provides a specific regime for SNAs within plantation forests. This is based on the definition of 'plantation forest' in the NESPF which means forest deliberately established for commercial purposes, rather than naturally occurring indigenous vegetation (cl 3.14).

Where Threatened or At Risk species occur within the productive parts of a plantation forest, this creates an SNA but without the full set of SNA restrictions. Instead, the NPSIB requires the species to be managed to maintain their long-term populations over the course of consecutive rotations. This replaces the 'avoid' requirements and the effects management hierarchy which normally apply to SNAs (3.10(2)).

Within the perimeter of plantation forest properties there may also be mature remnants of indigenous vegetation, for example in gullies. These could qualify as SNAs under any of the Appendix 1 criteria and are not covered by clause 3.14. The normal SNA provisions in clause 3.10 apply for new activities, and existing activities will be allowed to continue in those circumstances.

Key updates to the NPSIB

The following changes were made following the consultation period in 2019/2020.

- We have moved away from the term 'plantation forest biodiversity area' because submitters told us it was unclear.
- We have introduced a consistent approach for both threatened fauna and flora.
- We have ensured that the mature remnants of indigenous vegetation that qualify as SNAs continue to be protected by the standard SNA and NESPF management regime, rather than the framework for the productive harvestable forest.

How the NPSIB works with the NESPF and the Forests Act

The NESPF and the NPSIB work together, but at different levels of granularity. The NESPF is more prescriptive, operating at a 'rules' level. It contains provisions to manage indigenous vegetation outside SNAs and requires harvest management plans. It also mitigates the effects of forestry on threatened indigenous bird nesting, including four At Risk species found in forests.

The NPSIB plantation forestry provisions focus on council plan provisions regarding SNAs in the productive forest and in indigenous vegetation remnants. It aims to protect threatened indigenous biodiversity while recognising the productive use of the forest.

- Council plan rules for SNAs will apply in forests. For SNAs, the NESPF allows individual council plan rules to be more stringent than the NESPF provisions themselves. Some related changes to the NESPF might be needed to clarify the extent to which councils can provide for biodiversity in plantation forests.
- The NPSIB and NESPF do not distinguish between exotic and indigenous planted forests.

- Trees planted on land that was not covered by indigenous vegetation at the time of planting are not subject to the sustainable forest management provisions of the Forests Act 1949. However, they do require a milling statement from Te Uru Rākau that they fit one of the criteria under 67D of part 3A of the Forests Act (in this case that the timber is sourced from a planted indigenous forest).
- The Forests Act does apply to naturally occurring indigenous forest. It establishes a framework for authorising sustainable harvest via plans and permits. These forests may also be identified as SNAs – if so, harvesting activities will also need to comply with any SNA rules in council RMA plans.
- For plantation forests that are on Māori lands, the NPSIB policies for plantation forests will still apply.

Information and examples

General

Purpose of the NPSIB

Indigenous plants and animals of New Zealand are in decline. Some will disappear forever if we don't work together to reverse the decline and restore what has been lost.

The RMA has required councils to protect significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitat of indigenous fauna and to maintain indigenous biodiversity for over 30 years. Many councils have already included SNAs and other indigenous biodiversity provisions in their plans, but up to now this hasn't been done in a consistent way.

The objective of the NPSIB is to protect, maintain and restore indigenous biodiversity in a way that:

- recognises tangata whenua as kaitiaki, and people and communities as stewards, of indigenous biodiversity
- provides for the social, economic and cultural wellbeing of people and communities, now and into the future.

The NPSIB will provide standard criteria and management approaches to make it clear how council RMA plans can consistently protect and maintain unique and sensitive indigenous biodiversity. Without it we risk further declines to indigenous biodiversity.

Using land identified as a Significant Natural Area (SNA)

If an SNA is identified on your land, you can continue to use the land for its current purpose as long as your activities don't intensify or cause further damage to the SNA. But if you want to change the land use or increase the way in which you use the SNA (intensity or scale) you will need a resource consent.

Support for protecting and maintaining private SNAs

In most cases you don't have to actively manage and protect your SNA, for example by fencing it off or undertaking pest control. You just can't do things that will damage it. But many landowners value the indigenous biodiversity on their land and do a great job of caring for it.

There will be funding available to assist councils, iwi/Māori and landowners in implementing the NPSIB. Many councils have already begun, or are currently managing, identifying SNAs and discussing with landowners how best to protect their indigenous biodiversity. The mechanisms for accessing funding will be developed alongside the NPSIB.

Plantation forestry

SNAs in plantation forests

An SNA in a plantation forest is one that is within the planted area of the forest, or in an area that is used for the operations of the plantation forest. However, these areas are only SNAs if there are Threatened or At Risk species present.

SNAs can also exist on areas of the property that are not planted or are not used for the operation of the plantation forest. These may be areas of regenerating or remnant indigenous bush, for example. These SNAs are identified based on the full range of assessment criteria, not just whether Threatened or At Risk species are present.

Plantation forests containing a Threatened or At Risk species

Plantation forestry activities (such as earthworks and harvesting) are permitted within the SNA, but need to be managed in a way that allows the Threatened or At Risk species to survive on your property long term (cl 3.14). Only the areas of your plantation forest that support the Threatened or At Risk species will be identified as an SNA.

How you manage these activities so that the species does not permanently decline long term (ie, across rotations) will depend on what species is present. Many threatened species are actively managed and even thrive in plantation forests.

For example, kārearea benefit from the clearings created following harvest, and bats benefit from how you harvest in particular locations and at different times of the year. Good forestry management practice for some of these species already exists.

Managing biodiversity in SNAs within or bordering plantation forests

The NPSIB does not require that you actively manage and protect an SNA within or bordering a plantation forest. You just can't do things that will damage it. For example, you will need to remove any wilding trees that establish in the SNA from your plantation forest. The NESPF includes rules that manage plantation forestry activities (eg, afforestation, earthworks, wilding control, harvesting), so they do not cause unnecessary damage to SNAs.

Managing plantation forests with an understorey of indigenous plant species

The NESPF includes rules on the clearing of indigenous vegetation, as well as for nesting birds. This is because plantation forests are an environment that can develop indigenous biodiversity.

Any areas within a plantation forest that have Threatened or At Risk species can be identified as an SNA. These SNA areas will need to be managed in a way that maintains sustainable populations of the Threatened or At Risk species on your property in the long term. The NESPF rules for managing the developed understorey still apply.

Many foresters choose to help indigenous biodiversity by adapting how they manage their forest. Plantation forests support indigenous biodiversity – they grow over a long period of time, giving plants and animals an undisturbed home.

Some indigenous species even benefit from the harvest period of a plantation forest. Other indigenous species will return after it has been harvested and replanted, provided that a source population remains nearby.

Managing native bush bordering a plantation forest

The NESPF includes rules on how you may clear indigenous vegetation. These rules apply to plantation forestry activities (eg, earthworks and harvesting) bordering and throughout the plantation forest area.

Use or harvesting of indigenous trees or vegetation

Harvesting natural indigenous forest inside or outside of an SNA

The Forests Act requires an approved Sustainable Forest Management Plan and permit (SFMP) before harvesting unplanted indigenous trees.

An SFMP sets out how to maintain the ecological integrity of the forest and is strictly managed by Te Uru Rākau – New Zealand Forest Service with input from the Department of Conservation. SFMPs are set up in accordance with district and regional plans, including rules on SNAs, but you should check these plans before harvesting.

SFMPs can restore or enhance indigenous biodiversity. SFMPs require the active management of stock, weeds and pests to encourage regeneration. They can assist local authorities and landowners to restore degraded SNAs. In this way an SFMP can complement the objectives of the NPSIB.

Managing mānuka or kānuka in an SNA

If the area is an SNA only because of the threat of myrtle rust, you may continue to manage the mānuka or kānuka as long as it is able to grow back (there are no irreversible effects). For example, you cannot permanently remove the mānuka or kānuka. There may be other rules in your local council plans relating to the other indigenous biodiversity on the property.

Managing planted indigenous vegetation

It is unlikely, but possible, that deliberately planted indigenous vegetation could become an SNA in future, for example if there are Threatened or At Risk species present. However, these SNAs are managed differently because the vegetation was planted for something other than to benefit indigenous biodiversity or to be a plantation forest (3.11(4)(b)).

If it is a plantation forest, you should manage the area so that it doesn't result in the permanent loss of the Threatened or At Risk species from your property. For other developed land, you can use the land for the purpose you developed it for. However, you should not cause unnecessary harm to the indigenous biodiversity that is present and was the reason it was identified as an SNA.

