



National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity

Exposure draft summary for the farming sector

This information sheet supports the release of an exposure draft National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity (NPSIB). It focuses on how the NPSIB will work for New Zealand's farming community.

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.

This information sheet is intended to assist with understanding the proposed indigenous biodiversity national direction; the exposure draft process provides the opportunity for Ministry for the Environment to test its workability. The Ministry for Primary Industries will continue to work with the Ministry for the Environment to test consistency and workability for the farming community.

What the NPSIB means for the farming sector

Biodiversity has many on-farm benefits, from preventing erosion to improving soil quality and increasing the resilience of farm systems.

However, a more consistent approach is needed to identify and manage indigenous biodiversity, regardless of where it is found.

The NPSIB will apply to all land types and sets out the ecological criteria councils will have to use to identify Significant National Areas (SNAs). The aim is to provide greater certainty to people who want to develop or change the way they use their land and avoid significant regional variation.

We recognise the important work farmers are doing to improve on-farm biodiversity, whether they have an SNA or not. Many farmers and landowners across the country are already doing work voluntarily, or in partnership with organisations or with local councils.

Key updates to the NPSIB exposure draft

Public consultation in 2019/2020 resulted in some changes which have been incorporated into the exposure draft. Most changes to the draft are to improve clarity and better reflect policy intent. The exposure draft has been amended to:

- address effects management in SNAs
- strengthen the role of tangata whenua in decision-making
- include public conservation land within the scope of the NPSIB. This means public conservation land can be identified and protected as SNAs (with exceptions)
- tweak the provisions for pastoral land, areas outside of SNAs and existing uses for clarity.

Existing farming activities

The NPSIB allows existing activities to continue and provides for some specific new activities, for example, where these activities are locationally constrained, or there are no practicable alternative locations. New activities must fall within clearly defined parameters to ensure indigenous biodiversity can be protected.

Existing activities occurring inside SNAs will be allowed to continue, as long as there isn't an increase in scale or intensity, and it will not lead to degradation of an SNA.

Pasture renewal

The NPSIB contains a policy which recognises pasture renewal where it may affect an SNA. Renewing pasture species is part of many farming systems. The NPSIB sets out that a regular cycle of periodic maintenance or improvement is permitted, as long as certain conditions are met which address the environmental effects.

Councils' policy statements and plans need to recognise that sometimes vegetation is removed for pasture renewal. There will be exceptions to this activity where the regenerated indigenous biodiversity itself has become an SNA, or where the periodic clearance is likely to compromise the protection of SNAs or the maintenance of indigenous biodiversity.

Examples

Using land adjacent to an SNA

Existing farming activities are covered under the Resource Management Act. The NPSIB only requires particular management of new activities in and around SNAs where those activities will have adverse effects on the SNA, or where existing activities are intensified or increased in scale.

Protecting highly mobile fauna on farms

Highly mobile fauna areas are not SNAs, but it's important to protect these areas too.

There is limited information about highly mobile fauna and the NPSIB requires regional councils (working with tangata whenua and the Department of Conservation) to record areas outside SNAs that support specified highly mobile fauna where possible.

Using an SNA for grazing

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.

Public access to private SNAs

The NPSIB does not include anything that enables or requires the public to have access to private land.

Pest management in SNAs

Pest management is not a direct requirement of the NPSIB. Councils may require pest control in an SNA as part of a resource consent application for undertaking a new activity, if this would be seen to help manage adverse effects on the SNA. Pest management is generally considered under the Biosecurity Act, rather than the RMA.

Protecting SNAs on private land

Councils may require fencing off an SNA as part of a resource consent application for undertaking a new activity, if this would be seen to help manage adverse effects on the SNA, but this is not a requirement of the NPSIB.

Managing planted indigenous vegetation

It is unlikely, but possible, that deliberately planted indigenous vegetation could become an SNA in the 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 (3.11(4)(b)).

If there are Threatened or At Risk species present, the relevant area of vegetation can be identified as an SNA. It will need to be managed in a way that doesn't result in the permanent loss of the Threatened or At Risk species from the property.

The land can be used, as long as no unnecessary harm comes to the indigenous biodiversity.

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.

Using an SNA for occasional grazing or shelter

An SNA will be mapped and the approach to managing stock grazing and shelter will depend on the level of intervention proposed by each council in implementing the NPSIB. This will be guided by what effects need to be managed. Some councils may seek to restrict animal access to SNAs, in which case there are likely to be corresponding rules.

Existing use rights may apply if grazing is already occurring. District plan rules do not apply retrospectively, so if this use was permitted at the time it began, it can continue.

If the farming/grazing activity is new and the land is going through a change of use to establish a farming activity, the SNA provisions in the district plan will apply and effects on the SNA will be assessed. This may result in proposals or conditions requiring that stock not enter the SNA.

