

Resource management reform

Development, infrastructure and efficiency

Why we're reforming the resource management system

The Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) is Aotearoa New Zealand's main law governing how we use our natural and built resources. Now more than 30 years old, the RMA is not delivering for the environment or for development and is no longer fit to help us respond to emerging issues, such as adapting to the impacts of climate change.

The Government is reforming the resource management system to create one that's more certain and efficient – a system that supports development within environmental limits and is required to give effect to the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi).

At its heart is te Oranga o te Taiao – a concept drawn from te ao Māori, and an intergenerational ethic that speaks to the health and wellbeing of the natural environment, and the essential relationship between a healthy environment and its capacity to sustain all life.

Proposed laws

The Government announced in February 2021 that the RMA would be repealed and replaced with three new Acts: the Spatial Planning Act (SPA), the Natural and Built Environment Act (NBA) and the Climate Adaptation Act (CAA). The SP Bill and the NBE Bill are being introduced to Parliament in 2022. The CA Bill is expected to be introduced in 2023.

Focus on positive outcomes

A key criticism of the RMA is its focus on managing the adverse effects of activities at the consenting stage. The new resource management system will switch this focus and aims to achieve positive outcomes for both the built and natural environments. The weight of decision-making and debate will take place at the early planning stages, meaning less litigation and fewer delays at consenting stage.

Consenting

With more activities permitted in the natural and built environment plans, much less activity will be required at the consenting stage. Consent authorities will have far fewer consents to process, and will be able to impose effective and enforceable conditions.

Activities categories will be reduced from six to four. The categories will be:

- permitted
- controlled
- discretionary
- prohibited.

A lot has been learnt from the benefits of the fast-track consenting process, introduced in 2020 in response to the economic impacts of Covid-19. These learnings have been taken into account in developing the new legislation. There is value in keeping the fast-track consenting programme for certain projects. The policy intent of the [Medium Density Residential Standards](#) will also be carried into the new system.

Support for development and infrastructure

The costly and time-consuming processes of the RMA have not supported the timely provision of infrastructure; they have contributed to the rapid rise in house prices that have resulted in Aotearoa having the least affordable housing in the OECD.

The time taken to reach a decision on consent applications more than doubled between 2014/15 and 2021/22. A recent study for the New Zealand Infrastructure Commission (Te Waihanga) found that getting projects consented costs New Zealand's infrastructure developers NZ\$1.29 billion every year.

With more than 100 regional and district plans nationwide, a myriad of zones, overlays, rules and conditions has resulted in significant and unnecessary cost and uncertainty. Plans often reflect a bias towards the status quo, protecting established activities from changes to rules and standards that would promote better development and environmental outcomes.

Central and local government, regions, communities, households and businesses will benefit from the time and cost savings created by a more efficient resource management system.

A more efficient, less costly system

In the proposed new resource management system:

- More than 100 regional and district plans will be consolidated to around 14 natural and built environment plans (NBE plans).
- Regional spatial strategies will identify the housing and infrastructure needed in a region over at least the next 30 years.
- A new National Planning Framework will draw together more than 20 existing pieces of national direction, and will include an infrastructure chapter that is being developed by the New Zealand Infrastructure Commission (Te Waihanga).
- There will be a more flexible designations process and designations will be available to more providers.
- More activities will be permitted plans and fewer consents will be needed.
- The fast-track consenting process will continue for some infrastructure.
- Independent hearing panels will help improve plan quality and enable appeal rights to be restricted for matters in line with a panel's recommendations, reducing delay, cost, and re-litigation in the appeals process.

More about resource management reform

Visit the [resource management system reform pages](#) on the Ministry for the Environment's website for more information, including more factsheets:

- [Overview of resource management reform](#)
- [The Natural and Built Environment Act](#)
- [The Spatial Planning Act](#)
- [Protecting the environment](#)
- [A more effective role for Māori](#)
- [Roles and responsibilities](#)

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