

Resource management reform

Protecting the environment

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The Government announced in February 2021 that the RMA would be repealed and replaced with three new Acts: the Spatial Planning Act (SPA), the Natural and Built Environment Act (NBA), and the Climate Adaptation Act (CAA).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.

Tackling environmental threats and degradation

In Aotearoa New Zealand today:

- our native plants, animals and ecosystems are under threat, with 4000 native species currently threatened or at risk of extinction
- our activities are degrading ecosystems, causing declines in soil and water quality, and accelerating erosion
- decades of accumulating negative impacts on our natural environment have reduced its ability to recover from shocks like weather events, affecting livelihoods and community wellbeing.

One objective of the resource management system reforms is to protect and, where necessary, restore the natural environment. This includes protecting the capacity of the environment to provide for the wellbeing of present and future generations. A further objective is to better prepare for adapting to climate change and risks from natural hazards, as well as mitigating the emissions that contribute to climate change.

Natural and Built Environment Act

The proposed NBA will take over important functions from the RMA, including national direction, planning and consenting processes, and will focus on positive outcomes for both natural and built environments.

The NBA will provide a National Planning Framework that will coordinate and replace more than 20 current pieces of national direction. The National Planning Framework will set national environmental outcomes, limits and targets that regions must apply in their planning.

Outcomes, limits and targets in the National Planning Framework

Outcomes will include:

- our air, soil, estuaries and coastal areas being protected, restored or enhanced
- the reduction of greenhouse gases
- the development of well-functioning, climate-resilient urban areas that improve our quality of life.

Plans and consents will be required to show how outcomes will be achieved.

Limits will protect human health and prevent the ecological integrity of the natural environment from degrading from its current state.

Targets will drive improvement and restoration. If ecological integrity is already unacceptable degraded, the NPF will set a minimum level target and plans must include how this target is to be achieved.

The National Planning Framework will also provide stronger direction and guidance on resolving conflicts and issues that can arise during the planning process.

Natural and built environment plans

Under the NBA, a single natural and built environment plan (NBE plan) per region will replace more than 100 district and regional plans under the RMA.

The NBE plan will be developed by a regional planning committee with members from local authorities and local hapū, iwi and Māori, and with community engagement and input. It will be informed by the National Planning Framework and the long-term regional spatial strategy (see [Spatial Planning Act](#) below) and will show how, at the regional level, targets and outcomes for both the built and natural environments will be achieved.

With stronger direction from central government, more activities will be permitted in NBE plans, reducing cost and delays at the consenting stage. Local authorities will be able to enforce stronger conditions, and will have stronger compliance and enforcement powers.

Spatial Planning Act

The SPA will provide for long-term, coordinated, regional spatial planning. It will require regions to develop a regional spatial strategy, setting out the region's aspirations, priorities and challenges for at least a 30-year timeframe.

Regional spatial strategies will identify areas suitable for development or infrastructure, and areas that require protection or are vulnerable to climate change effects and natural hazards. Regional spatial strategies will be informed by the National Planning Framework and its outcomes, limits and targets.

The regional spatial strategy will – like the NBE plan – be developed by a regional planning committee with members from central government, local authorities and local hapū, iwi and Māori, and with community engagement and input.

Community engagement

The regional planning committees developing regional spatial strategies and NBE plans will be required to engage early and effectively with mana whenua and other interested parties.

Anyone interested in environmental outcomes will be able to have their voices heard at the development stage, with submissions on the NBE plan heard by an independent hearing panel.

The NBA will also introduce a strengthened Te Tiriti clause, requiring that all people exercising functions and powers under the Act must “give effect” to the principles of Te Tiriti. This updates the RMA's requirement to “take into account” Te Tiriti principles.

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 Spatial Planning Act](#)
- [Development and infrastructure](#)
- [Protecting the environment](#)
- [A more effective role for Māori](#)
- [Roles and responsibilities](#)

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