



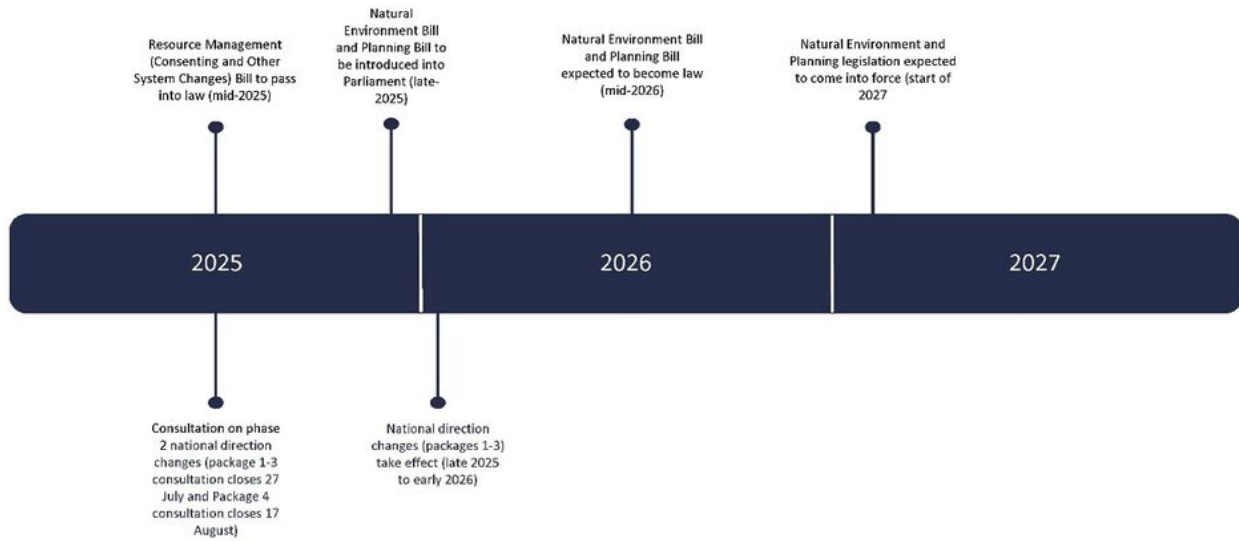
Resource Management Reforms on the Move

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Key Changes at a Glance

As we wait to see more details of two new bills to replace the RMA (signalled to be introduced to Parliament by the end of this year), more changes to the RMA and existing national planning documents are being made. But other changes to regional and local plans are to be “stopped”. In this article we provide an update on these changes and note the key dates for incoming changes

Timeline of RMA changes



RMA Bill 2

The Resource Management (Consenting and Other System Changes) Amendment Bill (Bill 2) continues to advance through Parliament, having passed its second reading this week, following the report back from the Environment Select Committee (on 11 June 2025).

Bill 2 proposes changes relating to five themes: infrastructure and energy, housing growth, farming and the primary sector, natural hazards and emergencies, and system improvements.

At its second reading, several key recommendations from the Select Committee were agreed to, including:

- Removing the opt-out provision for councils who have implemented the Medium Density Residential Standards because signalled changes to the NPS-UD will now be made in Phase 3 (the replacement of the RMA), and introducing specific processes for Auckland and Christchurch.
- Retaining public hearings in the consenting process (the status quo), removing the controversial proposal to bypass hearings when authorities had “sufficient” information.
- Preserving the 35-year default consent duration for renewable energy projects and long-lived infrastructure, providing certainty for long-term investments.
- Introducing a 10-year timeframe to reduce adverse effects under section 70 discharge rules.
- Empowering consent authorities under new section 106A to decline or impose conditions on land use consents in areas at risk of natural hazards, though this will not apply to infrastructure or primary production activities.

In addition to the Select Committee’s recommendations, the Government has

signalled it will make further amendments to Bill 2 through an amendment paper (yet to be introduced) to:

- Remove the heritage protection status currently provided in the Wellington City District Plan for the Gordon Wilson Flats in Wellington to allow these flats to be demolished.
- Insert a temporary regulation making power into the RMA to allow the Government (following engagement with a council) to modify or remove provisions in council plans if they negatively impact economic growth, development capacity or employment.
- Stop councils from progressing plan changes or regional policy statement reviews and require the withdrawal of plan reviews or changes that have not yet had hearings (or scheduled within 5 days of enactment), within 90 days of the legislation taking effect.

As part of the “plan stop” announcement yesterday, Minister Bishop stated, “Even though councils know the RMA’s days are numbered, many are still required to continue with time-consuming, expensive plan-making processes under the RMA.” He added, “The Government will be giving councils clarity on where to focus their efforts while they await the new planning system.”

Some types of plan changes will be automatically exempt from the “plan stop”, including:

- Streamlined Planning Processes.
- Private plan changes.
- Plans related to natural hazard management.
- Changes required under Treaty settlement agreements.

There will also be an ability to apply to the Minister for the Environment for an exemption, with further guidance to be provided on this next month.

National Direction Reforms: Public Consultation Underway

Last month, the Government announced a comprehensive overhaul of existing RMA

national direction, introducing significant changes across four key packages. These are described as targeted changes to national direction that will have an immediate impact and seek to improve infrastructure planning and delivery, enable development, and unlock growth in the primary sector. At a very high level we outline the changes which affect 16 new or amended national direction instruments.

Packages 1 and 2 are being consulted on under section 46A of the RMA which is the new streamlined process for preparing and amending national direction inserted by the Resource Management (Freshwater and Other Matters) Amendment Act 2024.

Package 1 (Infrastructure and development) – Key changes include:

- A new NPS- Infrastructure which would give greater weight to the benefits and needs of infrastructure in planning decisions, promote consistent management across regions, and improve coordination with other land uses. The definition of infrastructure will be expanded to include facilities such as schools and waste disposal, while renewable energy and electricity are excluded, as they are covered separately.
- Updates to the NPS – Renewable Electricity Generation and the NPS – Electricity Transmission which will streamline the re-consenting processes for renewable energy and electricity projects and reinforce their national significance.
- New National Environmental Standards for Granny Flats and Papakāinga which will provide more permissive activity statuses, making it easier to develop granny flats and papakāinga housing.
- A new NPS for Natural Hazards which would introduce a more consistent, risk-based approach to managing natural hazards nationwide, including standard risk levels, clear definitions, and a nationwide risk matrix.

Package 2 (Primary sector) – Key changes include:

- Amendments to the NES-Marine Aquaculture, aiming to simplify re-consenting and provide more flexible pathways for new activities.
- Amendments to the NES-Commercial Forestry, relaxing rules for harvesting, introducing stricter criteria for councils to promulgate more stringent rules than the NES-CF, and removing the ability for councils to control afforestation

through more stringent rules.

- Amendments to the NPS-Highly Productive Land, including removing restrictions on less versatile LUC 3 land, enabling urban and rural lifestyle development, with testing of inclusion of special agricultural areas.
- Changes to Stock Exclusion Regulations, removing the requirement to exclude non-intensively grazed beef cattle and deer from wetlands in low intensity farm systems.
- Targeted amendments to the NPS-Indigenous Biodiversity, NPS-Freshwater Management (FM) and NPS-HPL to enable more quarrying and mining.

Package 3 (Freshwater) – Key changes include:

- Changes to the role of Te Mana o Te Wai with options including reverting to the 2017 framing, removing the hierarchy of obligations, or removing Te Mana o Te Wai entirely;
- Changes to wetland protection regulation such as excluding “induced wetlands” from wetland protections, simplifying fish passage rules, and reviewing synthetic nitrogen fertiliser limits.
- Shifting from single water quality objective toward a multi-objective approach that balances environmental goals with broader social and economic considerations. This includes integrating economic opportunities, community expectations, and cost-effectiveness into decision-making.

The Government has signalled that consultation on package 3 will be undertaken in two stages with a formal exposure draft to be released later in 2025 for further consultation under section 46A of the RMA.

Package 4 (Going for Housing Growth) – Key changes include:

- New housing growth targets requiring councils to plan for at least 30 years of housing capacity using high-growth population projections.
- Strengthening intensification rules under the NPS-Urban Development requiring councils to measure walking catchments using a more prescribed methodology, permit greater building heights along key transit corridors, and

support intensification in areas where there is demand.

- Enabling more mixed-use development to encourage small shops and services (like dairies and cafés) near where people live.
- Removing district plan restrictions that do not affect other people or the environment, or those that restrict development feasibility (such as balcony requirements and minimum floor areas).

Feedback on package 4 is intended to inform the development of the Going for Housing Growth policy in the new resource management system. No changes are proposed to the NPS-Urban Development in the short term.

Next Steps:

Bill 2 is awaiting the Committee of the Whole House Stage in Parliament, and Minister Bishop has signalled it will become law next month.

Feedback on packages 1 to 3 closes on Sunday 27 July 2025, and the formal consultation period for Package 4 closes on Sunday 17 August 2025.

We understand that the Government intends to carry over national direction changes into the new resource management system, although the details of how this will be managed are not yet known. The changes proposed across the four packages are significant and it will be important to ensure the changes to the national direction documents are coherent and workable as any new system moves forward.

If you have any questions about these changes or would like assistance preparing feedback to the proposals, please contact any of our resource management team.