

Hon Chris Bishop

Minister of Housing
Minister for Infrastructure
Minister Responsible for RMA Reform
Minister for Sport and Recreation
Leader of the House
Associate Minister of Finance



30 April 2024

Tēnā koe,

I am writing to provide an update on the Government's work to amend the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA).

I have previously announced that this Government is approaching resource management reform in three phases. Phase one of the reform concluded with the repeal of the Natural and Built Environment Act and Spatial Planning Act in late December 2023, while phase two includes the introduction of the fast-track approvals regime, and some targeted changes to the existing RMA. Phase three will involve developing a long-term solution to replace the RMA.

Last week, Agriculture Minister Todd McClay, Associate Environment Minister Andrew Hoggard and I announced the first of two bills which will make some targeted changes to the Resource Management Act. The first bill will focus on amendments that need to be progressed quickly in order to provide certainty to industry, councils and resource consent applicants. The second bill will be more substantive and is expected to be introduced to Parliament later in 2024.

The proposed changes in the first RMA Amendment Bill will:

- Make it clear that, while the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management (NPS-FM) is being reviewed and replaced, consent applicants no longer need to demonstrate their proposed activities follow the Te Mana o te Wai hierarchy of obligations, as set out in the NPS-FM.
- amend stock exclusion regulations in relation to sloped land
- repeal intensive winter grazing regulations
- align the consenting pathway for coal mining with the pathway for other mining activities in the National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity (NPS-IB), NPS-FM, and the National Environmental Standards for Freshwater (NES-F)
- suspend the NPS-IB requirement for councils to identify new significant natural areas for three years
- speed up the process to make or amend national direction, such as national policy statements and national environmental standards.

Further detail on some of these proposals is set out below.

Farm regulations

Cabinet has agreed changes to stock exclusion, in certain circumstances, and winter grazing regulations representing a move to a more risk-based, catchment-focused approach.

Stock exclusion changes would remove the low slope map and allow regional councils and individual farmers to decide where stock need to be excluded, based on risk.

The Government is proposing to remove all national intensive winter grazing regulations in order to reduce compliance costs for farmers. Regional councils would determine if and how the activity should be managed.

It is our intention that freshwater farm plans will provide an effective way to manage the impacts of farming activities on freshwater, including intensive winter grazing and stock exclusion, in a risk-based and practical way.

The Government has recently announced that we will improve the freshwater farm plan system to make it more cost effective and practical for councils and farmers. In the areas where the freshwater farm plan rollout has started, we may look at whether current requirements to complete a plan within 18 months could be paused while improvements are developed.

Other proposed changes

Hon Shane Jones announced last week the Government's intention to align the consenting pathway for coal mining with the pathway for other extractive activities. This will give the industry certainty and confidence, and when the bill is enacted a wider range of consent applications for coal mines will be able to be made.

The first RMA Amendment Bill will also give effect to previously announced changes to suspend the direction to councils to identify new significant natural areas in accordance with the NPS-IB for a period of three years, to give enough time for a review of how they operate.

The bill will also speed up the process to make or amend national direction, which is currently unnecessarily onerous, costly, and takes too long.

Next steps

The Government expects to introduce the first RMA Amendment Bill to Parliament in late May 2024. It will likely be enacted in late 2024.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Chris Bishop'.

Hon Chris Bishop
Minister Responsible for RMA Reform