

Replacing the RMA

An overview of proposed legislation to replace the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA)

Please note that many aspects of this pack are still under active consideration

A phased approach to RMA replacement

Phase 1

Completed: Spatial Planning Act and Natural & Built Environment Act repealed in December 2023.

Phase 2

Completed: Fast-track Approvals Act passed into law in December 2024.

Completed: The Resource Management (Freshwater & Other Matters) Amendment Act passed into law in October 2024.

Completed: The Resource Management (Consenting and other System Changes) Bill passed into law in August 2025.

Underway: A package of National Direction changes to support housing, renewable energy, infrastructure, primary sector and natural hazards.

Phase 3

December 2023: The Government committed to replacing the RMA with laws 'based on enjoyment of property rights, while ensuring good environmental outcomes'.

March 2024: The Government announced it would replace the RMA with a Planning Act and a Natural Environment Act.

Now: The Parliamentary Counsel Office has started drafting the Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill.

Why is the Government replacing the RMA?

Poor outcomes



Persistent shortages of land and high cost of development: 8 x annual average income required to purchase a home

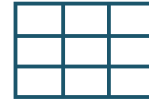


Declining natural environment and resources: Most catchments require a 30% reduction or more in at least one of the big four contaminants.

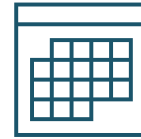


Process is slow, litigious and costly: \$32.9 billion is the estimated administration and compliance cost over 30 years in today's dollars. It takes 5-8 years to complete a district plan

Poor Regulatory quality



Inconsistencies between locations: 1100+ different planning zones across 67 councils



Not data driven: No legislative framework for environmental limits or system performance. Leading to inconsistent and case-by-case decision making.



Overly focused on avoiding effects leading to risk aversion: Around 30,000 resource consents issued each year (approximately 2.5% of these are notified consents)

What is the Government trying to achieve?



Make it easier to get things done by:

- unlocking development capacity for housing and business growth
- enabling delivery of high-quality infrastructure for the future, including doubling renewable energy
- enabling primary sector growth and development (including aquaculture, forestry, pastoral, horticulture, and mining).

While also:

- safeguarding the environment and human health
- adapting to the effects of climate change and reducing the risks from natural hazards
- improving regulatory quality in the resource management system
- upholding Treaty of Waitangi settlements and other related arrangements.

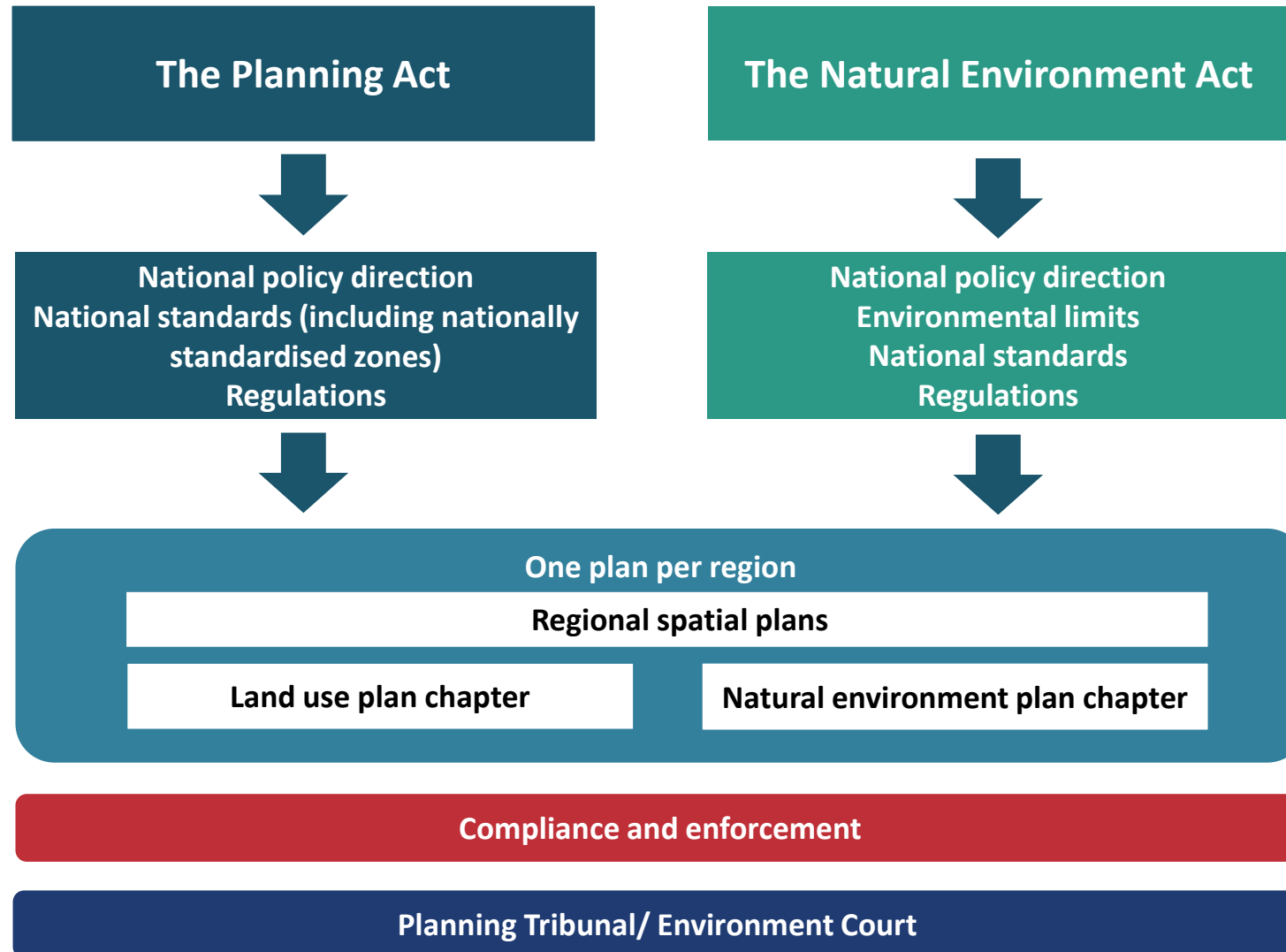
Key system changes

Features of the proposed system agreed to by Cabinet include:

- simplified national direction and cohesive national policy direction under each Act
- standardised planning provisions and performance standards, including nationally standardised zones
- a prescribed framework for environmental limits
- clearer definitions of adverse effects that can be considered and higher thresholds for when they must be managed
- a single combined plan per region with spatial, natural environment plans and land use plan chapters
- fewer activity categories and a higher threshold for determining affected persons
- a national compliance and enforcement regulator with a regional presence
- a Planning Tribunal for dispute resolution processes.

Cabinet also agreed that upholding Treaty settlements and related agreements is a principle of reforming the RMA.

Architecture of proposed RMA system



Expected outcomes

These shifts will help ensure the system enables faster growth within limits. We expect to see:



Enhanced property rights to enable greater use and enjoyment of land. Relief available when rights breached.



More efficient planning processes and more consistency between regions



Reduced regulatory overreach to increase capacity for housing and infrastructure



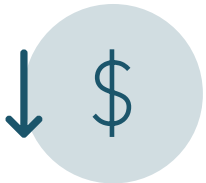
Fewer consents for land use, with Planning Act changes delivering the majority of the reduction



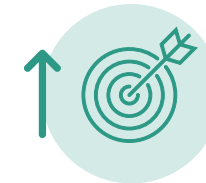
Less degradation and overuse of natural resources



Enhanced certainty for users earlier in the process, increasing investment attractiveness



Lower costs for users



Streamlined consent processes with less opportunity for litigation and standardised conditions

Legislative timeline

Sep 2024: Expert Advisory Group (EAG) set up to develop blueprint for replacing RMA.

Oct 2024: Cabinet set principles for the new RMA system.

Dec 2024: EAG delivered its draft blueprint report for replacing the RMA.

Jan 2025: EAG delivered its final blueprint for replacing the RMA.

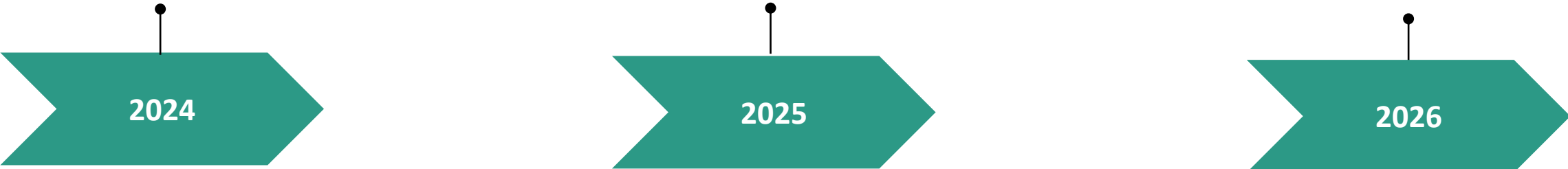
24 March: Cabinet agreed key features of the new RM system.

Late 2025: The Natural Environment Bill and Planning Bill are introduced.

2026: Select Committee process.*

2026: Bills expected to become law.*

NB: This is at Parliament's discretion.



2024

2025

2026

Implementing the new system

Implementation of the new system will be challenging and is critical to a successful outcome.



Transition: We are working on a transition plan that will identify when National Direction will be in place to inform consenting, as well as spatial plan making.



System funding: Greater use will be made of the 'user pays' principle to recover the costs of running the system.



Digital enablement: New digital tools will be developed to increase accessibility and efficiency: standardised data, e-consents, and e-plans.



Behaviour change: Achieving the system benefits relies on both successful implementation by central and local government, and on new ways of working for participants in the system. The Planning Tribunal plays a key role in this change.

Questions and discussion

You can email any questions or feedback about the proposed system to rmevents@mfe.govt.nz