



National guidance under the Resource Management Act

We all have a role to play in protecting our environment. As well as being a tidy Kiwi, collectively we need to guide how our resources are used throughout the country.

National environmental standards and national policy statements are instruments issued under the Resource Management Act that help to ensure our resources are managed appropriately at the local, regional and national level.

SETTING STANDARDS FOR OUR ENVIRONMENT

Environmental standards are regulations issued under the Resource Management Act. They protect certain resources and secure a consistent framework and decision making process throughout the country. Every regional, city or district council must enforce the same standard. In some circumstances, councils can impose stricter standards.

Currently, we have 14 national environmental standards relating to air quality. A standard for sources of human drinking-water has been developed and should be in force by early 2008. The Government is also developing national environmental standards for electricity transmission, water measuring devices, ecological flows and telecommunications facilities. The Ministry for the Environment is considering further standards to address on-site wastewater systems and contaminated land.

AIR QUALITY

In some areas of New Zealand, air pollution is a significant health and environmental issue. Air pollution can be a significant problem where open fires or wood burners are the main source of home heating and when winds are light.

In October 2004, the Government introduced the National Environmental Standards for Air Quality. Since then, regional councils and unitary authorities have identified areas where air quality is likely, or known, to exceed national air quality standards. These areas are called airsheds. Councils are managing these airsheds to bring air quality in line with the standards.

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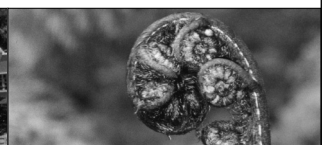
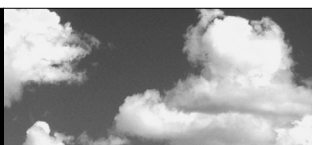
SOURCES OF HUMAN DRINKING WATER

Access to safe drinking water is a fundamental human need.

The National Environmental Standards for Sources of Human Drinking Water is currently being finalised. It will ensure that activities do not pollute drinking water sources, so the water remains safe for people to drink after existing treatment.

The standard should be in force by early 2008. The Ministry for the Environment will produce an implementation package to assist regional councils and consent applicants with applying the new standard.

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ELECTRICITY TRANSMISSION

We all rely on electricity and need some way of getting it. Electricity transmission lines span great distances and need to be regularly maintained, repaired and upgraded to ensure a reliable supply of electricity.

Two national environmental standards for electricity transmission have been prepared for public consultation. One proposed standard provides a framework for managing the environmental effects of the operation, maintenance and enhancement of the national grid (but excluding the construction of new transmission lines). The other standard relates to controlling the effects of activities on the national grid.

A discussion document about the standards will be released for public consultation on 13 October 2007 and submissions will close on 30 November.

The standards are being developed in conjunction with a national policy statement on electricity transmission (see next page).

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WATER MEASURING DEVICES

Our rivers and lakes are a vital resource for drinking water, irrigation, energy, cultural purposes, recreation and tourism.

To help protect water resources it is important that water takes are accurately and fairly managed, so the Government is developing the proposed National Environmental Standard for Water Measuring Devices. This standard would set minimum requirements for all new water measuring devices that are installed and define situations where these devices are compulsory. It forms part of the Sustainable Water Programme of Action.

A discussion document has been prepared outlining the potential standard. Public submissions on this document have been received and a summary of submissions is available at www.mfe.govt.nz/publications/water/proposed-nes-water-measuring-devices-nov06/index.html. The submissions will inform the final decisions on the standard.

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ECOLOGICAL FLOWS AND WATER LEVELS

To help protect our water resources it is also important that our rivers, lakes, wetlands and groundwater resources have a sufficient quantity of water flowing through them to provide for the ecosystem and community values.

The Government is developing a proposed National Environmental Standard on Setting Ecological Flows and Water Levels. This standard would provide regulatory controls and guidance on methods for assessing how much water should stay in a water body to provide for ecological values.

The proposed standard forms part of the Sustainable Water Programme of Action. A working group of key stakeholders provided advice on the proposed standard. A public discussion document is yet to be approved for public release.

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TELECOMMUNICATIONS FACILITIES

Telecommunication facilities are essential for the fast and reliable exchange of information. At present, council's district plans can vary in how they address and control installation of telecommunications antennae and equipment cabinets on roadsides.

Four national environmental standards for telecommunications facilities have been proposed. They cover roadside equipment cabinets, small antennas attached to existing roadside structures, noise limits for roadside cabinets, and radiofrequency emissions. The standards would provide national consistency for what telecommunications facilities could be installed without the need for a resource consent, and detail where installation is or is not appropriate.

Consultation on the four proposed standards closed on the 10 August 2007. The Ministry for the Environment is now preparing a report on submissions, which will be available on the Ministry's website around the end of October. Further analysis of submissions is being undertaken before a final cost-benefit analysis is completed and recommendations on the final policy position are presented to Cabinet early in 2008.

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ON-SITE WASTEWATER SYSTEMS

Domestic on-site wastewater systems (such as septic tanks) that are not functioning properly can adversely impact on human health and the environment. They can pollute drinking water, lead to water becoming unfit for swimming or gathering seafood, and contribute to algal blooms in lakes and rivers.

A national environmental standard, requiring inspection and maintenance regimes to manage on-site wastewater systems, is now being scoped. A discussion document on the proposed standard is expected to be released for public consultation late in 2007.

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RECOGNISING MATTERS OF NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

National policy statements provide guidance on resource management issues of national significance. The Government prepares national policy statements to help direct decision making at the national, regional and local levels.

National policy statements help councils decide how competing national benefits and local costs should be balanced. Councils need to ensure that their policy statements and plans give effect to a national policy statement.

The mandatory New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement was released in 1994 and is currently under review. The Government is now developing national policy statements on electricity transmission, freshwater management and flood risk management. National policy statements on renewable energy and urban design are also being considered by the Government.

ELECTRICITY TRANSMISSION

At present, there is no national framework to guide local government when they have to decide on proposals for transmission network development.

The Government has developed a proposed national policy statement to recognise the national significance of the electricity transmission network and help ensure that there is balanced consideration between the national benefits and the local effects of electricity transmission.

This proposed National Policy Statement on Electricity Transmission was notified in May 2007 and submissions closed on 25 June 2007. The Board of Inquiry heard public submissions in August 2007 and will make recommendations to the Minister for the Environment before the end of the year.

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FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT

Flooding is a natural process that happens relatively often in New Zealand. Flooding can cause community trauma and disruption, damage property and infrastructure, and result in economic hardship. Good flood risk management is important for our communities and will also help New Zealanders adapt to climate change.

A National Policy Statement on Flood Risk Management has been proposed. This would help strengthen the current policy framework by acknowledging the national significance of good flood risk management and by providing clear direction for decision makers.

Initial comments on a national policy statement have been sought from stakeholders with a direct interest in flood risk management. The Minister for the Environment has considered these comments and a proposed national policy statement is being prepared for public comment. We expect this to be ready for comment in the next six months.

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FRESHWATER MANAGEMENT

Under the Sustainable Water Programme of Action, a national policy statement is proposed to provide guidance on managing increasing demands for water and improving water quality. This guidance would assist councils in providing for environment, cultural and social values and other water uses.

The proposed National Policy Statement on Freshwater Management is currently being prepared. It is likely to be completed and ready for public comment in the next six months.

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RENEWABLE ENERGY

New Zealand's international obligations regarding climate change mean that more electricity will need to be generated from renewable sources in the future.

A national policy statement on renewable energy is being considered. This would clearly set out the Government's objectives on renewable energy and help ensure that councils are able to fully consider the benefits of renewable energy in their decision-making processes.

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URBAN DESIGN

New Zealand is one of the most highly urbanised countries in the world, with over 87 percent of its population living in urban areas. The way we design these areas is important for increasing the sustainability of our towns and cities.

The Ministry for the Environment is currently scoping the desirability of an urban design national policy statement. Such a statement on urban design would help ensure that quality urban design provisions are provided for in council plans across the country. The decision to develop an urban design national policy statement will be announced later this year.

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WANT TO KNOW MORE?

You can contact the **Ministry for the Environment** by phoning (04) 439 7400, emailing information@mfe.govt.nz, writing to PO Box 10362, Wellington, or see our website: www.mfe.govt.nz