

Guidance for 10. Format Standard

This guidance is intended to help you understand and interpret the *10. Format Standard* so you can implement it efficiently and effectively. It should be read alongside [Recommendations on submissions report 2F Format Standard](#) for further context.

We have developed this guidance based on our experience to date. We will update it with more examples as councils continue to implement the national planning standards (the planning standards). Since we first published this guidance, [New Plymouth District Council](#) and [Porirua City Council](#) have implemented the planning standards in their notified district plans. These plans provide examples of how *10. Format Standard* has been implemented to date.

The *10. Format Standard* applies to all regional policy statements, regional plans, combined plans and district plans, unless it provides direction on a matter that is not applicable to the particular plan type, for example, directions relating to rules apply only to plans not policy statements.

Order and grouping of provision types

Direction 1 requires that when provisions are included, they must be in the order listed in the standard. For example, if a chapter or section contains objectives, policies and rules they must be listed with objectives first, then policies, followed by rules.

Direction 2 requires policy statement and plan provisions to be grouped according to provision type. Using the same example as above, if a chapter or section contains objectives, policies and rules you must list all objectives then all policies, and lastly all rules.

You could use a nesting table with the objective and policies to show which policies correspond to which objectives or vice versa. Alternatively, you could use text below objectives or policies to show this relationship.

Directions 1 and 2 should be read in conjunction with, and do not override, the requirements of sections 62, 67 and 75 of the Resource Management Act 1991 (the RMA) relating to the contents of regional policy statements, regional plans and district plans. The directions follow best practice to:

- limit policy statement and plan content to the provisions with actual legal effect, that is, issues, objectives, policies, rules, methods, principal reasons and anticipated environmental results
- encourage inclusion of some content, such as ‘introductions’ and ‘explanations’, to sit outside of policy statements and plans as accompanying guidance or in section 32 reports.

When you consider other content to be important for interpreting your policy statement and plan you can still include it, however its location is not prescribed in this standard.

Matters associated with rules

Directions 3–5 contain principles that you must apply when drafting rules in plans.

Direction 4 requires you to locate both activity status and relevant matters of control or discretion with the specific rule to which they relate. You could either word matters of control or discretion in full or include a link and/or cross-reference to each matter if they are worded in full in a separate table. You need to include the activity status with the rule.

Direction 4 doesn't include the requirement to group assessment criteria with rules. This is because some councils don't include assessment criteria. Assessment criteria can be included in plans but their location is not specified in this standard, so you can decide where these are best located.

Direction 5 only applies to rules, and when you choose to abbreviate an activity status. For example, you can write the term 'permitted' in full in the text of a rule but you must use the abbreviation 'PER' when you choose to abbreviate this word in a rule table, for example.

Differentiating content in policy statements and plans

Directions 6–13 prescribe various instances where councils must make it clear to policy statement or plan users that content:

- is subject to change or variation
- has a different legal weight
- is a particular plan type (ie, various provisions in combined plans)
- should be read in conjunction with a related definition.

The directions provide flexibility for councils to choose how they highlight applicable content. For example, pop-up boxes, italicised text or the use of square brackets are means commonly used. This flexibility:

- allows different current practice to continue
- lets councils choose the means that best suits their corporate branding
- does not visually 'clutter' councils' policy statements and plans
- allows future advances in the functionality of e-Plans.

Direction 7, relating to the legal effect of rules, only applies to proposed plans as all the rules in operative plans have legal effect. We note that in complying with section 86E(1) of the RMA, you must also comply with section 86B(3).

Direction 8, relating to differentiating provisions in combined plans, requires councils to use specified abbreviations to identify the applicable provisions. It also allows unitary authorities to identify groups of provisions. Unitary authorities have the discretion to decide where to place the abbreviations but common practice is to include them in brackets.

All terms defined in a policy statement or plan must comply with directions 11–13. Direction 12 applies only when defined terms are included in an e-Plan format. It requires you to ensure functionality is

available so that in every instance where a term (or its plural) has a defined meaning, it is differentiated and a pop-up box or link for the definition is enabled.

The directions no longer require you to show content in policy statements and plans that is subject to national direction (eg, national policy statements, national environmental standards and national planning standards) and therefore cannot be changed through the public submission process. This is because of concern this requirement could create visual clutter. It is now up to you to determine how to communicate to your communities where content in your policy statements or plans cannot be changed.

Matters associated with schedules

Directions 14 and 15 are located in the *10. Format Standard* as schedules and can be included in the relevant chapters as well as being grouped in an appendix, for example, the *Appendix* or *Appendix and maps* chapter (as in the draft standards).

The directions set the minimum requirement for information to be included in schedules. You can add other information when you consider it necessary.

Identification and numbering of policy statement and plan structural elements and provisions

Directions 16–41 prescribe an alphanumeric approach to identifying chapters and sections and numbering provisions. The examples in the far right-hand column (on pages 43–45 of the planning standards) and at the end of *10. Format Standard* (see pages 47–48 of the planning standards) show how the directions are applied.

The directions relate only to the parts of the policy statement or plans containing issues, objectives, policies, rules, methods, principal reasons and anticipated environmental results. You have discretion to identify and number other parts of the policy statement or plan content, for example, the contents, purpose and glossary chapters under the *Introduction and general provisions* heading.

Chapters and sections with a mandatory title prescribed in the structure standards have a compulsory unique identifier in table 16. You must apply this identifier to chapter and section titles and the numbering of associated provisions (see directions 37–43 of the *10. Format Standard*).

Chapters and sections that contain issues, objectives, policies, rules, methods, principal reasons and anticipated environmental results that don't have a mandatory title prescribed in the structure standards, must be identified and numbered in accordance with directions 18 and 19.

Unique identifiers for zone grouping chapters for residential, rural, commercial and mixed use, industrial, open space and recreation and special purpose are included in table 16. These are to be used when you include these chapters. These chapters may contain provisions that apply to all zones within these groupings, as enabled by the *4. District Plan Structure Standard*. For example, provisions that apply to all residential zones could be located in a 'Residential zones – RESZ chapter', with provisions specific to particular zones located in their respective zone sections, for example, 'Medium density residential zone'. We expect most provisions relating specifically to a zone will be located within the individual zone section, as opposed to the zone grouping chapter.

You can include the full title of any chapter or section anywhere in your policy statement and plan, except for chapter and section titles and numbering of provisions, for user readability (for example, in objective, policy and rule wording).

Specific chapter title and numbering guidance

For the *Energy, infrastructure and transport* heading, if you:

- include all provisions in one chapter, the unique identifier of 'EIT' or 'EI' (depending on the plan type) must be used to identify the chapter and number-related provisions
- separate provisions into separate chapters, you must use a unique identifier to identify the chapter and number-related provisions. Our preference is 'ENGY' for Energy, 'INF' for Infrastructure and 'TRAN' for Transport.

For the *Hazards and risks* heading, if you include a chapter on hazardous substances, our preference to identify the chapter and number the provisions is 'HAZS'.

For the *Subdivision* heading, you can either apply the unique identifier 'SUB' across all:

- related provisions, or
- over-arching provisions, and include a chapter unique identifier to any additional chapter titles and provisions. For example, SUB-BA could apply specifically to matters relating to boundary adjustments.

Any general rules included under *How the plan works* heading must be numbered in accordance with directions 37–41.

Numbering of sub-set provisions, additions and deletions

The directions only relate to the first three tiers of sub-set numbering of issues, objectives, policies, rules, methods and principal reasons, and anticipated environmental results. You may provide further tiers but this is not prescribed in the planning standards.

Direction 43 requires any additional sub-set provisions to be uniquely identifiable to ensure policy statements and plan provisions are easily enforceable. The use of bullet points doesn't achieve this direction.

You can use methods such as brackets or dot points in sub-set numbering of provisions to break up numbering, for example, O1 .1 .a or O1 (1) (a) or O1 1) a) i).

Rule format

Rule format directions and tables are not included in *10. Format Standard*. Where you choose to use tables to format plain text (eg, rule tables), these don't need to be uniquely identifiable in accordance with direction 36 of *10. Format Standard*. However, tables that systematically display data, facts and/or numerical information, for example, will need to be uniquely identifiable in accordance with direction 36 of *10. Format Standard*. We are not producing guidance on rule format at this time. However, we are continuing to discuss rule formats with councils and e-Plan providers.

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