



# National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity

## Information for forest owners and managers

### Overview

The Government has developed a National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity to help protect and maintain our unique biodiversity.

All councils have had to protect areas with significant native biodiversity since the Resource Management Act (RMA) was introduced in 1991. The challenge has been that there was a lack of guidance about what this meant in practice and the requirement has been inconsistently applied. To address this, the criteria for identifying and managing these significant areas under the [National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity](#) (NPSIB) has now been made the same across Aotearoa New Zealand.

For plantation forestry, the NPSIB aims to allow forestry production activities to continue, while protecting the rarest native species.

Councils must manage adverse effects from plantation forestry activities on a Significant Natural Area (SNA) in existing plantation forest to maintain indigenous biodiversity, as far as practicable. Councils must accomplish this in a way that also allows the relevant activities to continue.

Where an SNA has been identified within the forest it must be managed over the course of consecutive rotations of production so long-term populations of any threatened or at-risk species are maintained.

The policies allow plantation forestry to play its role in addressing climate change, while recognising the impacts (positive and negative) on nature.

Councils will update plans and strategies over the coming years to bring in the new requirements.

### **Key information on indigenous biodiversity**

- Forestry plays a big role in responding to the climate crisis, whether by reducing emissions or adapting to climate change.
- Forestry provides important habitat for indigenous species. At the same time, some forests are productive, with ongoing management and harvesting requirements.
- Many threatened species are actively managed and even thrive in plantation forests.
- The NPSIB aims to allow production activities to continue, while protecting the rarest native species.

## **What the NPSIB means for forestry**

The NPSIB directs councils to establish consistent approaches in their policies, plans and strategies to maintain indigenous biodiversity. The NPSIB applies to all land types and it sets out consistent ecological criteria for councils to use to identify SNAs. The aim is to better protect our native plants and animals across the country while providing certainty to people who want to develop or change the way they use their land.

An SNA is identified on land that supports significant types or communities of indigenous species, such as areas of indigenous forest or bush. An SNA may be identified in areas of native or exotic forest. We need a more consistent national approach to identifying and managing indigenous biodiversity, regardless of where it is found.

The NPSIB works alongside existing requirements set through the Forests Act 1949 and the Resource Management (National Environmental Standards for Plantation Forestry) Regulations 2017 (NES-PF).

## **Why is it needed?**

Aotearoa has one of the highest proportions of threatened species in the world. Many landowners already actively manage and protect indigenous biodiversity on their land, but this is needed across the country to help prevent further loss.

Under the RMA, all councils must identify areas with significant native biodiversity. However, councils across Aotearoa have different criteria for identifying these areas and use different methods to maintain them. This has resulted in confusion and uncertainty for landowners who want to farm or develop their land. The NPSIB directs councils to set clear and consistent approaches in their policies, plans and strategies, which will provide more certainty and clarity for landowners.

## **How the NPSIB applies to forestry and planted areas**

Native and exotic forests can provide important habitat for indigenous species. However, some forests are productive, with ongoing management and harvesting activities taking place. Where an SNA has been identified in or around an area where forestry activities are undertaken, the NPSIB requires that these activities must be managed to maintain indigenous biodiversity.

Councils will update their policies, plans and strategies in the coming years to reflect NPSIB requirements, meaning there will be changes to existing plan rules and other work councils do for

indigenous biodiversity. Councils will be implementing parts of the NPSIB immediately, so anyone seeking resource consent for new activities or developments that will affect indigenous biodiversity may have additional requirements to meet.

## Plantation forestry

The NPSIB provides a specific regime for managing adverse effects on SNAs from plantation forestry. This is based on the definition of 'plantation forest' in the NES-PF.<sup>1</sup> This is a forest deliberately established for harvesting and includes its infrastructure.

Councils must manage adverse effects from plantation forestry activities (such as harvesting) on an SNA in existing plantation forest to maintain indigenous biodiversity, as far as practicable. Councils must accomplish this in a way that also allows the relevant activities to continue.

The most likely reason for an SNA to be identified in plantation forestry is the presence of habitats of threatened or at-risk (declining) species, but this will be specific to the SNA in question. Where an SNA has been identified within the forest that is planted with the intention to harvest, [clause 3.14](#) requires the SNA must be managed over the course of consecutive rotations of production so long-term populations of any threatened or at-risk species are maintained.

Maintaining long-term populations will depend on what species are present. Many threatened species are actively managed and can even thrive in plantation forests. For example, kārearea (New Zealand falcon) benefit from the clearings created following harvest, and bats can benefit from certain harvest methods in particular locations and at different times of the year. Good forestry management practice for some of these species already exists.<sup>2</sup>

Alongside the specific regime outlined in [clause 3.14](#) of the NPSIB, general SNA provisions may apply to areas bordering plantation forests. If mature remnants of indigenous vegetation are present in areas bordering plantation forests (eg, in gullies) these areas are not part of the plantation forest. They could qualify as SNAs under any of the NPSIB ecological criteria<sup>3</sup> and new plantation forestry activities in them are not covered by [clause 3.14](#). The general SNA provisions in [clause 3.10](#) will be applied by councils for new use and development, such as vegetation clearance and earthworks.

The NPSIB policies for plantation forests also apply to plantation forests on Māori land.<sup>4</sup>

## Harvesting indigenous forest

The NPSIB allows the harvest of indigenous tree species carried out in accordance with a sustainable forest management plan (SFMP) or permit under Part 3A of the Forests Act 1949,<sup>5</sup> where it may

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<sup>1</sup> A plantation forest is defined by the [National Environmental Standards for Plantation Forestry](#): it is of at least one hectare of planted forest species that is intended to be harvested, and includes all associated forestry infrastructure, for example, roads, fire breaks, and river crossings. Additionally, for the purposes of the NPSIB, it also includes setbacks that exist for operational aspects of the plantation forest.

<sup>2</sup> See [Rare Species: Guidance for managing rare species in plantation forests](#) on the New Zealand Forest Owners Association website for guidance.

<sup>3</sup> See [NPSIB Appendix 1](#) – Criteria for identifying areas that qualify as significant natural areas (SNAs).

<sup>4</sup> See [NPSIB clause 3.12\(1\)\(b\)](#) – SNAs on specified Māori land.

<sup>5</sup> See [NPSIB clause 3.10\(6\)\(e\)](#) – Managing adverse effects on SNAs of new subdivision, use, and development.

affect an SNA. If you are considering harvesting indigenous timber, we recommend you contact Te Uru Rākau – New Zealand Forest Service for guidance.

The Forests Act requires an approved SFMP or permit before harvesting existing or regenerating indigenous forests. A SFMP ensures the ecological integrity of the forest is maintained and has input from the Department of Conservation, Te Uru Rākau – New Zealand Forest Service, and the relevant local government authorities.

New harvesting activities undertaken according to an SFMP are subject to strict conditions to manage the adverse effects of harvesting on indigenous biodiversity and no further controls are applied through the NPSIB. However, while there is an exception for ancillary activities, such as track clearance and timber storage, these are not covered to the same extent. Any adverse effects on an SNA from any new activities of this type will need to be managed in accordance with existing council plan rules, and in accordance with NPSIB requirements (outlined in clause 3.11(5) once plans have given effect to the NPSIB.

Where resource consent is required, councils will also consider NPSIB requirements immediately<sup>6</sup>.

## **Indigenous vegetation planted for other purposes**

Indigenous or exotic vegetation planted for other purposes other than plantation forestry, such as shelter belts, may be identified as an SNA. However, where this occurs, the NPSIB provides a more flexible way to manage effects from new use or development on these SNAs because the vegetation was established to be used for something other than to benefit indigenous biodiversity.<sup>7</sup>

## **Other activities**

If you are managing a forest that is not covered by the categories above, councils will manage effects according to NPSIB clause 3.10.<sup>8</sup> However, you may need to seek advice based on your specific situation.

## **How the NPSIB interacts with the NES-PF**

### **The NES-PF**

The NES-PF provides nationally consistent regulations to manage the environmental effects of forestry activities. It covers eight core activities<sup>9</sup>, allowing these to be carried out as permitted activities, subject to conditions.

The regulations in the NES-PF still apply alongside the NPSIB. If your activity might affect an SNA and is permitted under the NES-PF, you will need to ensure it also complies with any rules in the district

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<sup>6</sup> See [NPSIB clause 3.11\(5\)](#) – Exceptions to clause 3.10.

<sup>7</sup> See [NPSIB clause 3.11\(4\)](#) – Exceptions to clause 3.10.

<sup>8</sup> Managing adverse effects according to NPSIB clause 3.10 is outlined in the [general summary](#) information sheet.

<sup>9</sup> Activities include: afforestation (planting new forest); pruning and thinning to waste (selective felling of trees where the felled trees remain on site); earthworks; river crossings; forestry quarrying (extraction of rock, sand or gravel within a plantation forest or for operation of a forest on adjacent land); harvesting; mechanical land preparation; and replanting.

or city plan. If existing council rules mean you need resource consent for a forestry activity, your council will also need to apply the NPSIB appropriate to the situation.

In the future, councils will amend their plans to fully incorporate NPSIB requirements for indigenous biodiversity. The NES-PF allows council plan rules to be more stringent for managing adverse effects on SNAs. This means that individuals or organisations undertaking forestry activities will also need to be aware of council requirements as they change.

## Questions and answers

### When does the policy take effect?

The NPSIB will take effect on 4 August 2023 and councils will make changes to their policies and plans over the coming years to reflect NPSIB provisions. However, councils will implement parts of the NPSIB straight away, so new activities or developments that may have adverse effects on indigenous biodiversity and need resource consent will need to meet NPSIB requirements. See the [general summary](#) sheet for a more detailed timeline.

### Where can I get more information?

Contact your local council or email [indigenousbiodiversity@mfe.govt.nz](mailto:indigenousbiodiversity@mfe.govt.nz) or visit [environment.govt.nz](http://environment.govt.nz).

A [general information sheet](#) is available. This provides an overview of key aspects of the NPSIB. There are also specific information sheets for [tangata whenua](#), [farmers and growers](#), [infrastructure providers](#) and [urban developers](#).

