



National planning standards factsheets

Information for plan users

This factsheet sets out key information on the planning standards and what impact they will have on plans.

What are they?

The national planning standards (planning standards) are a new form of national direction introduced through the 2017 amendments to the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA). They aim to make RMA plans (eg, policy statements, regional plans, district plans) more consistent with each other, easier to use and faster to make.

Over the past two years, the Ministry for the Environment (MfE) and Department of Conservation (DOC) have worked collaboratively with councils, iwi and sector groups to develop the first set of 17 planning standards. The planning standards address the structure and form of plans, set some national definitions and require plans to be accessible through an online interactive plan (ePlan).

The Ministers for the Environment and Conservation released these planning standards on 5 April 2019.

The national planning standards are as follows:

1. Foundation Standard
2. Regional Policy Statement Structure Standard
3. Regional Plan Standard
4. District Plan Standard
5. Combined Plan Standard
6. Introduction and General Provisions Standard
7. District-wide Matters Standard
8. Zone Framework Standard
9. Designations Standard
10. Format Standard
11. Regional Spatial Layers Standard
12. District Spatial Layers Standard
13. Mapping Standard
14. Definitions Standard
15. Noise and Vibration Metrics
16. Electronic Accessibility and Functionality Standard
17. Implementation Standard.

What do they mean for me?

Even with the planning standards in place, communities and councils will continue to be main developers of plans. Plans can still reflect other local planning documents, such as community plans, strategic plans, spatial plans, transport plans and long-term plans, at the district and regional scale.

Councils will implement the majority of the planning standards without going through a normal RMA plan change process (eg, notification, submissions and hearings). The exception to this is when councils implement the Zone Framework Standard, which offers a choice of zones to pick and choose from, so these may need a plan change process. For some plans that have zones that are already very consistent with the Zone Framework Standard, it might be possible for councils to simply change the name of the zones.

Once implemented, you won't be able to submit on, or request changes to, some matters that are set by the planning standards during plan-making and review processes – such as some definitions, the range and names of chapters, sections, where provisions are located and how they are displayed. Councils will identify which parts of plans are set by the planning standards and can't be changed.

One of the main objectives of the planning standards is to make plans easier to use and access. Plans will be required to be accessible through ePlans, which will make a huge improvement to how easy it is to navigate through plans and access information.

When will the planning standards affect plans?

Timeframes for implementation of the planning standards vary for different councils, planning documents and standards:

- all councils must meet basic electronic accessibility and functionality requirements within one year from when the planning standards take effect
- regional councils have three years to adopt the standards for their regional policy statements, and 10 years for their regional plans
- unitary councils have 10 years to adopt the planning standards
- city/district councils generally have five years to adopt the planning standards, with seven years for the definitions standard. A smaller group of councils (list 1 below) who have recently completed a plan review have seven years to make changes, and nine years for definitions.

If a council undertakes a full plan review within these timeframes the new plan must meet the planning standards when it is notified for submissions.

There are also different timeframes for online interactive plans:

- local authorities generally have five years, though some have seven years (list 2)
- all regional councils and unitary councils, and city/district councils with under 15,000 ratepayers (list 3) have 10 years to comply with the requirements.

List 1: Councils who have seven and nine years to adopt the planning standards

- Christchurch City Council
- Dunedin City Council
- Hurunui District Council
- Invercargill City Council
- Kāpiti Coast District Council
- Any territorial authorities committed to a combined district plan (through a council resolution, MOU or similar statutory obligation) under section 80 (3) of the RMA.
- Opotiki District Council
- Queenstown-Lakes District Council
- South Taranaki District Council
- Thames-Coromandel District Council

List 2: Councils who have seven years to obtain an online interactive plan (ePlan)

- Christchurch City Council
- Dunedin City Council
- Invercargill City Council
- Any territorial authorities committed to a combined district plan (through a council resolution, MOU or similar statutory obligation) under section 80 (3) of the RMA.
- Kāpiti Coast District Council
- Queenstown-Lakes District Council
- Thames-Coromandel District Council

List 3: Councils who have 10 years to obtain an online interactive plan (ePlan)

- Central Hawke's Bay District Council
- Central Otago District Council
- Clutha District Council
- Gore District Council
- Hauraki District Council
- Hurunui District Council
- Kaikoura District Council
- Kawerau District Council
- Mackenzie District Council
- Manawatu District Council
- Matamata-Piako District Council
- Opotiki District Council
- Otorohanga District Council
- Rangitikei District Council
- Ruapehu District Council
- South Taranaki District Council
- South Waikato District Council
- Stratford District Council
- Tararua District Council
- Waimate District Council
- Wairoa District Council
- Waitaki District Council
- Waitomo District Council.

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Published in April 2019 by the
Ministry for the Environment
Publication number: INFO 875



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New Zealand Government