

Illustrative National Policy Direction: an early opportunity to have a voice in the new planning system

The Government has released an illustrative National Policy Direction to test how national direction might operate within the proposed replacement planning system.

While the illustrative National Policy Direction is not Government policy, this process provides an early opportunity for affected parties to identify important gaps and help shape the development of the eventual instrument.

An early look at National Policy Direction (NPD)

On 25 August 2026, the Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport released "New Zealand's New Planning System: Testing the Approach to National Policy Direction" as an early example of how NPD could operate under the proposed new planning system.

The illustrative NPD is organised around five themes:

- Housing and Development;
- Infrastructure;
- Primary Production and the Rural Economy;
- Resources, including quarrying, mining and waste; and
- Public Values.

These themes intend to particularise the goals of the proposed legislation. Cross-cutting directives apply across the themes where relevant, and system-wide directives address Māori interests and natural hazards.

Where will National Policy Direction sit?

The proposed planning system is intended to operate through a hierarchy of national, regional and local instruments.

At the top, the Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill set the purposes, goals and overall architecture of the system. NPD will then translate those goals into more specific national priorities and directives, including direction about how tensions between goals should be managed.

Next in the hierarchy will be national standards and regulations, intended to turn those priorities and directives into more consistent processes, rules, methods and plan content. Regional spatial plans would translate the national direction into long-term strategic direction for growth and change in each region. Land use plans and natural environment plans would then implement that direction through provisions such as zones, rules, designations, limits and overlays. Individual consent and permit decisions would be made within that framework.

The significance of the NPD comes from its intended position near the top of this hierarchy. The illustrative NPD describes the new system as working like a funnel, with the NPD providing direction for each subsequent layer. The NPD is intended to reduce duplication, uncertainty, cost, delay and litigation, while giving councils, applicants and communities greater clarity about what has already been settled nationally and where regional or local choices remain.

National direction is not new. Under the Resource Management Act 1991 framework, national direction already addresses matters such as infrastructure, urban development and renewable electricity generation, but the release of this national direction took a long time (the first coastal policy statement was issued in 1994, followed by the national policy statement on electricity transmission in 2008). Our current national direction is spread across multiple instruments, which makes

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implementation complex and contributes to inconsistency in how national priorities are applied. According to the Government, the NPD is intended to provide a more integrated pathway from statutory goals to regional priorities and local rules.

What is the Government seeking feedback on?

The current process is not statutory consultation on the actual or final NPD. It is a non-statutory opportunity to test an illustrative example of how NPD might be structured and how it could work in practice.

The illustrative document states that a separate statutory consultation process on the content of the NPD will take place after the Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill have been enacted. Feedback provided now will inform the subsequent development of that NPD and may also help identify where further guidance, tools and support will be required.

The Government is seeking feedback specifically on:

- whether the thematic structure is clear and easy to understand;
- whether the illustrative NPD helps provide a clear picture of how NPD could work in practice;
- any important priorities, gaps or trade-offs that are not adequately reflected; and
- how NPD could be made more useful and effective.

An opportunity to identify what is missing

This consultation is an opportunity for affected persons, businesses and sectors to influence the development process before formal statutory consultation begins, and to explain what an effective national instrument would need to recognise and address from the perspective of those who use the planning system.

Of the four consultation questions, the invitation to identify important **priorities, gaps or trade-offs** that are not adequately reflected is likely to be particularly

relevant to businesses, infrastructure providers, landowners, developers and sector organisations.

Submitters may wish to consider:

- whether the matters most important to their land, activities, projects or sector are recognised;
- whether competing interests and trade-offs are identified clearly;
- whether the illustrative structure leaves any material gaps;
- whether the relationship between theme-specific, cross-cutting and system-wide directives is sufficiently clear; and
- whether the direction would be useful when translated into national standards, regional spatial plans and local plans.

These questions do not assume that the illustrative NPD contains particular defects. Rather, they provide a way for submitters to test whether its proposed structure would give clear and workable direction in the situations that matter to them.

Have your say

Feedback must be submitted by **16 October 2026** and can be submitted [here](#).

Want to know more?

If you would like to understand how the illustrative approach may relate to your interests, identify priorities or gaps relevant to your activities or sector, or obtain assistance preparing feedback, please contact Anderson Lloyd's specialist [Environment and Planning Team](#).