

Renewable Electricity Generation Reforms Consultation

Improved efficiency, consistency and consenting pathways

On 20 April 2023 Environment Minister Hon David Parker and Energy and Resources Minister Hon Dr Megan Woods opened consultation on new policies and rules on renewable energy generation (**REG**) and electricity transmission (**ET**).

The changes are part of a suite of climate policies the Government is releasing leading up to the General Election. Submissions on the proposed changes close on 1 June 2023.

Changes are proposed to two National Policy Statements, the National Policy Statement on Renewable Electricity Generation (**NPS-REG**) and the National Policy Statement on Electricity Transmission (**NPS-ET**). Changes are proposed through the National Environmental Standards for Electricity Transmission Activities (**NES-ETA**) and creation of a new National Environmental Standard for Renewable Electricity Generation (**NES-REG**).

The proposed changes are set to become part of the new resource management regime replacing the current Resource Management Act 1991.

Background

The need for rapid expansion in renewable energy infrastructure, to reduce emissions and meet climate change goals by 2050, is one of the key drivers for the policy changes.

The current national direction for renewable energy was developed before emission reduction targets were incorporated into law. The rate of development required to achieve emissions targets by 2050 has surpassed the capability of the current consent process.

Key changes proposed

The package of changes will improve the consistency of

consenting decisions, enable current generators to more easily upgrade existing infrastructure and improve the consentability of wind and solar in particular. For the purposes of the package renewable electricity generation means the generation of electricity from solar, wind, hydro-electric, geothermal, biomass, tidal, wave, or ocean current energy sources. The package includes the following amendments:

- Stronger and more directive policy direction in the NPS-REG and NPS-ET on the national benefits and the role of renewable energy, and associated infrastructure, to meet New Zealand's emission reduction targets.
- A new 'one stop shop' consenting pathway in the NPS-REG is proposed to enable REG in areas with significant environmental values, if the national significance and benefits of the REG outweigh the residual adverse effects. The two options being consulted on provide for a "gateway test" relating to operational or functional need, national or regional significance and potentially a requirement to show there is no practical alternative location. There are also two options in terms of the effects management hierarchy that must be applied – starting with the first priority being to avoid adverse effects where practical, stepping down to compensation to address residual adverse effects.
- The intent of the above point is to clarify priority for REG. However, the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement is not to be amended, therefore its directive "avoid" policies will still apply, intentionally. Similarly, the NPS on Freshwater Management is not to be amended and neither is the current hydro-electricity resources policy in the NPS-REG – putting off dealing with the complex issues associated with both new and existing hydro schemes until after the resource management reforms and the new national planning framework are in place.

Proposed Changes to Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission (Continued)

- The national significance of electricity transmission is proposed to be better provided for in the NPS-ET, including reverse sensitivity. This part of the package includes specific recognition of technical, operational and functional needs including access tracks and requires local decision makers to recognise the linkages with the NPS-REG to support the timely increase to energy capacity.
- The NPS-ET will have a new definition of minor electricity transmission network activities with options to provide for consenting pathways for upgrades considered to be more than minor only to be located in areas of significant environmental values if the benefits of the activity outweigh the adverse effects.
- New directions in the NPS-REG and NPS-ET are intended to enable renewable electricity generation in areas where there may be adverse outcomes on local amenity such as noise, shadow, glare, or effects on the character of the area provided these effects are avoided, remedied or mitigated to the extent practicable. The proposed new policy states that changes to amenity values are not of themselves adverse effects, and that changes may result in amenity values appreciated by other people.
- The current NPS-REG and NPS-ET do not refer to the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi or Te Ao Māori. New policy direction in the NPS-REG will require recognition and provision for Māori interests as part of the consenting process. Required actions include: early and meaningful engagement; if REG is on or near a site of significance the REG is to be undertaken in a way that provides for the significance of the site; and enabling small and community-scale renewable electricity generation to support tangata whenua goals and aspirations.
- Enabling the upgrade and repowering of existing wind and solar REG through a new policy and the development of a new NES-REG that provide for minor, intermediate and major upgrades and repowering activities. Standards will be developed for minor upgrades as permitted activities, intermediate upgrades as controlled activities and major upgrades and repowering as restricted discretionary activities.
- REG for residential use, small-scale onsite commercial use, or community use already makes a significant contribution to the national REG capacity. A new definition is proposed of these activities, along with a new policy and nationally consistent rules for small and community scale onshore wind and solar that would have controlled activity status.
- The workability and scope of the NES-ET activities will be improved through updated definitions, rules and conditions to better enable routine upgrading and maintenance of the electricity transmission network.

The package of changes will not replace the Fast Track consenting pathway in the COVID-19 Recovery (Fast-track Consenting) Act 2020 as there is proposed to be a similar consenting pathway be incorporated in the new resource management system.

Amendments to current NPSs are not designed to require local authorities to initiate plan changes. Amendments will influence consenting decisions in the transitional period until the National Planning Framework is progressed as part of the wider resource management reforms.

The development of the new NES-REG requires further consultation with stakeholders, Iwi and Government agencies to determine the most effective and efficient way to sequence and progress it's development with the proposed amendments to current NES.

Proposed Changes to Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission (Continued)

Have your say

The Ministry for Business, Innovation and Employment and the Ministry for the Environment has released a [consultation document](#) that is available for public feedback. Submissions close at 5pm on the 1 June 2023.

The timeframe is ambitious with changes to the NPS-REG and NPS-ET hoped to be progressed as a priority and gazetted by the end of 2023 with the consultation document the only opportunity for public feedback.

Development of the new NES and amendments to existing NES will occur later into 2023 following a lengthier process of additional consultation, including with stakeholders and possibly the public, and Cabinet processes. NES-REG and NES-ETA are expected to be brought into effect as regulations after gazettal into 2024.

Want to know more?

If you have any questions about the proposed changes to renewable electricity generation and transmission, please contact our specialist [Environment, Planning and Natural Resources team](#).

The Ministry for Business, Innovation and Employment are also hosting a high-level public webinar on Wednesday 03 May 2023 from 12-1pm. You can register [here](#).

A more in-depth stakeholder workshop will be hosted on Thursday 04 May 2023 from 10-12pm. You can register [here](#).