



AGENDA

Strategy and Policy Committee Meeting

Date: Thursday, 18 June 2026

Time: 9:30 am

Location: Council Chambers
Waikato Regional Council
Level 1, 160 Ward Street, Hamilton

Members: Cr Ben Dunbar-Smith – Chair
Cr Liz Stolwyk – Deputy Chair
Cr Warren Maher
Cr Mich'eal Downard
Cr Robert Cookson
Cr Kataraina Hodge
Cr Keith Holmes
Cr Chris Hughes
Cr Tipa Mahuta
Cr Gary McGuire
Cr Jennifer Nickel
Cr Garry Reymer
Cr Noel Smith
Cr Angela Strange

Strategy and Policy Committee

Ngā Tikanga Whakahaere | Terms of Reference

1. *Mana ā-Ture* | Status

This Committee was established by Council under clause 30(1)(a) of Schedule 7 of the [Local Government Act 2002](#). It is a discretionary committee that can be created or disestablished by Council resolution.

2. *Ngā Kawenga* | Responsibilities

This Committee is responsible for the following functions, excluding matters that fall within the specific responsibilities of other committees:

- a. Setting Council's strategic direction and policy responses
- b. Identifying regional issues that require Council intervention
- c. Setting Council's advocacy position on regional issues
- d. Responding to external agency statutory planning processes
- e. Providing thought leadership on matters of regional significance
- f. Establishing strategic priorities for organisational direction and policy setting

3. *Ngā Apatono* | Powers

The Committee has the following powers required to carry out its responsibilities:

- a. Advising Council on regional governance matters, including delegation to:
 - i. Develop Council's strategic direction and recommend policy responses
 - ii. Develop Council's position on regionally significant issues
 - iii. Oversee development of regional by-laws and plans including, the Regional Policy Statement, regional plans, and the Regional Pest Management Plan.
- b. Provide guidance on regional governance projects, including:
 - i. Upper North Island Strategic Alliance
 - ii. Waikato Progress Indicators Implementation
 - iii. Regional and sub-regional spatial planning.
- c. Review and endorse submissions on central government, neighbouring councils, and territorial authority policy documents
- d. Receiving information to:
 - i. Monitor the effectiveness of Council's strategic influence
 - ii. Review and recommend updates to Council's strategic positions
- e. Monitoring implementation of the Regional Policy Statement (RPS) by partners and receiving reports on progress toward RPS objectives
- f. Cross-boundary collaboration to:
 - i. Foster cooperation on inter-regional issues
 - ii. Stay informed of emerging cross-boundary issues
 - iii. Provide guidance and receive updates on collaboration efforts
- g. Establishing hearing panels and subcommittees, and appointing commissioners to:
 - i. Hear and make recommendations on proposed policy statements or plans under the Resource Management Act 1991
 - ii. Oversee other statutory policy processes, including:
 - Regional Biodiversity Strategy
 - Regional Pest Management Strategies
 - Bylaws
- h. Develop Council's governance position on regionally significant and cross-boundary matters

Note: Commissioners are delegated powers under section 34A (1) of the [Resource Management Act 1991](#) to:

- i. Hold hearings and recommend decisions on submissions
- ii. Exercise powers under sections 37, 37A, 39–42A of the RMA

- iii. This delegation excludes final decision-making powers under clauses 10, 17, and 29(4) of Schedule 1 of the RMA

4. *Ngā Tūranga* | **Membership**

4.1 *Ngā Mema* | **Members**

All elected members of the Council are members of this Committee.

4.2 *Ūpoko me te Ūpoko Tuarua* | **Chair and Deputy-Chair**

The Chair and Deputy-Chair are appointed by Council in accordance with clause 25 of Schedule 7 of the Local Government Act 2002.

5. *Tokamatua* | **Quorum**

Two members. Refer clause 23(3)(b) of Schedule 7, [Local Government Act 2002](#).

6. *Ngā Tikanga Pōti* | **Voting**

- a. Decisions are made by majority vote of members present.
- b. If votes are equal, the Chair has a deliberative and casting vote.

Refer clause 24 of Schedule 7, Local Government Act 2002.

7. *Ngā Hui i te Tau* | **Frequency of meetings**

Bi-monthly *or* as required.

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1 KARAKIA TIMATANGA

Whakataka te hau ki te uru	Cease o winds from the west
Whakataka te hau ki te tonga	Cease o winds from the south
Kia mākinakina ki uta	Bring calm breezes over the land
Kia mātaratara ki tai	Bring calm breezes over the sea
E hī ake ana te atakura	And let the red-tipped dawn come
He tio	With a touch of frost
He Huka	A sharpened air
He hau hū	And promise of a glorious day
Tīhei mauri ora!	Behold we live

2 APOLOGIES**3 CONFIRMATION OF AGENDA****4 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST**

Members are reminded of the need to be aware of maintaining a clear separation between personal interests and duties and their role as an elected member.

If any member has an interest that creates an actual, or could be perceived to create, a conflict in relation to any item on the agenda, it is recommended that this be disclosed.

5 MINUTES FOR CONFIRMATION OR RECEIPT

5.1 MINUTES OF THE SUBMISSIONS SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 24 APRIL 2026

Rā | Date: 5 May 2026

Kaituhi | Author: Brooke Roebeck, Democracy Advisor

Kaituku | Authoriser: Tracey May, Director, Science, Policy and Information

TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That the minutes of the Submissions Subcommittee meeting held on 24 April 2026 be confirmed as a correct record.

KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Aside from the standard procedural items (apologies, confirmation of agenda etc) and decisions made under delegated authority, there were no recommendations for the Strategy and Policy Committee to consider.

ĀPITIHINGA | ATTACHMENTS

1. Minutes of the Submissions Subcommittee meeting held on 24 April 2026



MINUTES

Submissions Subcommittee Meeting

Friday, 24 April 2026

Order Of Business

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Waikato Regional Council
Submissions Subcommittee Meeting
OPEN MINUTES

Date: Friday 24 April 2026, 9.30am
Location: Council Chambers
Waikato Regional Council
Level 1, 160 Ward Street, Hamilton

Members Present: Cr Ben Dunbar-Smith – Committee Chair
Cr Liz Stolwyk – Committee Deputy Chair
Cr Chris Hughes
Cr Garry Reymer (virtually via Teams)

Staff Present: Janine Becker – Director, Customer and Corporate Services
Jane Apperley – Manager, Corporate Planning
Jacob Dexter – Biodiversity Sites Lead
Brooke Roebeck – Democracy Advisor

The contents of these minutes meet all legal requirements and include a full set of decisions.

An audio-visual recording of the open session of the meeting is available on Waikato Regional Council's public website.

Recording	Document ID #	YouTube Link
Recording 1	Doc # 35694284	https://youtu.be/ZOMKN6RTOGQ

1 KARAKIA TIMATANGA

Item commenced in recording 1, at start.

The Chair (Cr Ben Dunbar-Smith) opened the meeting with a karakia.

2 APOLOGIES

Item commenced in recording 1, at 29 seconds.

COMMITTEE RESOLUTION SS26/01

Moved: Cr Liz Stolwyk

Seconded: Cr Chris Hughes

That the apologies of Cr Warren Maher for absence be accepted.

CARRIED

3 CONFIRMATION OF AGENDA

Item commenced in recording 1, at 39 seconds.

COMMITTEE RESOLUTION SS26/02

Moved: Cr Liz Stolwyk

Seconded: Cr Chris Hughes

- 1. That the agenda of the Submissions Subcommittee Meeting of 24 April 2026, as circulated, be confirmed as the business of the meeting, subject to:**
- 2. That the order of items follows the order set out in the minutes.**

CARRIED

4 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

Item commenced in recording 1, at 56 seconds.

No interests were disclosed pertaining to items on the agenda or interests not already recorded on a relevant register.

5 MINUTES FOR CONFIRMATION OR RECEIPT

Nil

6 GENERAL ITEMS**6.1 SUBMISSIONS TO THE 2026/27 ANNUAL PLAN CONSULTATIONS OF WAITOMO DISTRICT COUNCIL AND THAMES COROMANDEL DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Item commenced in recording 1, at 1 minute 20 seconds.

Presented by the Manager, Corporate Planning (Jane Apperley) and the Biodiversity Sites Lead (Jacob Dexter).

COMMITTEE RESOLUTION SS26/03

Moved: Cr Chris Hughes

Seconded: Cr Ben Dunbar-Smith

- 1. That the report *Submissions to the 2026/27 Annual Plan consultations of Waitomo District Council and Thames Coromandel District Council* (Submissions Subcommittee, 24 April 2026) be received.**
- 2. That the Submissions Subcommittee delegates the Chair, Strategy and Policy Committee (Cr Ben Dunbar-Smith) and the Director, Customer and Corporate Services (Janine Becker) approval for lodgement of the submissions (Submissions Subcommittee, 24 April 2026 at page 10-16), subject to amendments identified in discussions had at the subcommittee meeting.**

CARRIED

7 KARAKIA WHAKAMUTUNGA

Item commenced in recording 1, at 20 minutes.

The Chair (Cr Ben Dunbar-Smith) closed the meeting with a karakia.

9.51am – The meeting closed.

6 GENERAL ITEMS

6.1 SUBMISSION ON THE CONSERVATION AMENDMENT BILL AND THE NATIONAL CONSERVATION POLICY STATEMENT PROPOSAL DOCUMENT

Rā Date:	25 May 2026
Kaituhi Author:	Judy van Rossem, Specialist Policy Advisor
Kaituku Authoriser:	Tracey May, Director, Science, Policy and Information
Mana whakatau Delegation Status:	Committee has delegated authority to make the recommended decision

TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

- To seek approval from the Strategy and Policy Committee on the content, and subsequent lodgement, of the Waikato Regional Council's (the Council's) submissions on the:
 - Conservation Amendment Bill; and
 - Proposal Document: Content of the first National Conservation Policy Statement.

KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- On 7 May 2026, the Government introduced the Conservation Amendment Bill. This Bill proposes significant changes to the way public conservation land is managed in New Zealand under the Conservation Act 1987 (the Act).
- Clause 15 of the Bill enables the Minister of Conservation to set future national policy direction through publishing a National Conservation Policy Statement (NCPS).
- The Department of Conservation (DoC) is seeking public comment on an early consultation on the NCPS, separate to the Environment Select Committee's consideration of the Bill.
- DoC's submission period closes on Tuesday, 9 July 2026.
- The Environment Select Committee's submission period on the Conservation Amendment Bill closes on 2 July 2026.

TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

- That the report *Submission on the Conservation Amendment Bill and the National Conservation Policy Statement proposal document* (Strategy and Policy Committee, 18 June 2026) be received.
- That the Strategy and Policy Committee:
 - Approves the Waikato Regional Council submissions on the Conservation Amendment Bill and the National Conservation Policy Statement Proposal Document; or

- (b) Delegates to the Committee Chair (Cr Ben Dunbar-Smith) and the Director, Science, Policy and Information (Tracey May) approval for lodgement of the Waikato Regional Council submissions on the Conservation Amendment Bill and the National Conservation Policy Statement Proposal Document subject to amendments identified in discussion had at the committee meeting.

HOROPAKI | BACKGROUND

Conservation Amendment Bill

7. The [Conservation Amendment Bill](#) had its first reading in Parliament on 12 May 2026, before being referred to the Environment Select Committee.
8. The Bill proposes a significant overhaul of the 40-year-old Conservation Act 1987, aimed at modernising what is widely seen as an outdated and complex system. It is intended to streamline the management of conservation land, while enabling appropriate economic activity on public conservation land alongside conservation outcomes.
9. The Bill will provide a more streamlined and flexible conservation system by:
 - streamlining the planning framework to improve efficiency and better enable economic activity on conservation land;
 - allowing for more efficient and effective processing of concession applications, and ongoing management of concessions;
 - enabling greater flexibility to exchange and dispose of conservation land;
 - providing clarity on te Tiriti o Waitangi / Treaty of Waitangi (Treaty) obligations;
 - increasing revenue to help maintain and enhance the visitor experience on conservation land.
10. Key changes to the Conservation Act, grouped by theme, are described below.

Changes to the purpose-related provisions of the Conservation Act

11. The Bill amends several purpose-related provisions in the Conservation Act to enable more development on conservation land, while protecting conservation values. While the definition of 'conservation' is not proposed to be changed, a new statutory function is proposed to sit alongside that, being to *recognise economic opportunities that arise from the use and development of land and other natural resources and historic resources managed by the Department, and to enable this use and development to the greatest extent practicable under this Act and other enactments*. Under the Conservation Act currently there is no real opportunity to consider and weigh the economic benefits that might accrue from decisions/activities. This is a significant change.

Streamlining the Act's management planning framework

12. The Bill streamlines the national planning framework by:
 - (a) creating a single new National Conservation Policy Statement or NCPS (instead of the existing Conservation General Policy and the General Policy for National Parks) to sit at the top of the planning hierarchy and provide binding national direction, including classifying activities as pre-approved or exempt; and

- (b) introducing one layer of area plans (instead of the current Conservation Management Strategies, Conservation Management Plans and National Park Management Plans). These must be consistent with the NCPS and cover all land, coastal and marine areas of New Zealand managed by the Department.
13. Each statutory document has a prescribed process providing for consultation with iwi authorities, establishing advisory roles for the New Zealand Conservation Authority and conservation boards, and requiring approval by the Minister.

Centralising power and decision-making

14. The Bill expands and clarifies ministerial and regulatory powers through the national control of conservation policy via the NCPS and the regulation of activity classes, exemptions and timeframes. At the same time, it constrains the ability of region-specific planning instruments, such as area plans, to override national direction.
15. The Bill removes the New Zealand Conservation Authority's function of approving conservation management strategies and plans, limiting its role to providing comments on the NCPS and draft area plans. The functions of Conservation Boards are similarly reduced.

Giving effect to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi and upholding Treaty settlements

16. The Bill retains the foundational Section 4 requirement for conservation legislation to be administered and interpreted so as to give effect to Treaty principles. To provide additional clarity and certainty, the Bill contains a descriptive provision identifying the steps, processes, and other activities that section 4 requires the Crown to undertake before making land management decisions (i.e. on land exchanges and disposals, concessions, area plans, and visitor amenities areas). This includes procedural requirements to seek comments from Māori groups, ensuring their rights and interests are considered before decisions are finalised.
17. The Bill also includes an overarching clause requiring persons exercising powers to act consistently with Treaty settlements and customary rights (such as rights under the Takutai Moana Act 2011).

Concession application processes

18. For concession holders — including tourism and recreation operators — the Bill signals a shift toward a more standardised and nationally directed framework that will affect how approvals are obtained, renewed and managed over time. Concession application processes are streamlined by:
- (a) Increased use of exempt or pre-approved activity classes for low impact, routine activities, reducing the need to individual concession applications;
 - (b) Introducing statutory time frames for concession applications;
 - (c) Allowing the setting of standardised conditions;
 - (d) Enabling the Minister to decline applications earlier in the application process while enabling broadening their current discretionary power to initiate an allocation process for concessions;
 - (e) Removing requirements to hold hearings for submitters in a public notification process;
 - (f) Allowing leases for up to 60 years for e.g. critical infrastructure.

Increased flexibility for conservation land exchange and disposal

19. The Bill loosens existing constraints on exchanging and disposing of Crown-owned conservation land. However, the highest value conservation land such as National Parks remains ineligible for both exchange and disposal (equating to approximately 40% of New Zealand's total conservation land).
20. Specifically, the Bill provides that:
 - (a) land exchanges will be only possible on a "net conservation benefit" basis i.e. where the land received is considered (by the Minister) to have higher conservation values than the conservation land traded away (but not necessarily on a like for like basis); and
 - (b) land disposals will only be possible where the land is not important for the conservation of threatened species or ecosystems, the habitat provided is not one of the best examples of its type, and the Director-General of Conservation has recommended it.

Visitor Amenity Areas

21. This is a new category of land, its purpose being to provide the public with recreational and public amenities and related services to further the use and enjoyment of land help under the Act. A non-exclusive list of these amenities / services are contained in the Bill, and generally speaking are things such as toilets, visitor centres, accommodation, car parks, restaurants / cafes, tour operator services and associated infrastructure.

International Visitor Access Charges

22. The Bill also introduces a new framework to enable international visitor access charges at specified high-use conservation sites (such as Cathedral Cove) while maintaining free access for New Zealanders.
23. Areas may be subject to levies only if:
 - the benefits of a levy outweigh the operational costs of administering the levy; and
 - if the area has high international visitor numbers or high costs for visitor infrastructure.
24. Enabling an access levy will raise additional revenue, which can then be used to maintain and enhance visitor experiences on conservation land. This revenue will support investment in visitor infrastructure and support biodiversity and heritage work.

Proposal Document: Content of the first National Conservation Policy Statement

25. Separate to the Bill submission process, on 18 May 2026, the Department of Conservation (DOC) released a [consultation document](#) on the first for public feedback. DOC has prepared this consultation document to describe the proposed content of the first NCPS, including proposed policies, area plan content and pre-approved and exempt activities. This will allow the NCPS to be developed while the Bill goes through the parliamentary process.
26. As explained above, the NCPS will sit in a new proposed hierarchy of conservation management tools as follows:
 - Conservation Act, National Parks Act, Reserves Act etc.
 - NCPS
 - Area Plans.

27. The proposal states that the structure will streamline the country's concession framework. It is intended the proposed framework will be a less complex process and will provide applicants with greater transparency and certainty about where activities are suitable on different types of public conservation land.
28. The Bill at *Clause 13D(2)(b)* sets the purpose of a NCPS as being to *recognise the economic opportunities that arise from the use and development of land and other natural resources and historic resources managed by the Department, and to enable this use and development to the greatest extent practicable under those Acts.*
29. The explicit statutory purpose to recognise economic opportunities from public conservation land, is not something we have seen in our national conservation framework before. The Minister will be responsible for approving the NCPS.
30. The NCPS will specify "visitor zones", with each zone describing the type of recreation and tourism that is appropriate for an area. Area Plans will be required to designate all land within their boundaries as one of these zones. These are set out in the consultation document: visitor amenity areas, high visitor zones, medium visitor zones, low visitor zones and wilderness areas. The NCPS will also include guidance and require an assessment as to which economic activities are likely to be consistent with the proposed visitor zones and the purpose (being the statutory land classification) for which the land is held.
31. Area Plans are intended to be much shorter and more streamlined than the Management Strategies and Plans that they will be replacing. The NCPS will specify what types of policies can and cannot be included in an Area Plan.
32. DOC anticipates as much as 40% of concession activities to fall under the new categories of exempt and pre-approved activities. Their aim is that in having less applications to process, there will be more resources to be directed towards larger, more complex concessions.
33. There are four activities that are classed as exempt from needing a concession, such as news of the day filming and observational research. There will be 16 activities under the NCPS that qualify as pre-approved concessions and a set of standard terms and conditions to manage potential adverse effects, with DOC retaining the ability to set specific contractual conditions. They range from various guided recreation activities to research and specific types of filming.
34. For some activities that are not exempt or pre-approved, a standardised pre-assessment application process will apply. Standardising a range of pre-assessments is intended to result in greater consistency as to how concession applications are evaluated and give applicants a better understanding as to where different activities are anticipated to occur. These include things like grazing, beehives, planting and roading. These activities have also been assessed against different land classifications and visitor zones.

TE TAKE | ISSUE

35. Consultation on the Bill opened on 22 May 2026 and close on 2 July 2026. Consultation on the NCPS consultation document opened on 14 May 2026 and close on 9 July 2026.
36. Although the draft NCPS consultation is a separate process to the Bill, they are intended to progress in tandem as the Bill moves through the parliamentary process of select committee, submissions and hearings. This does mean that the scope of this draft NCPS will be subject to change based on amendments to the Bill.

37. Staff have prepared two separate submissions on the Bill (**Attachment 1**) and NCPS consultation (**Attachment 2**). The draft submission to the Bill is generally supportive of the Bill's intent to unlock faster processes, improve decision-making, and provide more certainty and clarity for communities and businesses. The submission also identifies several concerns with the Bill including:
- needing to balance economic development with conservation outcomes
 - needing consistency in giving effect to Treaty of Waitangi provisions and Treaty settlements
 - insufficient safeguards around concessions and land exchanges/disposals
 - risks of development in areas exposed to natural hazards; and
 - a lack of alignment with regional council functions and wider environmental management frameworks.
38. The key concerns and recommendations sought in the draft submission are summarised below across the eight themes.

Streamlining the Act's management planning framework

- (a) Supports simplifying the planning framework but concerned that the proposed system may not adequately reflect the full range of regional council functions, particularly outside the marine environment.
- (b) Recommends stronger alignment with RMA planning frameworks, better integration with regional spatial planning, and clearer inclusion of climate change and natural hazard considerations in decision-making.

Centralising power and decision-making

- (a) Concerned that the Bill increases Ministerial control while reducing the role of independent bodies such as Conservation Boards and the New Zealand Conservation Authority.
- (b) Recommends retaining these bodies' decision-making roles and clarifying limits on Ministerial powers to ensure transparency, local input, and balanced decision-making.

Consistency in giving effect to the Treaty of Waitangi and upholding Treaty settlements

- (a) Recommends that all Treaty settlement proposals allow for consistency with our current relevant settlement provisions to reduce the risk of undermining council-iwi relationships.

Concessions system

- (a) Supports streamlining concession processes, but concerned about insufficient requirements to assess site-specific environmental values and effects.
- (b) Recommends exemptions or pre-approval for non-commercial council activities, stronger information requirements for applications and tailored conditions for different environments.
- (c) Opposes blanket long-term (60 year) concessions without climate change and natural hazard risk safeguards.

Increased flexibility for conservation land exchange and disposal

- (a) Concerned that the proposed approach could result in the loss of locally important ecological values and reduced landscape connectivity.
- (b) Recommends robust site-specific assessments and a “no net loss” approach that considers downstream impacts such as water quality and natural hazard risks that councils are then required to manage, for land that may leave the conservation estate.

Visitor amenity areas

- (a) Concerned that visitor amenity area provisions could prioritise tourism and development over the underlying conservation purpose of the land.
- (b) Recommends ensuring that conservation values remain the primary consideration, with development only enabled where it does not compromise those values.

International visitor access charges

- (a) Supports the concept of a visitor levy but is concerned about how revenue will be allocated and the potential impacts on council activities and recommends that funds be reinvested in the locations where they are collected and that regional council statutory activities be exempt from access charges.

39. The draft submission to the NCPS consultation document is generally supportive of the proposal to provide more clarity for concession applicants, support faster concession decision-making and provide clearer, more consistent planning documents. Key submission points are as follows:

- Supports streamlined area plans but recommends stronger, up-to-date evidence and expert oversight to ensure robust assessment of values and impacts.
- Concern that visitor zones may enable increased development pressure and should not override conservation priorities.
- Exempt activity framework is too narrow and should include non-commercial regional council functions such as environmental monitoring and hazard management.
- Lack of clarity in key terms (e.g. “reasonably available”, “moderate”, “significant”) risks inconsistent application and under-assessment of effects.
- Supports pre-approved low-impact activities but recommend a precautionary approach where ecological information is incomplete.
- Stronger conditions and clearer processes needed for pre-approved and exempt activities, including clearer rules where they are disapplied.
- Sensitive environments (e.g. threatened species habitat) should be excluded from pre-approved and exempt activity provisions.
- Supports standardised pre-assessment approach and recommend inclusion of regional council statutory functions if not exempt or pre-approved.
- Recommends better alignment with other national policy instruments (e.g. NPS-FM)
- Recommends including regional council pest control as an exempt or pre-approved activity in the NCPS, to avoid unnecessary approvals and support timely action.
- Supports land reclassification processes but recommend stronger safeguards to ensure ecological, water, and hazard management values are fully considered.

TE AROMATAWAI I TE HIRANGA | ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

40. Having regard to the decision-making provisions in the LGA and the Council's Significance and Engagement Policy, a decision in accordance with the recommendations is not considered to have a high degree of significance. Staff are of the opinion that the content and recommendations in this report are consistent with the decision-making requirements contained in Part Six of the LGA and that the decision-making requirements of the LGA have been met.

TE HOROPAKI Ā-TURE | LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

41. WRC has an interest in this Bill in terms of:
- (a) how it interacts with our environmental management, biosecurity and regional planning functions under the Resource Management Act 1991 and the future planning framework under the Planning and Natural Environment Bills; and
 - (b) considering potential impacts on WRC's activities on conservation land. WRC holds concessions and permissions managed by the Department of Conservation (DOC) and relies on these contracts to undertake some activities. These activities are undertaken to ensure WRC is meeting its functions and obligations under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) and other legislation.
42. In addition, both WRC and DOC share functions under section 30(d) of the RMA with respect to the coastal marine area (CMA). This includes controlling land and associated natural and physical resources, as well as potential effects of the use, development, or protection of land, including the avoidance or mitigation of hazards.

NGĀ WHAIWHAKAARO KAUPAPAHĒRE | POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

43. To the best of the writer's knowledge, this decision to endorse the submission is not significantly inconsistent with, nor is anticipated to have consequences that will be significantly inconsistent with any policy adopted by the Council or any plan required by the LGA.

TE TIRITI O WAITANGI | THE TREATY OF WAITANGI

44. The draft submission recognises the Council's obligations to take account of the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi by supporting the retention and strengthening of section 4 obligations and emphasising that Treaty principles must continue to guide all conservation decision-making. It highlights the Council's obligations in existing Treaty settlements.

WHAKAKAPINGA | CONCLUSION

45. The Council has the opportunity to make a submission on the Conservation Amendment Bill and the National Conservation Policy Statement proposal document. Each submission recommends further clarification, evidence and consideration be taken in the development of New Zealand's conservation policy direction and legislation.

ĀPITIHANGA | ATTACHMENTS

- 1. Waikato Regional Council Submission on the Conservation Amendment Bill – (Doc # 36112898) [↓](#)**
- 2. Waikato Regional Council Submission on the National Conservation Policy Statement Proposal Document – (Doc # 36143006) [↓](#)**

File No: 25 12 05
Document No: 36112898
Enquiries to: Judy van Rossem

2 June 2026

Committee Secretariat
Environment Committee
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

Email: en.legislation@parliament.govt.nz



Dear Sir/Madam

Waikato Regional Council Submission to Conservation Amendment Bill

Thank you for the opportunity to submit on the proposed Conservation Amendment Bill. Please find attached the Waikato Regional Council's (the Council's) submission regarding this Bill. The submission was formally endorsed by the Council's Strategy and Policy Committee on **18 June 2026**.

Should you have any queries regarding the content of this document please contact Judy van Rossem, Specialist Policy Advisor, Policy Implementation directly on (07) 859 0893 or by email judy.vanrossem@waikatoregion.govt.nz

Regards,

Tracey May
Director Science, Policy and Information

HE TAIAO MAUIORA HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT
HE ŌHANGA PAKARI STRONG ECONOMY
HE HAPORI HIHIRI VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

Submission from Waikato Regional Council on the Conservation Amendment Bill**Introduction**

1. We appreciate the opportunity to make a submission on the Conservation Amendment Bill.
2. Waikato Regional Council (WRC) recognises that this is the most significant reform of conservation legislation in nearly 40 years and that the aim of the Bill is to provide a more streamlined and flexible conservation system.
3. WRC has an interest in this Bill in terms of:
 - (a) how it interacts with our environmental management, biosecurity and regional planning functions under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) and the future planning framework under the Planning and Natural Environment Bills; and
 - (b) considering potential impacts on WRC's activities on conservation land. WRC relies on DOC concessions and permissions to undertake non-commercial statutory functions such as natural hazard management, emergency response, flood protection, river management as well as providing high-quality, independent and timely environmental data for decision-making on natural resources, biodiversity and biosecurity matters. These activities are undertaken to ensure WRC is meeting its functions and obligations under the RMA and other legislation.
4. In addition, both WRC and DOC share functions under section 30(d) of the RMA with respect to the coastal marine area (CMA). This includes controlling land and associated natural and physical resources, as well as potential effects of the use, development, or protection of land, including the avoidance or mitigation of hazards.
5. WRC is providing feedback to the Select Committee on the Conservation Amendment Bill and also to DOC on the proposals for the first National Conservation Policy Statement (NCPS) through two separate submissions. This is important to ensure alignment with WRC's functions under the RMA, particularly in managing environmental effects and ensuring integrated, effects-based decision-making.
6. Key submission themes are:
 - Changes to purpose-related provisions of the Conservation Act
 - Consistency in giving effect to the Treaty of Waitangi and upholding Treaty settlements
 - Modernising and streamlining the conservation management planning framework
 - Management of concessions
 - Land exchanges and disposals
 - Introducing visitor amenity areas
 - Charging an international visitor levy for access to some areas of conservation land
 - Clarity around Takutai Moana rights.

Summary

7. In summary, our submission:
 - (a) Recommends that the proposed new economic function for DOC in new section 6(ea) must clearly prioritise conservation outcomes as per the purpose of the Act, and be aligned with the RMA to ensure integrated management of natural and physical resources.
 - (b) Recommends that all Treaty settlement proposals allow for consistency with our current relevant settlement provisions to reduce the risk of undermining council-iwi relationships.
 - (c) Supports clear and transparent decision-making processes and seeks complementarity with the RMA. This includes ensuring that the Council's inputs into conservation processes are transparently considered and able to influence decisions, to support integrated environmental management across public entities.

- (d) Supports the Bill's intent to simplify and consolidate the conservation management planning system through the introduction of an overarching National Conservation Policy Statement and area plans that provide more detail for local areas.
- (e) Supports stronger alignment between the NCPS, RMA national direction, and future resource management frameworks, as well as integration with local spatial planning, to enable better collaboration, data sharing, and evidence-based environmental outcomes.
- (f) Recommends expanding consultation requirements to ensure regional councils are engaged throughout the development and amendment of the NCPS and area plans, reflecting the full scope of regional council responsibilities beyond marine matters.
- (g) Recommends that the Bill retains the current functions of the New Zealand Conservation Authority and Conservation Boards, including involvement in approving the NCPS and area plans, so that local knowledge, community voices, and mana whenua perspectives continue to shape decisions. Area plans should include sufficient spatial data, environmental constraints, and hazard information at a scale that enables integration with regional spatial planning frameworks.
- (h) Recommends that the Bill explicitly recognise the role of conservation land in climate change mitigation and adaptation, and embed climate considerations in decision-making to ensure conservation outcomes remain prioritised over development pressures.
- (i) Recommends that the Bill require the National Conservation Policy Statement (NCPS) to include a risk-based approach to natural hazards. This should, at a minimum:
- avoid activities and development in areas of high or intolerable natural hazard risk, with explicit recognition of public safety considerations;
 - be informed by and apply relevant hazard risk assessments, including consideration of high-impact, low-probability events, and alignment with civil defence and emergency management planning frameworks; and
 - provide for mechanisms that support the transition of high-risk land away from development, including the use of designations, reserve status or other tools to prevent reoccupation or redevelopment where land has become unsafe.
- (j) Supports the Bill's move to streamline concession processes and the introduction of exempt and pre-approved activities through the NCPS.
- (k) Strongly recommends that the Bill or the subsequent NCPS explicitly exempts regional councils from needing to obtain concessions when undertaking statutory functions (such as state of the environment monitoring, biosecurity, and natural hazard management) on public conservation land, as these activities are for public benefit and do not result in commercial gain. Alternatively, where a full exemption is not appropriate, WRC recommends these statutory functions be classified as 'pre-approved activities' to provide a streamlined permitting pathway, or be explicitly included in the list of activities subject to 'standardised pre-assessment' to ensure they can proceed efficiently.
- (l) Seeks acknowledgement of the importance of regional council activities and the need for continuity of these in the long term.
- (m) Recommends strengthening the provisions for exempt and pre-approved activities to require consideration of local site values, clear limits on scale and intensity, and transparent criteria for suspending activities, to ensure conservation outcomes are not compromised.
- (n) Recommends requiring concession applications to include a clear description of site ecological values, including ecosystems, species present, and habitat connectivity, to ensure environmental effects are properly understood and conservation outcomes are protected.
- (o) Strongly recommends limiting all concession terms to a 30 year maximum, or alternatively if longer terms are allowed, requiring robust upfront assessment of long-term climate and hazard risks, along with mandatory review and adaptive management provisions to ensure infrastructure remains appropriate over time.
- (p) Recommends that stronger safeguards are needed for land exchange and disposal to:

- require assessment of future ecological, climate, natural hazard and connectivity values prior to disposal or exchange;
 - require a clear, robust “no net loss” (or net gain) test that accounts for local ecological values, habitat connectivity, landscape value and future conservation potential, rather than relying solely on non-equivalent “higher value” comparisons determined at a national scale.
 - consider downstream effects under the RMA, including risks of poorly located development and natural hazards; and
 - maintain transparency and independent oversight in decision-making.
- (q) Recommends amending section 16G(2)(b) to ensure that the primary conservation purposes and protection values of the underlying land prevail over Visitor Amenity Area provisions, so that tourism and development activities cannot override the fundamental intent of conservation land.
- (r) Recommends requiring that revenue from international visitor access levies be reinvested in the locations where it is collected, to support the ongoing maintenance, protection, and sustainability of highly visited conservation sites.
- (s) Recommends that DOC recognises the legislative functions of regional councils and allow an exemption of access charges for regional councils when undertaking activities on conservation land.
- (t) Recommends that implementation and role changes should occur in direct consultation with affected post-settlement governance entities and any governance entity named in legislation.
- (u) Recommends clearer terminology and explicit implementation steps for councils where Māori rights, customary marine title rights, or Treaty settlement redress may be affected.
8. We request to be involved in any future consultation processes in relation to conservation law reform and would welcome the opportunity to comment further on any issues explored during the Select Committee process.
9. The Council wishes to make an oral submission and present its views to the Committee.

Submitter details

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Changes to the purpose-related provisions of the Conservation Act

We recommend that the proposed new economic function for DOC in new section 6(ea) clearly prioritises conservation outcomes and is aligned with the RMA to ensure integrated management of natural and physical resources.

1. We have concerns that section 6(ea) may cause conflicts to the Council's statutory responsibilities under the RMA to protect natural and physical resources, maintain water quality, manage natural hazards, and safeguard indigenous biodiversity. Public conservation land plays a critical role in supporting ecosystem resilience, climate change response and regional environmental outcomes. Introducing a statutory obligation to promote economic development risks these values being compromised, and may lead to outcomes inconsistent with integrated management under the RMA. We consider that conservation outcomes are the primary purpose of the Act, and that any enabling of economic activity on conservation land should be within this context.

Consistency in giving effect to the Treaty of Waitangi and upholding Treaty settlements

We recommend that new section 4A stay consistent with current RMA obligations safeguarding Treaty – council relationships and that conservation decision-making processes uphold the importance of our iwi management plan obligations, to reduce the risk of undermining council-iwi relationships.

2. Any process agreed on by the government must clarify how existing Treaty Settlement legislation will be upheld. Absolute clarity on this matter is required. Regional councils are presently a named partner to several Treaty Settlement obligations, named by the Crown to deliver on aspects of the Crown's agreements and obligations with Treaty Settlement Iwi. If this partnership is to change then it is imperative that the Crown has provided absolute clarity for local government and Settlement Iwi what this changed relationship should be.

Streamlining the conservation management planning framework

We support the Bill's intent to simplify and consolidate the conservation management planning system through the introduction of an overarching National Conservation Policy Statement and area plans that provide more detail for local areas.

We support stronger alignment between the NCPS, RMA national direction, and future resource management frameworks, as well as integration with local spatial planning, to enable better collaboration, data sharing, and evidence-based environmental outcomes.

We recommend expanding consultation requirements to ensure regional councils are engaged throughout the development and amendment of the NCPS and area plans, reflecting the full scope of regional council responsibilities beyond marine matters.

We recommend that the Bill retains the current functions of the New Zealand Conservation Authority and Conservation Boards, including involvement in approving the NCPS and area plans, so that local knowledge, community voices, and mana whenua perspectives continue to shape decisions.

We recommend that the Bill explicitly recognise the role of conservation land in climate change mitigation and adaptation, and embed climate considerations in decision-making to ensure conservation outcomes remain prioritised over development pressures.

We recommend that the Bill require the National Conservation Policy Statement (NCPS) to include a risk-based approach to natural hazards. This should, at a minimum:

- avoid activities and development in areas of high or intolerable natural hazard risk, with explicit recognition of public safety considerations;
- be informed by and apply relevant hazard risk assessments, including consideration of high-impact, low-probability events, and alignment with civil defence and emergency management planning frameworks; and
- provide for mechanisms that support the transition of high-risk land away from development, including the use of designations, reserve status or other tools to prevent reoccupation or redevelopment where land has become unsafe.

3. We support the new conservation management planning system including:
 - (a) the creation of a new **National Conservation Policy Statement (NCPS)** that sits at the top of the conservation planning hierarchy and provides binding national direction, and
 - (b) consolidating the various lower order management plans (conservation management strategies, conservation management plans and national park management plans) into a single layer of non-overlapping **area plans** covering all land, coastal and marine areas managed by DOC.

Integration with regional council functions

4. We consider that this system can result in a more streamlined planning process that better aligns with the current RMA framework and future planning framework under the Planning and Natural Environment Bills. However, we note that the requirement for area plans to cover the marine environment could also create a potential overlap with regional council functions in the coastal marine area under section 30 of the RMA. Area plans will need to align with the Waikato Regional Policy Statement and the Regional Coastal Plan, particularly around coastal water quality and ecosystem protection, to avoid conflicting direction.
5. DOC and local authorities share responsibilities under the RMA and both seek positive environmental outcomes. Alignment between the NCPS, RMA national direction, and future resource management frameworks is therefore important, along with integration between area plans and local spatial planning. Improved alignment would support more effective collaboration between DOC and local authorities, including better data sharing and more robust, evidence-based decision-making to strengthen outcomes for biodiversity, ecosystem connectivity, and pest management.

6. There are significant opportunities to improve collaboration and alignment across statutory plans and strategies, including for biodiversity, land management, and pest control. However, the Bill currently limits regional council involvement in the development of the NCPS and area plans to situations where these intersect with marine legislation. This does not reflect the breadth of regional council responsibilities under the RMA, as many functions we manage—such as freshwater, soil conservation, and natural hazards—interact directly with conservation land. Restricting consultation to a “marine-only” trigger risks missing important cross-domain interactions.
7. The Bill (through Clause 127) amends section 4(3)(a) of the RMA so that Crown land-use activities are exempt from section 9 controls where they are consistent with the NCPS or area plans. This amendment applies only to land-use controls. Regional council functions relating to water takes, discharges, and riverbed disturbances under the WRP remain in place, and DOC activities will continue to require resource consent in these areas. This maintains the regional council role in managing environmental effects.

Conservation Authority/Conservation Boards

8. The Council opposes the Minister having unilateral decision-making powers, particularly for technical matters. This process weakens independent oversight and limits locally informed input into conservation decision-making. The Council is concerned that the Bill grants the Minister broad power to bypass consultation for 'minor or technical amendments' without clearly defining what those amendments entail. By centralising control and reducing the New Zealand Conservation Authority and local Conservation Boards to largely advisory roles, the Bill sidelines essential place-based knowledge and community perspectives. This directly impacts Waikato Regional Council, as our RMA functions rely on collaboration and local context, and weakening independent boards will hinder the successful alignment between national conservation planning and regional spatial planning.

Natural hazards and climate adaptation

9. We note that the Bill makes no mention of climate adaptation, yet public conservation land plays a critical role in carbon sequestration (e.g. through forests and wetlands) and climate resilience (buffering floods, droughts and coastal erosion). We consider that the Bill should explicitly recognise the role of public conservation land in addressing climate adaptation. While the conservation planning reforms offer opportunities for more integrated management, these benefits may be undermined by provisions that enable development without sufficient safeguards. We consider that climate mitigation and adaptation should be embedded as core considerations in decision-making, and that the protection of ecosystems that support climate resilience must remain a priority over economic development.
10. We recommend ensuring there is clear alignment between the conservation planning system and wider risk management frameworks, particularly in relation to natural hazards, climate change and public safety. While regional policy statements and national direction under the RMA (including the proposed Natural Hazards National Policy Statement) embed risk-based approaches to land use planning, these are not directly reflected in the conservation planning framework.
11. While the proposal enables greater flexibility for granting concessions and activities on public conservation land, it does not clearly require a risk-based approach to natural hazards. The absence of such a requirement creates a material risk that development could occur in areas of elevated or increasing hazard exposure, without sufficient consideration of long-term risk, public safety or civil defence implications. This creates a potential gap in how natural hazard risk is considered across systems and does not reflect the expectations of Policy HAZ P3 in the Waikato Regional Policy Statement (WRPS), which requires consideration of high-impact, low-probability events and their implications for public safety, essential services and community response and recovery.
12. Over time, the proposal may unintentionally increase exposure to natural hazards and shift the downstream risk, cost, and emergency management burden to local government. The proposal may also

limit our ability to proactively manage high-risk land after hazard events, particularly where land should transition away from development (e.g. where coastal erosion or instability has made it unsafe). We need to retain mechanisms to restrict or extinguish development rights in these areas as without them or alignment with designation or rezoning tools (such as reserve status or incorporation into the coastal marine area), landowners may continue to use or redevelop unsafe land, undermining long-term risk reduction and public safety.

Modernising and streamlining the concessions system

We support the Bill's move to streamline concession processes and the introduction of exempt and pre-approved activities through the NCPS.

We strongly recommend that the Bill or the subsequent NCPS explicitly exempts regional councils from needing to obtain concessions when undertaking statutory functions (such as state of the environment monitoring, biosecurity, and natural hazard management) on public conservation land, as these activities are for public benefit and do not result in commercial gain.

We seek acknowledgement of the importance of regional council activities and the need for continuity of these in the long term.

We recommend strengthening the provisions for exempt and pre-approved activities to require consideration of local site values, clear limits on scale and intensity, and transparent criteria for suspending activities, to ensure conservation outcomes are not compromised.

We recommend requiring concession applications to include a clear description of site ecological values, including ecosystems, species present, and habitat connectivity, to ensure environmental effects are properly understood and conservation outcomes are protected.

We strongly recommend limiting all concession terms to a 30 year maximum, or alternatively if longer terms are allowed, requiring robust upfront assessment of long-term climate and hazard risks, along with mandatory review and adaptive management provisions to ensure infrastructure remains appropriate over time.

13. We support the move to modernise and streamline concession processes provided for in *new section 13E* (inserted by *Clause 15*), including the introduction of exempt and pre-approved activities managed through the NCPS.
14. WRC relies on concessions from DOC to carry out its statutory functions on public conservation land such as river management, natural hazard management and environmental monitoring. Activities undertaken to fulfil these functions include:
 - Installing and managing a network of monitoring stations e.g. weather stations, river or lake level recording sites, groundwater monitoring wells, and continuous water quality monitoring. These monitoring stations provide data for hazard management and emergency response, and resource management.
 - Maintaining the network of flood protection and drainage infrastructure such as stopbanks, floodgates, and pump stations.
 - Bankside erosion protection which may include vegetation layering, vegetation or rock groynes, vegetation training lines, obstruction removal, rock revetment, riparian planting and set-back fencing.
15. As such WRC activities are non-commercial and undertaken for public benefit, including protecting people, property, and the environment, we consider that in many cases they should be exempt, or at least pre-approved, from concession requirements under the Conservation Act, particularly where resource consent is not required under the RMA. In the past, we have experienced issues such as commercial fees for public-good activities, inconsistent advice on concession requirements, delays, and

conditions where our functions are difficult to implement. These create unnecessary barriers to delivering core functions. Therefore, we seek acknowledgment of the importance of the activities undertaken by council and the need for the continuity of these in the long-term. We seek and confirmation that council activities such as operating weather monitoring stations will not need a concession or are able to be pre-approved when meeting the conditions listed above.

16. We are concerned about the level of discretion afforded to the Minister in setting and applying conditions to exempt and pre-approved activities. While we support making the concessions process more efficient, nationally determined conditions may not adequately reflect local site values or the actual effects of activities in specific locations. The Minister does not need to be satisfied that each and every activity will avoid adverse effects (*new section 13E(2)* inserted by *Clause 15*), which creates a risk that activities may occur in inappropriate locations or at unsuitable intensities. This creates a risk that activities may be permitted subject to conditions that are difficult to interpret or implement, and which may be inconsistent with RMA decisions that the Council has made. WRC strongly advocates for a consistency of approach between government agencies that have environmental stewardship responsibilities, to ensure regulatory alignment and prevent conflicting directives on public conservation land.
17. We consider that the provisions allowing activities to be suspended are also unclear (*new section 13F* inserted by *Clause 15*). Activities may be allowed to occur before any issues are identified, and there is potential for repeated suspensions without clear explanation. There is no requirement to explain why a suspension is needed or what effects the activity is having, thus there is a need for transparency to be demonstrated.
18. We consider that concession application requirements as detailed in *new section 14G* (inserted by *Clause 23*) are insufficient to support robust assessment of the effect of activities. While applicants must describe potential effects, there is no requirement to identify key ecological values such as ecosystems, species present, habitat connectivity, or ecological integrity. Without this information, impacts cannot be properly understood. The Council considers applicants should be required to describe site values to support informed, effects-based decision-making and protect environmental outcomes.
19. We do not agree with the removal of requirement to publicly notify grazing licences under *new section 14R* (inserted by *Clause 23*). Grazing on conservation land around the margins of wetlands can adversely affect the wetland and surrounding environment. Removing the responsibility for notification reduces transparency and input from communities, iwi, and councils. It will also increase the likelihood of misalignment with regional plan provisions, and could establish a dual and conflicting environmental policy framework and management system. We consider that grazing licences affecting sensitive environments should be publicly notified or require focused and/or limited consultation.
20. We note that the Bill provides broad discretion for the Minister to impose conditions on concessions, including through standardised conditions under *new section 14ZS* (inserted by *Clause 23*). We are concerned that standardised concession conditions may not reflect site-specific values and risks. Conservation areas vary widely, and some environments, such as geothermal areas, cannot be restored once disturbed. The Council considers conditions should be tailored to each site, with standardised conditions limited to broad matters only.
21. We do not agree with the proposal in *new section 14ZY* (inserted by *Clause 23*) to allow concession terms of up to 60 years (beyond the standard 30 years) for long-life infrastructure, as this effectively locks in land use decisions for several decades. From a natural hazards and climate change perspective, this risks placing or retaining infrastructure in areas that may become unsuitable over time due to flooding, erosion, or sea level rise. Extended terms also reduce the ability to respond to changing environmental conditions, shifting site values, and advancing technology. We are concerned that long-duration concessions limit opportunities for reassessment and adjustment over time, which is inconsistent with a risk-based and adaptive approach to resource management. Without appropriate safeguards, this may result in unintended long-term management and financial implications for councils responsible for

overseeing this infrastructure. Consistent with our previous submissions on long-term consents, we recommend that any provision for extended concession terms include comprehensive upfront assessment of long-term climate change and natural hazard risks, together with clear mechanisms for periodic review and adaptive management to ensure concessions remain appropriate over time.

22. Land exchanges and disposals

We recommend that stronger safeguards are needed for land exchange and disposal to:

- require assessment of future ecological, climate, natural hazard and connectivity values prior to disposal or exchange;
- require a clear, robust “no net loss” (or “net gain”) test that accounts for local ecological values, habitat connectivity, landscape value and future conservation potential, rather than relying solely on non-equivalent “higher value” comparisons determined at a national scale.
- consider downstream effects under the RMA, including risks of poorly located development and natural hazards that councils are then required to manage; and
- maintain transparency and independent oversight in decision-making.

23. We have concerns about the combined effect of the offsetting and compensation provisions under Section 15 of both the Planning Bill and the Natural Environment Bill, and the expanded land exchange and disposal provisions under *new Part 3C (new sections 15 to 15ZB)* of the Conservation Amendment Bill, as these create a real risk of an overall net loss of conservation value. While the legislation includes a goal to ‘achieve no net loss in indigenous biodiversity’ and requires that land acquired through exchange has higher conservation value, neither framework mandates a strict ‘like-for-like’ assessment. Without this safeguard, locally important values may be lost. For example, highly specific wetland habitat supporting endangered species in the Waikato could be offset, compensated, or exchanged for entirely different ecosystems elsewhere, resulting in the permanent loss of important regional biodiversity connections and ecological functions.
24. The concept of “net conservation benefit” (*new section 15C*) applies only to Crown ownership and does not account for the loss of protection once land leaves the conservation estate. This is particularly relevant to our council’s functions under the Resource Management Act, including biodiversity protection, water quality management, natural hazard mitigation, and maintaining ecosystem connectivity. Land with low current ecological value may still play an important role as a buffer, corridor, or future climate mitigation asset (e.g. carbon storage or habitat restoration). Once disposed of, these opportunities are permanently lost and may enable development outcomes that create downstream environmental and hazard risks that must be managed through the RMA framework.
25. We are also concerned that the criteria for land disposal are too narrow (*new section 15K*). Land that is not the “best example” of its type may still provide critical habitat, ecological connectivity, or future conservation value, including for at-risk species or as corridors for species movement. These values are not adequately captured in the Bill, and there is limited clarity on how such assessments will be undertaken or what information will be relied upon.
26. Given the permanent nature of these decisions and the reliance on Ministerial discretion, the Council considers that stronger safeguards are required. Decisions on land exchange and disposal should take a long-term, public interest view, and should be based on a robust, site-specific assessment of ecological values, connectivity, future potential, and natural hazard risk, with a clear requirement to avoid net loss of conservation outcomes. Changes in land use must also consider downstream impacts on Council functions, including flood protection and hazard management. For example, in the Thames area of the Waikato Region, vegetation loss can worsen erosion and debris flows, increasing risk. Landscape values to protect outstanding natural landscapes should also be protected through the assessment process.

Introducing visitor amenity areas

We recommend amending section 16G(2)(b) to ensure that the primary conservation purposes and protection values of the underlying land remain the primary purpose within which Visitor Amenity Areas operate, so that tourism and development activities cannot override the fundamental intent of conservation land.

27. We have concerns regarding the proposed treatment of Visitor Amenity Areas (VAAs), particularly *new section 16G(2)(b)*, which provides that protection principles apply only to the extent that they are compatible with VAA authorisations. This effectively allows tourism and development provisions to override the core conservation purpose of the land where there is a conflict. This risks prioritising visitor use over protecting natural, cultural, and landscape values, especially in sensitive areas. We consider that protection of site values should remain the primary consideration, and any development should be required to avoid or minimise harm and be consistent with the conservation purpose of the land.

Charging international visitors a levy for access to some areas of conservation land

We recommend requiring that revenue from international visitor access levies be reinvested in the locations where it is collected, to support the ongoing maintenance, protection, and sustainability of highly visited conservation sites.

We recommend that DOC recognises the legislative functions of regional councils and allows an exemption of access charges for regional councils when undertaking activities on conservation land.

28. We support the general intention of the new international visitor access levy at a small number of highly visited conservation sites, with revenue intended to fund maintaining and enhancing visitor experiences on conservation land (*new section 48D*). The Waikato region has places that fit the criteria for potential places to be charged for access such as Mautohe/Cathedral Cove, Waireinga/Bridal Veils Falls near Raglan and part of the Tongariro National Park.
29. There is a risk that funding is allocated according to central government priorities rather than conservation need at the place that it is gathered from. We strongly recommend that the revenue from international visitor access charges is reinvested back into the area where it is collected to ensure long term sustainability of those sites.
30. WRC has legislative functions under the RMA and other legislation that sometimes result in carrying out activities on conservation land. These activities include natural hazard management and emergency response, flood protection and river management, as well as providing high quality, independent and timely environmental data for decision making on natural resources, biodiversity and biosecurity matters. WRC activities are primarily undertaken to prevent harm to people, property or the environment, are for the benefit of the public, and do not result in profit or commercial gain. We recommend DOC recognises the legislative functions of regional councils and allow an exemption of access charges for regional councils when undertaking their activities on conservation land. This would ensure the continuity of our activities without further burdens.

Clarity around upholding Takutai Moana rights

We recommend that implementation and role changes should occur in direct consultation with affected post-settlement governance entities and any governance entity named in legislation.

We recommend clearer terminology and explicit implementation steps for councils where Māori rights, customary marine title rights, or Treaty settlement redress may be affected and therefore affect council functions.

31. The Council supports the intent of the Bill to uphold customary marine title (CMT) rights, including recognising CMT planning documents in area plans and applying conservation permission requirements to pre-approved and exempt activities within CMT areas. Strengthening the Bill with clear referral and engagement steps for CMT groups would provide more certainty for regional councils when working in the coastal marine area. This would support councils' functions under the RMA by ensuring that iwi interests are clearly identified early, integrated into decision-making, and aligned across conservation and regional coastal planning processes, reducing the risk of conflicting requirements and improving coordinated management of coastal environments.

File No: 25 12 05
Document No: 36143006
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2 June 2026

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Dear Sir/Madam

Waikato Regional Council Submission to National Conservation Policy Statement Proposal Document

Thank you for the opportunity to submit on the proposal document for the content of the first National Conservation Policy Statement Proposal Document. Please find attached the Waikato Regional Council's (the Council's) submission regarding these documents. The submission was formally endorsed by the Council's Strategy and Policy Committee on **18 June 2026**.

Should you have any queries regarding the content of this document please contact Judy van Rossem, Specialist Policy Advisor, Policy Implementation directly on (07) 8590893 or by email judy.vanrossem@waikatoregion.govt.nz.

Regards,

Tracey May
Director Science, Policy and Information

HE TAIAO MAUIRORA HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT
HE ŌHANGA PAKARI STRONG ECONOMY
HE HAPORI HIHIRI VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

Submission from Waikato Regional Council on the National Conservation Policy Statement Proposal Document

Introduction

1. We appreciate the opportunity to make a submission on proposed content of the first National Conservation Policy Statement (NCPS), to support the Conservation Amendment Bill currently before the Select Committee.
2. Waikato Regional Council (WRC) has an interest in the NCPS, including proposed policies, area plan content and pre-approved and exempt activities, as it will affect the activities that we carry out on conservation land to meet our functions and obligations under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA). WRC currently holds concessions and permissions managed by the Department of Conservation (DOC) and relies on these contracts to undertake these activities.
3. WRC is providing feedback to DOC on the proposals for the first NCPS, and to the Select Committee on the Conservation Amendment Bill, through two separate submissions.
4. Overall, we see the Conservation Amendment Bill as a structural reset of DOC's planning system that broadly aligns with our integrated management approach. However, it creates some important risks and dependencies for WRC. Our focus within the submission is that our statutory functions can continue effectively.
5. We are pleased to see that feedback is being sought on the proposed content of the NCPS at the same time as the Bill is going through the Select Committee process, as this reduces delay between the legislation taking effect and the NCPS being finalised.
6. This submission has been prepared in the form of responses to the consultation questions in the proposal document.

Summary

7. In summary this feedback:
 - (a) Supports the proposed scope and content of area plans, and the intent for them to be more streamlined and shorter than current conservation management strategies.
 - (b) Recommends that an expert panel along with consultation as proposed in the Conservation Amendment Bill be established for each area plan to ensure that plan content is accurate and up to date.
 - (c) Recommends better assessing the relationship between area plans and regional spatial plans under the new resource management system.
 - (d) Recommends ensuring that the primary purpose of the visitor zones is to promote conservation and the protection of ecological and cultural values, and that recreation and development should only occur where they do not compromise any conservation values.
 - (e) Strongly recommends that the exemption framework be expanded to include such non-commercial, statutory council activities, while recognising that higher-impact works (e.g. flood protection structures) may still require case-by-case assessment due to their potential environmental effects.
 - (f) Recommends that section 25 (*Disapplication of pre-approved and exempt activities*) be simplified and clarified to explicitly state that where activities are "disapplied," they revert to requiring a concession and full assessment.
 - (g) Supports the inclusion of pre-approved activities for low-impact research and operational activities, such as drone use and the collection of soil, non-threatened flora, and non-protected

wildlife, where environmental effects are minimal and can be appropriately managed through standard conditions.

- (h) Recommends clarifying the terms “known” or “reasonably available information” and requiring a precautionary approach to assessment where information is incomplete, to ensure that ecological values are not unintentionally compromised.
 - (i) Supports the use of standard conditions for pre-approved activities but recommends that additional safeguards are needed to address site-specific risks. In particular, conditions should require a precautionary approach where ecological information is incomplete, rather than relying on “reasonably available” data.
 - (j) Recommends that exempt and pre-approved activities should not apply in areas where site-specific values are highly sensitive, vulnerable, or not well understood such as karst/cave systems or areas supporting threatened or at-risk species.
 - (k) Supports the list of activities proposed for standardised pre-assessment in Appendix 4.
 - (l) Recommends that statutory functions undertaken by regional councils on public conservation land be explicitly included within the list of activities subject to standardised pre-assessment if such activities cannot be fully exempt or pre-approved.
 - (m) Recommends that the policies under “Freshwater Fish” particularly sections 43 and 44 should reference the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management, and that alignment of the policies relating to other specific activities as described (such as sports fish and game birds) be checked against other current national policy instruments.
 - (n) Recommends that pest control for biodiversity outcomes by regional councils be explicitly provided for in the NCPS, with exempt or pre-approved activity classes for routine biosecurity work on public conservation land, to avoid unnecessary case-by-case concessions and enable timely, effective action.
 - (o) Recommends that regional council statutory activities specifically natural hazard management, flood protection, river management, and environmental monitoring be added to the Appendix 5 non-exhaustive list of exempt activities. These are critical public-good activities that should not require a district land use consent when undertaken on public conservation land.
 - (p) Recommends that land reclassification decisions should take important functions such as biodiversity, river health and flood protection into account to avoid creating downstream issues that councils must manage.
 - (q) Suggests that Tables 3 and 6 (Assessment of activities against land classifications) include an explanation as to how the “% of PCL” is determined.
8. We request to be involved in any future consultation processes in relation to conservation law reform and would welcome the opportunity to comment further on any issues explored during its development.

Submitter details

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Consultation question	WRC submission
Directing content of area plans	
<p>1. <i>Is there additional content that you believe should be included or removed within area plans?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We support the proposed scope and content of area plans, and the intent for them to be more streamlined and shorter than current conservation management strategies. The inclusion of sufficient information about the values, threats and pressures of a site, as well as relevant Treaty settlement information, upon which concession applications can be thoroughly assessed is an important consideration. • However, we are concerned that there is no intention to verify the natural and cultural values for each area to a level that will enable a robust assessment of the impacts of proposed activities. The extent that information is “reasonably available” is undefined. The level of information required to support assessments is unlikely to be able to simply be rolled over from an existing, out-of-date conservation management strategy (CMS)(for example, the Waikato CMS was completed in 2014). • We recommend that an expert panel along with consultation as proposed in the Conservation Amendment Bill be established for each area plan to ensure that plan content is accurate and up to date. • We recommend assessing how area plans will connect with the regional spatial plans under the new resource management system. Specifically, DOC’s Area Plans should provide clear spatial mapping of conservation values, identified natural hazards, and infrastructure corridors at a scale that can be directly exported and integrated into regional spatial plans. This will provide efficiencies, avoid ambiguities, support consistent cross boundary management and ensure the two systems are well integrated.
<p>2. <i>Do you have views on any transitional policies for area plans that should be considered?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We understand that new <i>Clause 11</i> in the Conservation Amendment Bill provides that existing CMS’s will remain in effect until replaced by area plans, and have no further views on transitional provisions.
Visitor zones	
<p>3. <i>Do you have any feedback on the proposed approach to developing visitor zones?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We consider that visitor zones could be developed as long as these are nested within the primary purpose of conservation land, and as a result any development enabled through these zones must complement the ecological and cultural values of the site. • We consider that if the visitor zones are not nested with conservation principles there is a risk of shifting the focus from conservation toward prioritising recreation and tourism, and this may increase development pressure on conservation land over time. • This shift in focus could have implications for regional council functions, including biodiversity protection, water quality management, natural hazard management, and integrated land and water planning. Increased development and

	<p>infrastructure in sensitive areas can create cumulative environmental effects that councils must later manage through the resource management system.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>If DOC decides to progress with visitor zones, we recommend</u> ensuring that the primary purpose of the visitor zones is to promote conservation and the protection of ecological and cultural values, and that recreation and development should only occur where they do not compromise any conservation values.
Exempt activities	
<p>4. <i>Do you have feedback on any of the activities proposed for exemption from requiring a permit, and should we consider any others?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We consider that the current list of exempt activities in the draft NCPS is too narrow and does not reflect the range of statutory functions regional councils are required to undertake on public conservation land. Activities such as installation and operation of equipment for state of the environment and natural hazard monitoring (including continuous water quality equipment, geothermal monitoring, river or lake level recording sites, telemetry installation and groundwater monitoring wells) are essential to delivering our functions under the RMA and other legislation, and are undertaken for public benefit rather than commercial gain. Requiring concessions for these activities can introduce unnecessary costs, delays, and uncertainty for work that is often time-sensitive and focused on preventing harm to people, property, and the environment. • We strongly recommend that the exemption framework be expanded to include such non-commercial, statutory council activities, while recognising that higher-impact works (e.g. flood protection structures) may still require case-by-case assessment due to their potential environmental effects.
<p>5. <i>Are there other conditions you think should be included or removed for these exempt activities?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We consider that the provisions relating to the “disapplication” of exempt and pre-approved activities are unclear and difficult to interpret. The use of the term “disapply” (a double negative) creates confusion about what is actually intended, particularly for applicants and decision-makers. While the explanation suggests that activities can still proceed through a standard concession process, this is not immediately clear from the language used. • We recommend that this section be simplified and clarified to explicitly state that where activities are “disapplied,” they revert to requiring a concession and full assessment. Clear, plain language and a more direct explanation of the process would improve understanding, transparency, and implementation.
Pre-approved activities	
<p>6. <i>Do you have feedback on any of the activities proposed for pre-approval, and should we consider any others?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We support the inclusion of pre-approved activities for low-impact research and operational activities, such as drone use and the collection of soil, non-threatened flora, and non-protected wildlife, where environmental effects are minimal and can be appropriately managed through standard conditions.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • However, we have concerns about the reliance on “known” or “reasonably available” information to assess effects. This term is unclear and risks important ecological values, including threatened species, being overlooked where data is limited or incomplete. In practice, this may mean activities proceed without full understanding of site-specific values, particularly in areas where ecological data gaps exist. • We also note that terms such as “moderate” or “significant” are not defined, which may lead to inconsistent interpretation and application. • We recommend clarifying these terms and requiring a precautionary approach to assessment where information is incomplete, to ensure that ecological values are not unintentionally compromised.
<p>7. Are there any other terms and conditions you think should be included or removed for these pre-approved activities?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We support the use of standard conditions for pre-approved activities but we recommend that additional safeguards are needed to address site-specific risks. In particular, conditions should require a precautionary approach where ecological information is incomplete, rather than relying on “reasonably available” data.
<p>Areas where pre-approved and exempt activities do not apply</p>	
<p>8. Are there areas where you believe exempt and pre-approved activities should not apply? Please describe the area(s) in detail and the significant adverse effects on natural, cultural, or historic values, and why adverse effects cannot be avoided or mitigated.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We recommend that exempt and pre-approved activities should not apply in areas where site-specific values are highly sensitive, vulnerable, or not well understood such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ karst/cave systems where disturbance may be irreversible and cannot be mitigated through restoration ○ areas supporting threatened or at-risk species including breeding, nesting or feeding sites – where even low impact activities could cause disturbance or cumulative effects.
<p>9. What costs and benefits do you see in not applying pre-approved and exempt activities in specified locations?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We consider that not applying pre-approved and exempt activities in specified locations has clear environmental benefits such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Helping to protect threatened species and sensitive environments, where even low-impact activities may have disproportionate effects ○ Improving alignment with regional council functions, including managing downstream impacts under the RMA (e.g. water quality and hazards). • Practical costs that need to be balanced include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing efficiency gains from pre-approval by requiring full concession processes, leading to increased time and cost for applicants and DOC

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could place additional resourcing pressure on DOC for processing and assessment. • Overall, we consider that the benefits of protecting high-value or sensitive areas outweigh the costs.
Activities with standardised pre-assessment	
10. Do you have feedback on any of the activities proposed for standardised pre assessment?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We support the list of activities proposed for standardised pre-assessment in Appendix 4.
11. Do you know of any other commonly undertaken activities on PCL which should be included in the list of activities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We consider that the range of statutory functions undertaken by regional councils on public conservation land should, in the first instance, be exempt or pre-approved where they are non-commercial and deliver clear public benefit. These activities - including environmental monitoring, telemetry, and state of the environment reporting as described previously - are essential to fulfilling statutory obligations and managing risks to people, property, and the environment. • If such activities cannot be fully exempt or pre-approved, we recommend that they be explicitly included within the list of activities subject to standardised pre-assessment, to ensure they can proceed efficiently while still allowing for appropriate consideration of site-specific environmental effects.
Policies for the management of specific activities	
12. Are there other management matters we should consider for one (or more) of these activities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We recommend that the policies under “Freshwater Fish” particularly sections 43 and 44 should reference the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management.
13. Is there additional feedback relating to these activities you wish to provide?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We recommend that alignment of the policies for the management of other specific activities (such as sports fish and game birds) be checked against other current national policy instruments.
14. Should any other activities be managed by the NCPS?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We recommend that the control of pests for biodiversity outcomes by regional councils be explicitly managed by the NCPS. Integrated pest control is a core regional function under the Biosecurity Act 1993 that intersects directly with our RMA obligations under the Waikato Regional Policy Statement to safeguard ecological integrity (Objective ECO-O1) and promote indigenous biodiversity outcomes (Policy ECO-P1). To support cohesive, landscape-scale biodiversity outcomes, the NCPS must provide the mechanism for immediate operational alignment for regional council biosecurity teams. Historically, central government processing delays and concession requirements have frequently hindered WRC’s operational efficacy under the Waikato Regional Pest Management Plan. We therefore recommend the NCPS explicitly establish 'exempt' or 'pre-approved' activity classes for routine regional council biosecurity and pest control duties on

	public conservation land. Removing the need for case-by-case concessions for these statutory, public-good activities will eliminate administrative friction and ensure rapid, effective interventions.
Exemption from district land use consents	
15. Are there other activities you think should be included in the non-exhaustive list (noting the activities must meet the requirements of the RMA section 4(3) exemption)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We recommend that regional council statutory activities, specifically natural hazard management, flood protection, river management, and environmental monitoring be added to the Appendix 5 non-exhaustive list of exempt activities. These are critical public-good activities that should not require a district land use consent when undertaken on public conservation land.
Policies for land reclassification	
16. Is there any feedback you wish to provide regarding these reclassification policies?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We support reviewing and reclassifying conservation land where needed, but we are concerned that this could enable more intensive use without fully considering the environmental impacts. Reclassification should require a clear assessment of ecological values, water quality, and natural hazard risks such as flooding and erosion. We consider that land with lower apparent value may still be important for biodiversity, river health, and flood protection. We recommend that reclassification decisions should take these functions into account to avoid creating downstream issues that councils must manage. It is unclear from Tables 3 and 6 (Assessment of activities against land classifications) as to how the “% of PCL” is determined, and we suggest that the commentary includes an explanation of how these figures were derived.

6.2 SUBMISSION ON THE HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCES AND NEW ORGANISMS AMENDMENT BILL

Rā Date:	21 May 2026
Kaituhi Author:	Naomi Crawford, Team Leader - Policy Implementation
Kaituku Authoriser:	Tracey May, Director, Science, Policy and Information
Mana whakatau Delegation Status:	Committee has delegated authority to make the recommended decision

TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. To seek approval on the content, and subsequent lodgement, of the Waikato Regional Council's (the Council's) submission on the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Amendment bill (the Bill) 2026.

KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. The Bill proposes a range of amendments to the hazardous substances and new organisms regulatory framework, including streamlined approval pathways for biosecurity responses, updated provisions relating to hazardous substance management, and enhanced notification and regulatory alignment mechanisms.
3. From a regional perspective, the Bill introduces changes that intersect directly with the council's functions under the Waikato Regional Policy Statement (WRPS) and Waikato Regional Plan (WRP), particularly in relation to biosecurity response, hazardous substances management, contaminated land, and integrated management across environmental media.
4. The proposed submission generally supports the intent of the Bill, particularly where amendments improve regulatory responsiveness, national consistency, and alignment with regional environmental management frameworks.
5. However, it seeks targeted refinements to ensure alignment with established regional planning frameworks and to maintain the effectiveness of locally delivered environmental management systems.
6. The close-off date for public submissions on the Bill has passed, but upon our request the Select Committee has agreed to accept a late submission from the Council so that it can be considered by this Committee. To register the Council's intent, staff lodged a brief "placeholder" submission prior to the deadline, which will be replaced by the final version endorsed by this Committee.

TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

1. That the report *Submission on the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Amendment Bill* (Strategy and Policy Committee, 18 June 2026) be received.
2. That the Strategy and Policy Committee:

- (a) Approves for lodgement the proposed Waikato Regional Council submission to the *Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Amendment Bill*; or
- (b) Delegates to Cr Ben Dunbar-Smith (the Chair) and the Director, Science, Policy and Information the approval for lodgement of the proposed Waikato Regional Council submission to the *Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Amendment Bill submission* subject to amendments identified in discussion had at the committee meeting.

HOROPAKI | BACKGROUND

7. The Bill introduces amendments to the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Act to improve regulatory efficiency, particularly in managing biosecurity responses and hazardous substances.
8. These changes are relevant to the council's statutory role in managing environmental effects of hazardous substances across air, land, and water, as provided for through the WRPS and WRP.
9. The Council also holds specific responsibilities under Te Ture Whaimana o Te Awa o Waikato (Vision and Strategy), which requires protection and restoration of the Waikato and Waipā River catchments and prevents further degradation from human activities.
10. The submission has been prepared to ensure that national changes appropriately recognise and align with these existing regional frameworks and obligations.

TE TAKE | ISSUE

11. The Bill introduces new EPA enforcement powers, including "step-in" provisions. While these aim to strengthen national oversight, there is a risk of duplication or misalignment where regional councils already perform established regulatory functions. The submission supports excluding regional councils from these powers to maintain clarity of roles and avoid undermining locally delivered enforcement functions.
12. The updated definition of "environmental medium" (air, water, soil, and surfaces) is supported, as it aligns with the integrated management approach embedded in the WRP and reflects the interconnected nature of environmental systems.
13. The Bill introduces notification requirements for local authorities; however, the absence of defined timeframes creates uncertainty for operational planning. The submission recommends that the EPA notify affected regional councils within a defined timeframe (e.g. within five working days) of applications where councils are likely to have an interest, to support integration with regional regulatory responsibilities.
14. The Bill enables rapid approval pathways for biosecurity responses during adverse events. This is strongly supported as it improves responsiveness and aligns with regional pest management obligations. However, formal notification within a defined timeframe (e.g. within five working days of adverse event approvals or risk species notifications) is required to ensure readiness and effective co-ordination of response activities.
15. The Bill introduces nationally standardised requirements for the storage and disposal of POPs, as well as more agile mechanisms for updating regulated substances. While increased

national consistency is supported, there is a risk that national provisions could override or dilute more stringent regional plan controls and limit the ability of councils to give effect to local environmental management objectives where higher levels of protection are required. The submission seeks clarification that regional councils can retain stricter controls where justified by local conditions.

16. The Bill introduces approval requirements for transshipment of hazardous substances through New Zealand. This is supported, particularly given the Waikato Region's role as a key freight corridor. However, effective implementation depends on ensuring regional councils receive timely notification and sufficient information. The submission therefore recommends that the Bill require the EPA to notify affected regional councils of transshipment approvals to support emergency response planning and regional risk management.
17. Key matters raised in the submission include:
 - (a) Support for rapid emergency approval pathways for biosecurity responses, subject to defined and timely notification requirements for all relevant local authorities, including regional councils.
 - (b) Support for clearer national direction on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), provided it does not override or dilute more stringent regional controls required to protect vulnerable environments (including vulnerable aquifers and contaminated land sites).
 - (c) Support for formalisation of transshipment approvals with explicit notification obligations to regional councils to support emergency management and regional risk planning.
 - (d) Support for an updated definition of "environmental medium" to reflect integrated resource management and alignment between national and regional regulatory frameworks.
 - (e) Support for excluding regional councils from the Environmental Protection Authority's (EPA) proposed "step-in" enforcement powers to maintain clarity of roles and avoid duplication or misalignment with established regional functions.

TE WHAKAMAURU – TE WHAKAHEKE I NGĀ PĀNGA KI TE ĀHUARANGI | MITIGATION – REDUCING IMPACTS ON THE CLIMATE

18. This decision will have no direct impact on the Council's ability to respond to climate change. However, effective hazardous substances management contributes indirectly to environmental resilience.

TE AROMATAWAI I TE HIRANGA | ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

19. Having regard to the decision-making provisions of the Local Government Act 2002 and the council's Significance and Engagement Policy, this matter is not considered to have a high degree of significance.

TE HOROPAKI Ā-TURE | LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

20. To the best of the writer's knowledge, this decision is not significantly inconsistent with, nor is anticipated to have consequences that will be significantly inconsistent with any policy adopted by council or any plan required by the LGA or any other enactment.

TE TIRITI O WAITANGI | THE TREATY OF WAITANGI

21. The decision sought is in alignment with the Local Government Act 2002 obligations to respect the Crown's responsibility to take appropriate account of the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi and to maintain and improve opportunities for Māori to contribute to local government decision-making processes.

WHAKAKAPINGA | CONCLUSION

22. The Council's submission supports the overall intent of the Bill to improve regulatory efficiency and responsiveness, particularly in relation to biosecurity and hazardous substances management.
23. The submission seeks targeted amendments to ensure clarity of roles between central and regional government, alignment with regional planning frameworks, defined notification timeframes (including expectation of notification within five working days), to support effective operational planning and integration with regional regulatory systems. To retain more stringent region-specific environmental protections where required by local conditions, as uncertainty in these areas has the potential to undermine effective regional environmental management.

NGĀ TOHUTORO | REFERENCES

24. [Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Amendment Bill | New Zealand Legislation](#)

ĀPITI HANGA | ATTACHMENTS

1. **Waikato Regional Council Submission on the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Amendment Bill – (Doc # 36027291)** [↓](#)

File No: 25 12 05
Document No: 36027291
Enquiries to: Naomi Crawford

15 June 2026

Committee Secretariat
Primary Production Committee
Parliament Buildings
Wellington 6140



Email: pp.legislation@parliament.govt.nz

Tēnā koutou katoa,

Waikato Regional Council Submission on the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Amendment Bill

Thank you for the opportunity to submit on the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Amendment Bill. Please find attached the Waikato Regional Council's (the Council's) submission.

Should you have any queries regarding the content of this document please contact Naomi Crawford, Team Leader, Policy Implementation directly on (07) 8584637 or by email naomi.crawford@waikatoregion.govt.nz.

Ngā mihi nui,

Tracey May
Director Science, Policy and Information

Submission from Waikato Regional Council on the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Amendment Bill

Introduction

1. We appreciate the opportunity to make a submission on the **Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Amendment Bill**.
2. From a regional planning perspective, this Bill introduces pivotal changes to biosecurity tools and toxic substance management that directly intersect with the Council's functions under the Waikato Regional Policy Statement (WRPS) and the Waikato Regional Plan (WRP).
3. The Council has unique Treaty Settlement responsibilities, primarily Te Ture Whaimana o Te Awa o Waikato (Vision and Strategy), which is the primary direction-setting document for the Waikato and Waipā River catchments. Te Ture Whaimana requires the restoration and protection of the health and wellbeing of the river system, which must not be required to absorb further degradation from human activities.
4. The Council generally supports the intent of the Bill to streamline approval pathways, but seeks specific refinements to ensure operational alignment with regional environmental management.
5. In summary, the Council's submission:
 - a) Supports the establishing of rapid emergency approval pathways for biosecurity responses while seeking defined and timely notification requirements for all local authority interest areas.
 - b) Supports clearer national direction on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) storage and disposal, provided it does not override stringent regional rules protecting vulnerable aquifers.
 - c) Supports formalising transshipment approvals with appropriate notification to regional councils to manage regional transport risks.
 - d) Supports the updated definition of "environmental medium" to align with integrated management principles.
 - e) Supports the explicit exclusion of regional councils from the Environmental Protection Authority's (EPA) new "step-in" enforcement powers.
6. The Council does not wish to be heard at this time in support of its written submission to the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Amendment Bill. The Council appreciates the opportunity to provide these written comments and trusts that the feedback provided will assist the Select Committee in its consideration of the Bill.

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Support for EPA "Step-in" exclusions

The Council supports the exclusion of regional councils from the Environmental Protection Authority's (EPA) proposed "step-in" enforcement powers under clause 142 of the Bill (which inserts new section 99A(5)). **The Council supports** how this provision recognises the existing statutory roles of regional councils in managing the environmental effects of hazardous substances, which ensures that locally delivered enforcement functions are not unnecessarily displaced by central government intervention.

7. Within the Waikato region, the management of hazardous substances and associated environmental effects is clearly provided for through the Waikato Regional Policy Statement (WRPS) and the Waikato Regional Plan (WRP). In particular, implementation methods IM-M21 (Hazardous substances) and IM-M22 (Natural hazards) of the WRPS, alongside the established regulatory framework within the WRP, delineate the Council's responsibilities for managing discharges to air, land, and water, including within the coastal marine area and riverbeds. These provisions reflect a regionally tailored approach that responds to local environmental conditions and risks.
8. Notwithstanding this, the Council considers it important that the integrity of these established regional roles is maintained as the national regulatory framework evolves. The introduction of centralised enforcement powers, if applied to regional council functions, could create duplication, uncertainty, or misalignment between national and regional regulatory regimes, particularly in areas where councils have well-established expertise and operational systems.
9. Accordingly, the Council considers the "step-in" approach necessary to maintain clarity of roles and responsibilities. Retaining regional enforcement functions ensures continued alignment with the WRPS and WRP, and supports effective, locally responsive management of hazardous substance effects within the Waikato Region.

Updated definition of 'environmental medium'

The Council supports the inclusion of an updated definition of "environmental medium" under clause 126 of the Bill (which inserts an updated definition into section 77B), which provides for air, water, soil, and surfaces.

10. The definition promotes alignment between national and regional regulatory regimes and aligns with the integrated resource management approach embedded within the WRP, which recognises the interconnected nature of environmental systems and the movement of contaminants across different media. The WRP was intentionally developed as a single, resource-based plan to manage these interactions holistically, avoiding artificial delineation between air, land, and water.
11. The updated definition provides important consistency between the national legislative framework and the regionally implemented planning framework, supporting coherent and effective management of hazardous substances and their environmental effects.

Broadening notification timeframes (clause 85 of the Bill (which inserts new section 53B))

The Council recommends that the Bill be amended to require the EPA to notify affected regional councils within a defined timeframe, such as within five working days of an application being received.

12. The Council acknowledges the notification requirements under clause 85 of the Bill (which inserts new section 53B) of the Bill, which require the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) to notify local authorities where they are likely to have an interest in Part 5 applications. The Council supports

this provision, as it recognises the integrated nature of resource management and the role of regional councils in managing the environmental effects of hazardous substances across multiple environmental media.

13. Establishing a clear notification timeframe will provide greater planning certainty and support effective integration between national decision-making processes and regional regulatory responsibilities. The Council considers that the current provision would benefit from greater certainty regarding the timing of notifications. Without a specified timeframe, there is a risk that local authorities may not receive information in a timeframe that enables appropriate operational planning and response.

Streamlining regional pest management and ecological integrity

The Council recommends the Bill be amended to require that the EPA formally notify affected regional councils within five working days of an 'adverse event' approval being granted or a 'risk species' notice being issued. While the Bill proposes a necessary high-level notification loop, establishing this specific timeframe provides essential response readiness and allows for the necessary rapid alignment with regional biosecurity response protocols.

14. The Council supports the rapid emergency approval pathways established in the Bill for biological control tools and chemical treatments during a declared biosecurity 'adverse event' (under clauses 68 and 70 of the Bill, which update sections 46 and 48 of the HSNO Act 1996). Historically, central government processing delays have frequently hindered operational efficacy under the Waikato Regional Pest Management Plan. Accordingly, this alignment is strongly supported as it aligns with Objective ECO-O1 (Ecological integrity and indigenous biodiversity) and Policy ECO-P1 of the WRPS, which require the Council to promote positive biodiversity outcomes and safeguard the continued functioning of ecological processes.
15. Additionally, the Council acknowledges the introduction of an expedited notice system for designating 'risk species' under Part 5A. We recognise that clause 114 of the Bill (which inserts new section 73G(1)(a)(iii)) includes a requirement for the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) to notify local authorities likely to have an interest before making a decision. However, we seek greater operational certainty to ensure rapid immediate alignment for regional biosecurity teams following such declarations.

Safeguarding contaminated land baselines

The Council recommends that the Authority clarify that national requirements relating to the storage and disposal of POPs, and the scope of substances captured through Schedule 2A, do not override or dilute more stringent regional plan provisions where these are necessary to give effect to local environmental management objectives and to manage region-specific risks.

16. While the Council supports greater national consistency in the management of POPs and the ability to respond more quickly to newly identified contaminants, it is important that the national framework does not limit the ability of regional councils to apply more stringent controls where justified by local environmental conditions. This is particularly relevant in areas with vulnerable aquifers, regionally significant water bodies, or sites affected by legacy contamination, where a higher level of protection may be required.
17. Within the Waikato context, matters relevant to this subject are addressed through Chapters 5.2 (Discharges onto or into land) and 5.3 (Contaminated Land) of the WRP. These provisions establish

regionally specific consenting thresholds and controls to manage risks associated with chemical contaminants, including legacy contamination and potential impacts on soil, groundwater, and surface water. The WRP also provides the framework for identifying and managing known contaminated sites within the region, including those where historical use of hazardous substances continues to pose ongoing risks.

18. The proposed national provisions are broadly consistent with the objective of achieving improved environmental outcomes. The ability to update POPs lists more efficiently is particularly beneficial, as it supports a more responsive regulatory system that can better address emerging risks to soil and water quality. However, the introduction of nationally standardised requirements raises questions as to how these will interact with existing regional plan provisions, particularly where local conditions necessitate more stringent controls to address sensitive environments.

Regional transport risks and transshipment

The Council supports the inclusion of transshipment approval requirements under clause 51 of the Bill, which require persons to obtain approval prior to transshipping a hazardous substance or new organism through New Zealand. This provision introduces an additional safeguard over the movement of high-risk materials and is particularly relevant to regions with significant freight movement and logistics activity.

The Council recommends that the Bill be amended to require the EPA to notify affected regional councils where transshipment approvals are granted, including sufficient information to support regional emergency management and response planning. Establishing a clear notification requirement will help ensure alignment between national regulatory processes and regional operational responsibilities.

19. The Waikato Region functions as a key freight movement node within the Upper North Island, with substantial volumes of hazardous substances transported through the region via the North Island Main Trunk rail corridor and major state highways. Given this context, the Council recognises the importance of ensuring that transshipment activities are appropriately regulated and supported by clear national direction.
20. The Council considers that the effectiveness of the transshipment approval regime will depend on the extent to which regional authorities are provided with timely and relevant information to support emergency response planning and situation awareness, particularly where hazardous substances are being transported through the region but may not originate or be destined for it.

6.3 SUBMISSION ON THE REVIEW OF MEASURES FOR SHORE-BASED HARVESTING IN THE AUCKLAND COROMANDEL AREA

Rā Date:	28 May 2026
Kaituhi Author:	JP Silva, Senior Policy Advisor
Kaituku Authoriser:	Tracey May, Director, Science, Policy and Information
Mana whakatau Delegation Status:	Committee has delegated authority to make the recommended decision

TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. To seek approval of the content, and subsequent lodgement, of the Waikato Regional Council's submission on the review of measures for shore-based shellfish harvesting in the Auckland Coromandel area.

KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. Fisheries New Zealand (FNZ) is reviewing the rules for recreational harvesting of shellfish and other invertebrates in the Auckland Coromandel area. The consultation responds to ongoing concerns about the sustainability of intertidal shellfish and other fisheries resources in the area. It proposes intertidal closures (from the high-tide mark to 200 m offshore along the coastline of the Auckland Coromandel mainland and around Waiheke Island) and changes to the recreational daily limits for shellfish. Covering intertidal habitats as well as some shallow subtidal habitats.
3. FNZ is proposing four options for the intertidal closures and staff have prepared a draft submission in support of option 4 - a partial intertidal closure plus, outside of the intertidal closure area, a combined recreational daily limit of ten shellfish for any species without its own recreational daily limit. In addition, the key issues identified with the proposal include the need for greater clarity in how intertidal closure boundaries will apply (particularly in estuarine environments), potential displacement of harvesting effort to other areas, and the need for robust monitoring, education, and engagement to support implementation. These issues are also addressed in the draft submission.
4. Staff consider Option 4 provides the most appropriate balance between improving sustainability outcomes and maintaining access for recreational and customary harvesting, while targeting areas under the greatest pressure. Overall, Option 4 is considered a practical and proportionate response that aligns with FNZ's preferred approach, while allowing for adaptive management as further monitoring information becomes available.
5. Submissions close on 12 June, however FNZ granted WRC an extension until 19 June so that this Committee could consider the submission. Submissions will inform advice to the Minister on the proposed options and any wider education and monitoring initiatives to support implementation. Under section 11 of the Fisheries Act 1996, the Minister may implement a range of measures, including intertidal area closures that restrict take of all or

select species for the purpose of ensuring sustainability. These sustainability measures can be implemented by Notice in the Gazette or through regulations.

TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

1. That the report *Submission on the review of measures for shore-based harvesting in the Auckland Coromandel area* (Strategy and Policy Committee, 18 June 2026) be received.
2. That the Strategy and Policy Committee:
 - (a) Approves for lodgement the proposed Waikato Regional Council submission on the review of measures for shore-based shellfish harvesting in the Auckland Coromandel area; or
 - (b) Delegates to Cr Dunbar-Smith (the Chair) and the Director Science, Policy and Information the approval for lodgement of the proposed Waikato Regional Council submission on the review of measures for shore-based shellfish harvesting in the Auckland Coromandel area subject to amendments identified in discussion had at the committee meeting.

HOROPAKI | BACKGROUND

6. FNZ is reviewing the rules for recreational harvesting of shellfish and other invertebrates in the Auckland Coromandel area. This area is defined in the Fisheries (Amateur Fishing) Regulations 2013 and includes beaches on the east and west coasts as per the picture below:

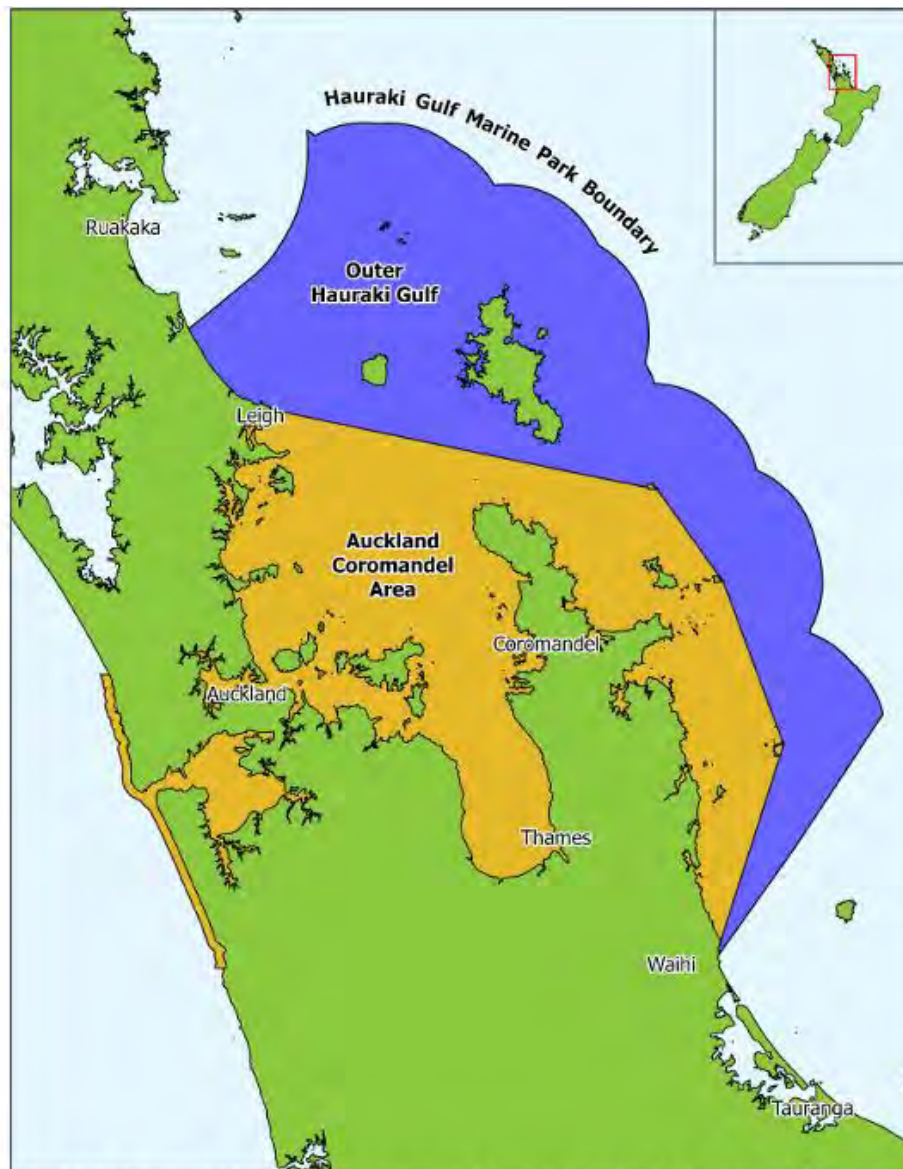


Figure 1. The Auckland Coromandel area (orange) extends from Leigh to Waihi in the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park (blue) and includes a portion of the Auckland west coast from Muriwai Beach¹ to Port Waikato.

7. The intertidal zone includes rocky reef and soft substrate (i.e. mud and sand) habitats that are exposed to air and submerged by water at different phases of the tide as well as rock pools. A diverse range of animals and plants are found within intertidal habitats, including mussels, crabs, barnacles, worms, limpets, anemones, whelks, periwinkles and seaweeds. Subtidal areas are located below the low tide mark and are submerged underwater at all times. There are important biological connections between the intertidal and subtidal areas.
8. Intertidal habitats are highly dynamic. Throughout the tidal cycle, marine life are exposed to air and water and encounter various stressors at different times of the day (e.g., ultraviolet radiation, heat stress, wave action, and significant fluctuations in oxygen and salinity). Rock pools provide a refuge for some species during low tide but these species assemblages can face unique stressors due to crowding, heat, rainfall and stagnated flow. These factors can make intertidal species more vulnerable to human pressures including pollution, harvesting, sedimentation and climate change.
9. In October 2025, FNZ received a request from the Ngāti Manuhiri Settlement Trust for a temporary closure under section 186A of the Act to prohibit take of all marine invertebrate

and seaweed species from a large stretch of coastline on the east coast of Auckland. Following consultation, in February 2026, the Minister decided to implement a 2-year closure of fisheries waters at Ōmaha Bay, Kawau Bay and Whangaparāoa Peninsula. The closure is in addition to existing section 186A closures applying to shellfish in other parts of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park.

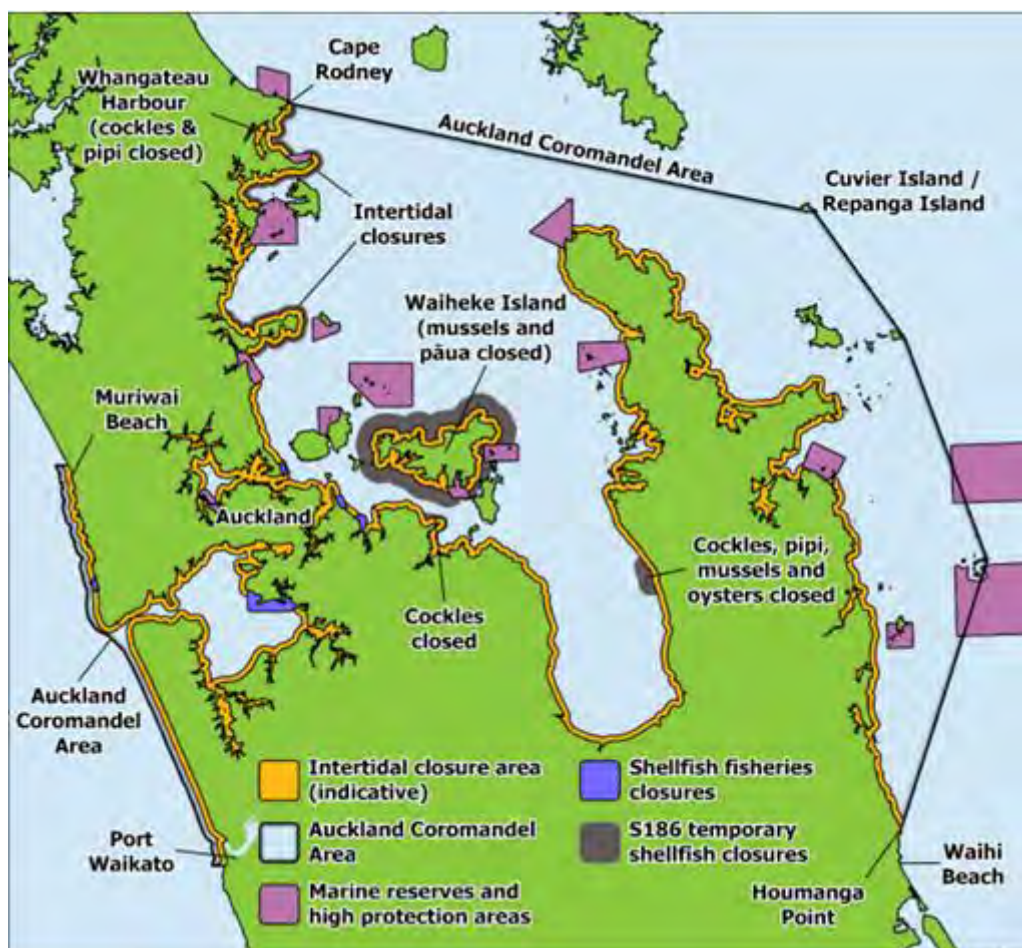
10. In 2025, FNZ commenced a review of recreational measures applying to shellfish in the Auckland Coromandel area as part of the actions within the Hauraki Gulf Fisheries Plan 2023. The consultation on the wider shellfish review was scheduled to follow the Minister's decision on the Trust's section 186A application and provides an opportunity to support sustainable management of intertidal fisheries resources at a regional scale.

TE TAKE | ISSUE

11. While this consultation concerns potential changes to fisheries management rules under the Fisheries Act 1996 (FA), the Council has a role under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA), relevant to this consultation, including achieving integrated management of the natural resources in the region, and the maintenance and enhancement of ecosystems in coastal water. Accordingly, the policy direction under the Waikato Regional Policy Statement (WRPS) provides for the full range of ecosystem types, their extent and the indigenous biodiversity that those ecosystems can support existing in a healthy and functional state. The proposed measures are proposed to be implemented under section 11 of the FA as sustainability measures, and do not override or replace regional council functions under the RMA.
12. Shellfish and other marine invertebrates are an important part of coastal ecosystems. They are also a valuable source of food, and intertidal shellfish harvesting supports the social and cultural wellbeing of tāngata whenua, local communities and visitors to the Auckland Coromandel area.
13. Tāngata whenua and local communities have expressed ongoing concerns about the sustainability of intertidal shellfish in the Auckland Coromandel area and in recent months, FNZ has received increased reports of intensive harvesting of marine life from the intertidal rocky shore and rock pools.
14. Intertidal shellfish fulfil an important role in the marine food chain and as a component of coastal biodiversity, and their removal from an area can impact a range of birds and fish that rely on shellfish as a food source. The excessive removal of these species, as result of changing harvesting practices, can lead to changes in the abundance and distribution of other species through competition and other behavioural changes.
15. Currently, shellfish recreational daily limits and site-specific measures are used to manage shore-based harvesting in the Auckland Coromandel area. Many of the shellfish species being taken by recreational fishers from the rocky shore, such as limpets, cat's eyes, and whelks, fall within a general combined daily limit of 50 shellfish per person. Anecdotal information suggests a broader range of invertebrates (e.g. sea anemones and sponges) are also being taken from intertidal habitats. These species are not subject to recreational daily limits and harvesters can legally take unlimited amounts each day.
16. Recreational harvesting and its impact is often concentrated in certain 'hot spots'. This can lead to localised depletion in discrete areas. As fisheries resources in these areas become

less abundant there is a risk that displacement to new sections of coast will result in serial depletion effects over time.

17. The discussion document also raises the issue of potential risk of displacement. Partial closures can sometimes result in the displacement (movement) of fishing effort to other locations where fishing is still allowed. Many intertidal species rely on interactions with adjacent waters for reproduction and survival. A 200 m seaward limit would capture a larger area than the intertidal zone in certain places and mitigate some of the risks associated with displacement of effort toward shallow subtidal habitats that are easily accessed from shore. FNZ is proposing to address any residual risks by setting a reduced combined daily limit of 10 shellfish for species without defined daily limits in these areas (Option 3 or Option 4). However, staff noted that there could also be displacement to other locations.
18. To address potential sustainability risks associated with shore-based harvesting activities, FNZ is seeking views on proposed options for intertidal area closures and changes to the daily limits for certain shellfish species in the Auckland Coromandel area. The proposed intertidal area closure is highlighted in the picture below:



19. Currently recreational daily limits apply to 11 named species of shellfish in the Auckland Coromandel area, including bivalves (i.e., cockles, pipi, mussels, tuatua, scallops, oysters), rock lobsters (i.e. packhorse and spiny), kina and pāua (a full list of species limits is provided in Table 2 below). Toheroa take is prohibited. "Any other" shellfish species without its own daily limit is subject to a combined recreational daily limit of 50 shellfish per person. This general limit applies in most fisheries management areas around the country. The table

below shows the scope of recreational measures under the status quo daily limits which apply to most of the Auckland Coromandel area.

Intertidal areas (i.e. from the mean high-water mark to 200 m offshore)	
Fishers can take	Fishers cannot take
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any shellfish within existing daily limits (Table 2) “Any other” shellfish without species-specific daily limits, including periwinkles, chitons, limpets, whelks, sea cucumbers, squid, octopus, within the existing combined daily limit of 50 per person Any other invertebrates (e.g., worms, sponges, sea anemones, and sea squirts) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Toheroa
Other areas (seaward of the 200 m limit in the wider Auckland Coromandel area)	
Fishers can take	Fishers cannot take
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any shellfish within existing daily limits (Table 2) “Any other” shellfish without species-specific daily limits, including periwinkles, chitons, limpets, whelks, sea cucumbers, squid, octopus, within the existing combined daily limit of 50 per person Any other invertebrates (e.g., worms, sponges, sea anemones, and sea squirts) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Toheroa

NGĀ KŌWHIRINGA | OPTIONS AND ANALYSIS

- FNZ is seeking submissions on four proposed options for intertidal area closures and changes to the recreational daily limits for certain shellfish species in the Auckland Coromandel area. The table below provides a summary of the proposed options:

Proposed intertidal closure area	
<p>Option 1: Full intertidal closure</p>	<p>This option would prohibit recreational take of shellfish and other invertebrates from the defined intertidal closure area.</p> <p>This is a highly restrictive option that would prohibit recreational take of a range of valued shellfish species including spiny and packhorse rock lobsters, pāua, scallops, and squid.</p> <p>The existing combined ‘any other’ daily limit of 50 shellfish, as well as the species-specific recreational shellfish limits, would continue to apply outside the intertidal closure area.</p>
<p>Option 2: Partial intertidal closure (with exceptions)</p>	<p>This option would prohibit recreational take of shellfish and other invertebrates from the defined intertidal closure area.</p> <p>However, exceptions would allow the harvest of named shellfish species within recreational daily limits. The named species are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bivalves (i.e. cockles (50), pipi (50), pacific or rock oysters (100), dredge oysters (50), scallops (20), and tuatua (50)) • Crabs (10*) • Kina (150 east coast and 50 west coast) • Octopus (1*) • Blackfoot pāua (10) and yellow-foot pāua (10) • Sea cucumbers (5*) • Shrimps (20*) • Spiny (3) and packhorse rock lobsters (3) • Squid (5*) <p>The recreational shellfish daily limits will include existing limits for some species (shown in brackets above) and new limits for other species shown with a * (i.e. crabs, octopus, sea cucumbers, shrimps, and squid).</p> <p>The existing combined ‘any other’ daily limit of 50 shellfish, as well as the species-specific recreational shellfish limits would apply outside the intertidal closure area.</p>
Proposed intertidal closure area + new combined recreational daily limit of ten shellfish	
<p>Option 3: Full intertidal closure + new combined daily limit</p>	<p>This option is a full intertidal closure (Option 1) plus, outside of the intertidal closure area, a combined recreational daily limit of ten shellfish for any species without its own recreational daily limit, in the Auckland Coromandel area.</p> <p>The ten shellfish limit would apply to a broad range of species (e.g. barnacles, crabs, limpets, octopus, periwinkles, sea cucumbers, shrimps and squid). It would not apply to species that have their own recreational daily limit (e.g., cockles, pipi, tuatua, spiny and packhorse rock lobsters).</p>
<p>Option 4: Partial intertidal closure + new combined daily limit</p>	<p>This option is a partial intertidal closure (Option 2) plus, outside of the intertidal closure area, a combined recreational daily limit of ten shellfish for any species without its own recreational daily limit, in the Auckland Coromandel area.</p> <p>The ten shellfish limit would apply to a narrower range of species (e.g. barnacles, limpets, periwinkles). It would not apply to species that have their own recreational daily limit (e.g. cockles, pipi, tuatua, spiny and packhorse rock lobsters and (as proposed) crabs, octopus, sea cucumbers, shrimps and squid).</p>

21. The intent of the proposed options is to mitigate impacts of high harvest pressure and a broadening of recreational effort toward shellfish and other marine invertebrates that are easily accessed from shore.
22. Of all the options, staff consider that Option 4 provides the most appropriate balance between improving sustainability outcomes and maintaining access for recreational and

customary harvesting, while targeting areas under greatest pressure. It achieves key objectives, such as manging taxa like octopus, which have key ecological functions while still allowing harvesting of more abundant species like kina. This approach better balances protection and use than either the status quo or a full blanket intertidal closure.

23. Further, we consider that option 4 retains ability to harvest popular named species with species-specific daily limits from a defined closed area and introduces additional species-specific daily limits. Additionally, it reduces combined daily limit from 50 to 10 per person for all other species outside the intertidal closure area, thus reducing risks to shellfish populations in more remote and inaccessible areas. Option 4 is also the preferred option for FNZ and for our colleagues at Auckland Council (this position can change depending on feedback from their Council)

THE SUBMISSION

24. Considering the reasons listed above, the draft submission supports option 4, However we note that we see option 4 as a workable starting point and we consider that ongoing monitoring will be essential to fully understand if option 4 will be sufficient to manage the current issue across the whole intertidal closure area. Accordingly, we recommend FNZ to treat this as an evolving issue and providing avenues for sustainability measures that could fine tune any future response needed.
25. The draft submission also addresses some issues identified with the proposal including the need for greater clarity in how intertidal closure boundaries will apply (particularly in estuarine environments), potential displacement of harvesting effort to other areas, and the need for robust monitoring, education, and engagement to support implementation.
26. In summary, the draft submission:
 - a) Supports reviewing the rules for recreational harvesting of shellfish and other invertebrates in the Auckland Coromandel area with a preference for Option 4.
 - b) Highlights examples of current and historical concerns relevant to this proposal in the Coromandel area.
 - c) Supports wider initiatives such as educational campaigns as well as scientific and community monitoring.
 - d) Answers some of the optional questions posed by the discussion document.

TE AROMATAWAI I TE HIRANGA | ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

27. Having regard to the decision-making provisions in the LGA and the Council's Significance and Engagement Policy, a decision to approve the submission in accordance with the recommendations is not considered to have a high degree of significance. Staff are of the opinion that the content and recommendations in this report are consistent with the decision-making requirements contained in Part Six of the LGA and that the decision-making requirements of the LGA have been met.

TE HOROPAKI Ā-TURE | LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

28. Under section 11 of the Fisheries Act 1996, the Minister may implement a range of measures, including intertidal area closures that restrict take of all or select species, for the purpose of ensuring sustainability.

29. Recreational daily limits are set in accordance with the Fisheries (Amateur Fishing) Regulations 2013. The Regulations empower the Minister to set or vary recreational daily limits for shellfish by issuing a separate instrument. In practice, the recreational daily limits for shellfish are set in the Fisheries (Recreational Management Controls) Notice.
30. WRC functions under Section 30 of the Resource Management Act 1991 include achieving integrated management of the natural resources in the region and the maintenance and enhancement of ecosystems in coastal water. Objective ECO-01 of the Waikato Regional Policy Statement (WRPS) provides for the full range of ecosystem types, their extent and the indigenous biodiversity that those ecosystems can support exist in a healthy and functional state.
31. Additionally, objective CE-CMA-02 recognise and provide for the mauri and health of marine waters, including by harvesting of aquatic food species and mahinga kai that is safe to eat. While objective IM-07 of the WRPS provides for the relationship of tangata whenua with the environment, including providing for the use and enjoyment of natural and physical resources in accordance with tikanga Māori and mātauranga Māori.

NGĀ WHAIWHAKAARO KAUPAPAHERE | POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

32. To the best of the writer's knowledge, this decision is not significantly inconsistent with, nor is anticipated to have consequences that will be significantly inconsistent with any policy adopted by Council or any plan required by the LGA or any other enactment.

TE TIRITI O WAITANGI | THE TREATY OF WAITANGI

33. The draft submission supports having a strong implementation framework that includes ongoing iwi and hapū participation and recommends FNZ to continue engagement with affected iwi and hapū, including those connected to areas that may experience displacement effects of intertidal shellfish harvesting.

WHAKAKAPINGA | CONCLUSION

34. The Committee are being asked to endorse the submission on the proposal, subject to any necessary amendments. The submission will then be lodged by the due date (19 June).

ĀPITIHINGA | ATTACHMENTS

1. **Waikato Regional Council's submission on the review of measures for Shore-based shellfish harvesting in the Auckland Coromandel Area – (Doc # 36048759) [↓](#)**
2. **Discussion document - Review of measures for shore-based shellfish harvesting in the Auckland Coromandel area – (Doc # 35921815) [↓](#)**

File No: 25 12 05
Document No: 36048759
Enquiries to: Joao Paulo Silva



19 June 2026

Fisheries New Zealand
PO Box 2526
Wellington 6140
New Zealand

Email: FMSubmissions@mpi.govt.nz

Dear Sir/Madam

Waikato Regional Council Submission on the review of measures for shore-based shellfish harvesting in the Auckland Coromandel area

Thank you for the opportunity to submit on the review of measures for shore-based shellfish harvesting in the Auckland Coromandel area. Please find attached the Waikato Regional Council's (the Council's) submission, formally endorsed by the Council's Strategy and Policy Committee on **18 June 2026**.

Should you have any queries regarding the content of this document please contact Joao Paulo Silva, Senior Policy Advisor, Policy Implementation directly on (07) 794 97179 or by email joaopaulo.silva@waikatoregion.govt.nz.

Regards,

Tracey May
Director Science, Policy and Information

HE TAIAO MAUIRORA HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT
HE ŌHANGA PAKARI STRONG ECONOMY
HE HAPORI HIHIRI VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

Submission from Waikato Regional Council on the review of measures for shore-based shellfish harvesting in the Auckland Coromandel area

Introduction

1. We appreciate the opportunity to make a submission on the review of measures for shore-based shellfish harvesting in the Auckland Coromandel area.
2. The Waikato Regional Council (the Council) core functions¹ relevant to this consultation include achieving integrated management of the natural resources in the region, and the maintenance and enhancement of ecosystems in coastal water. Accordingly, the policy direction under the Waikato Regional Policy Statement (WRPS) provides for the full range of ecosystem types, their extent and the indigenous biodiversity that those ecosystems can support existing in a healthy and functional state (Objective ECO-01).
3. The Council supports reviewing the rules for recreational harvesting in the Auckland Coromandel area. We agree that shellfish and other marine invertebrates are an important part of coastal ecosystems and a key source of kaimoana. Additionally, intertidal shellfish fulfil an important role in the marine food chain and as a component of coastal biodiversity, and their removal from an area can create a risk for other ecosystems such as birds and fish that rely on shellfish as a food source. We consider it essential to appropriately manage these activities to ensure that the intertidal ecosystems are better managed and enhanced.
4. We welcome the opportunity to comment on the following stages of developing rules for managing recreational harvesting of shellfish and other invertebrates in the Auckland Coromandel area. Additionally, if the opportunity arises, the Council wishes to be heard in support to this submission.

Summary

5. In summary, this submission:
 - a. Supports reviewing the rules for recreational harvesting of shellfish and other invertebrates in the Auckland Coromandel area with a preference for Option 4.
 - b. Highlights examples of current and historical concerns relevant to this proposal in the Coromandel area.
 - c. Supports wider initiatives such as educational campaigns as well as scientific and community monitoring.
 - d. Answers some of the optional questions posed by the discussion document in the table below.

Management options – Support for Option 4

The Council supports Option 4 – a partial intertidal closure plus a combined daily limit of 10 shellfish for any other species.

6. We consider that there is sufficient understanding across the Gulf that a reduction in the recreational daily limit will be of benefit for the shellfish populations with consequential benefits for the intertidal and some subtidal ecosystems. Therefore, **we support option 4**, as it provides a balanced and targeted approach by managing unsustainable recreational take and associated ecosystem depletion, while still providing for use and cultural practices. It achieves key objectives, such as managing taxa like octopus, which have key ecological functions while still allowing harvesting of more abundant species like kina. This approach better balances protection and use than either the status quo or a full blanket closure.
7. Further, we consider that option 4 retains ability to harvest popular named species with species-specific daily limits from a defined closed area and introduces additional species-specific daily limits.

¹ As listed in Section 30 of the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA).

Additionally, it reduces combined daily limit from 50 to 10 per person for all other species outside the intertidal closure area, thus reducing risks to shellfish populations in more remote and inaccessible areas.

8. Nevertheless, we consider that ongoing monitoring will be essential to fully understand if option 4 will be sufficient to manage the current issue across the whole intertidal closure area.
9. Accordingly, **we recommend Fisheries New Zealand (FNZ)** treats this as an evolving issue and provides mechanisms to refine future responses. **We also support** having a strong implementation framework that includes ongoing iwi and hapū participation, clear public education as well as scientific and community monitoring, including displacement monitoring, all supported with adequate resourcing from FNZ.

Submitter details

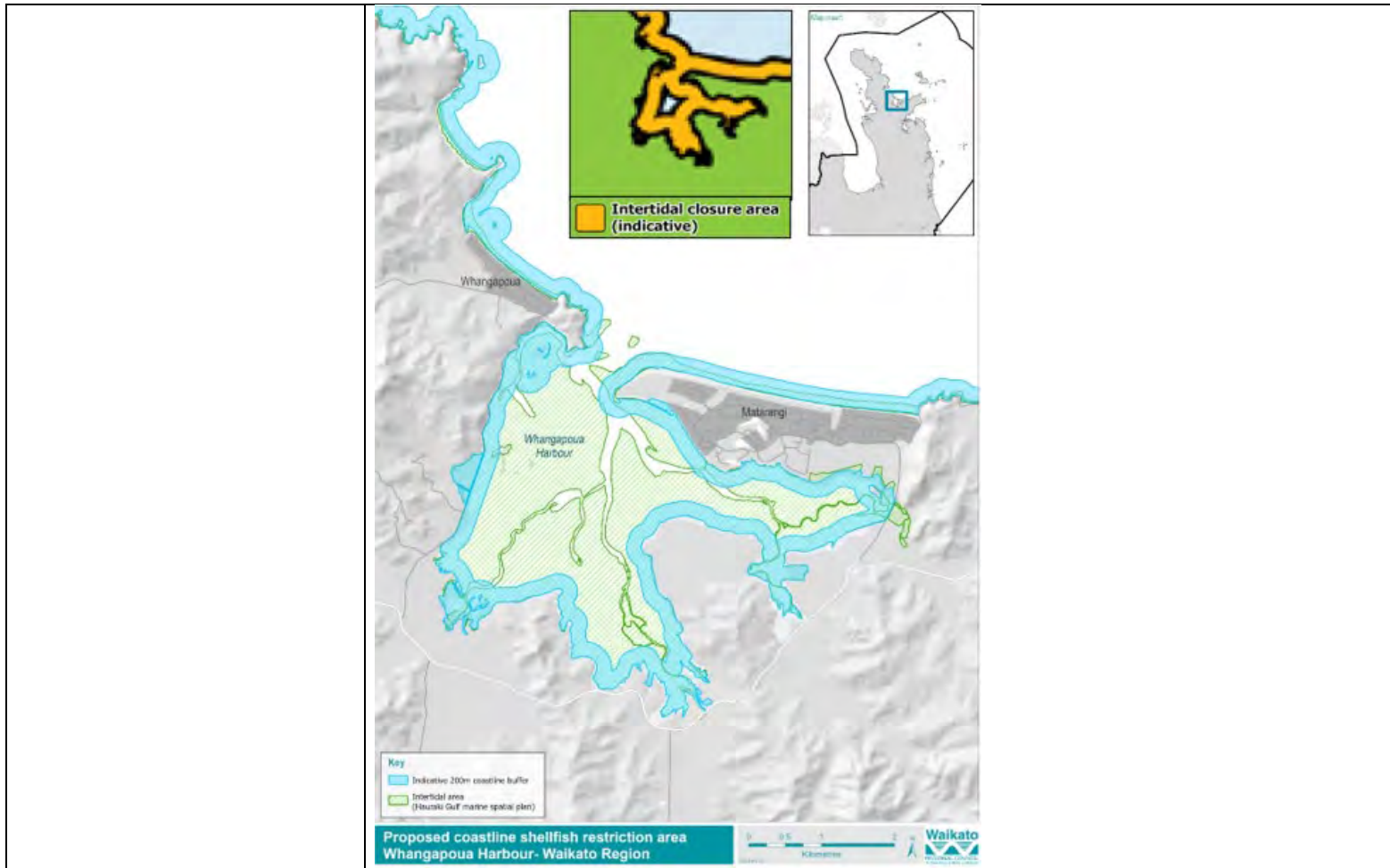
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Contact person:

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Senior Policy Advisor, Policy Implementation
Email: joaopaulo.silva@waikatoregion.govt.nz
Phone: (07) 794 97179

Table – Optional questions from the discussion document

Question	WRC response
<i>Boundaries of the proposed intertidal closure area (high-water mark to 200 m offshore)</i>	
<p>Do you support the boundaries of the proposed intertidal closure area (i.e. high-water mark to 200 m offshore)? If not, what are some details of an alternative boundary you support?</p>	<p>We consider that the proposed boundary (high-water mark to 200m offshore) is practical in terms of providing for a clear spatial delineation of the intertidal closure area of the coastline. However, we note that in some instances the boundary in the discussion document looks to be further reaching than 200m. We understand that this is conceptual at this stage but recommend having a revised version including a higher quality map to avoid any ambiguity in terms of the extent of the intertidal closure for users as well as monitoring and compliance.</p> <p>We understand that this proposal is more focused on managing recreational takes in rocky reefs/rock pools, however we consider that estuaries have intertidal and subtidal ecosystems and are rich in fauna and can contain patches of rocky reef as well as hosting a range of harvested species. From our view, it was not clear from the description and figures in the proposal how estuaries would be considered, and this as an important detail across all options. For example, the conceptual figure in the discussion document indicated that all of Tairua Estuary would be covered while only part of Whangapoua Estuary would be covered. We have demonstrated what the 200m boundary would look like for Whangapoua Estuary below and included the discussion document map as an inset for contrast. We noted that paragraph 87 of the discussion document reads that there could some flexibility on the boundary to accommodate the geomorphology of bays, harbours and rivers.</p> <p>Therefore, we recommend clarifying how the proposal will intersect with estuaries also, as to whether all estuaries would be included (e.g. from the mouth), or all intertidal areas within estuaries, or only 200m from the high-water level as per the coastline.</p>



<p>Do you support the proposed intertidal closure area applying to the Auckland Coromandel mainland and Waiheke Island coastlines? If not, where do you consider the proposed intertidal closure area should apply?</p>	<p>We lack information to make a quantitative and fully informed choice of the options in terms of areas for intertidal closures. However, we are aware the Coromandel peninsula is subjected to significant harvesting pressure in certain areas. Anecdotally, we know that many of our shallow reefs close to more populated areas are relatively poorer in terms of ecosystem diversity and abundance. We consider that there is unlikely to be one single cause for this, but we consider that harvesting pressure is likely a contributing factor in some locations.</p> <p>Therefore, we support the proposed intertidal closure area for our region. We consider that having a comprehensive intertidal closure area throughout the defined mainland area will provide for a clear spatial boundary, which will be beneficial in terms of monitoring and for preventing displacement efforts to areas left not protected.</p> <p>Examples highlighting areas currently under pressure in the Coromandel peninsula include the areas in connection with the section 186A Temporary Closure² granted for Hauraki Māori Trust Board from 1998 to 2024 for the coastline extending from Ngārimu Bay to Wilsons Bay on the Thames coast, which encompassed Te Mātā and Waipatukahu. The closure from Hei o Wharekaho Settlement Trust³ that includes the area along the coast from Whangapoua to Onemana and the East Coromandel scallop rāhui and temporary closure sought by Ngāti Hei⁴. The area extends across the eastern Coromandel coast from Whangapoua to Onemana for tipa/scallops.</p>
<p>Are there any other areas, including other populated islands, that you would like to see included in the intertidal closure? If so, please indicate what additional areas you think should be included and provide information to support your views.</p>	<p>We recommend assessing and including Whanganui Island in the intertidal closure. We consider that the island meets the criteria under point 87 for inclusion. Whanganui Island is a coastal island that is easily accessible and walkable to at low tidal stages.</p> <p>We do not have any other areas to indicate at this stage. However, we recommend FNZ monitors whether harvesting effort shifts into other Waikato coastal areas, particularly during peak holiday periods.</p>
<p>How would the proposed closure boundaries impact you? Please provide details to support your response.</p>	<p>The Council is responsible for the integrated management of the natural resources in the region and the maintenance and enhancement of ecosystems in coastal water. Therefore, we have a role in helping to ensure our coastal ecosystems are not negatively impacted by unsustainable practices. Therefore, we support appropriately managing all species and ensuring that management keeps pace with changing needs, including the addition of new species that are currently being harvested but are not currently included in the management framework.</p>

² [51340-The-closure-request-for-extension-letter](#)

³ [186A Fisheries Act](#)

⁴ [Fisheries \(SCA CS Closure\) Notice 2023](#)

	<p>Additionally, the Council is responsible for managing some activities within the coastal environment through the Waikato Regional Coastal Plan (WRCP).. Therefore, we recommend that throughout the educational campaign that FNZ makes it clear that the restrictions under this proposal are prescribed under the fisheries management framework. This will ensure better understanding from the public on which activity is managed by which organisation.</p>
<p>Do you have any other feedback on the benefits and/or risks associated with the proposed boundaries and spatial extent of the intertidal closure area?</p>	<p>We support FNZ on using sustainability measures under the Act to address ecosystem depletion issues. We agree that sustainability measures provide flexibility to implement changes quickly to address sustainability risks without amendments to regulations (which can take longer).</p> <p>We recommend FNZ resources the educational campaigns ensuring that the information (signs, pamphlets, etc) also reach the more secluded areas. We also recommend that the information should cover how to proceed when observing non-compliance. Additionally, we recommend the resourcing of the monitoring and enforcement actions, ensuring that the monitoring also include other areas in which displacement of shellfish harvesting may happen.</p> <p>The discussion document notes that the available information does not fully capture rock pools, shellfish size structure, or all harvesting areas. We recommend FNZ addresses these regional data gaps. We consider that this will ensure better management of these ecosystems.</p> <p>We also recommend FNZ develops a clear implementation plan for the intertidal closure with a review framework.</p>
<p><i>Partial intertidal closure + a combined daily limit of 10 shellfish (“any other” species) (Option 4)</i></p>	
<p>Do you have any other feedback on the benefits and/or risks associated with this additional option?</p>	<p>As mentioned at paragraph 8, we support Option 4 , and we recommend assessing the effectiveness of Option 4 in the near future and then re-evaluating areas for improvement.</p>
<p><i>Development of a refreshed education campaign</i></p>	
<p>What feedback do you have on the proposed education and engagement actions (pamphlets, digital communications, and community engagement), and how effective do you think these approaches will be in promoting sustainable shellfish harvesting?</p>	<p>We support ongoing scientific and community monitoring. We consider that this should include rock pools, rocky reefs, shellfish size structure, harvest pressures, and recovery indicators. We recommend FNZ works with councils, iwi, hapū, schools, and community groups to support local monitoring through equipment, training as well as developing monitoring methods, data standards, and regular public reporting.</p>
<p><i>Role of scientific and community monitoring</i></p>	
<p>What feedback do you have on the proposed approach to scientific and</p>	<p>Council is presently establishing a subtidal rocky-reef programme, and following this will consider implementing an intertidal rocky-reef monitoring programme to fulfil statutory state of the environment monitoring responsibilities. The</p>

<p>community monitoring of intertidal rocky shore species in the Auckland Coromandel area?</p>	<p>purpose and design of the monitoring is not appropriate for evaluating the efficacy of fisheries management. As such there is a need for an appropriate design and undertaking of monitoring by FNZ.</p> <p>Our experience is that a combination of both scientific and community monitoring is useful. The scientific monitoring provides the rigours of reliable, quantitative data on which decisions can be made, and community data has other advantages, for example, it can potentially cover more locations, has an important social component (ownership/kaitiaki) and in addition it provides for education and communication outcomes.</p> <p>We recommend developing a monitoring programme targeting rocky strata (rock pools and rocky coastline), to be applicable across Auckland Coromandel, with the specific focus on informing shore-based shellfish harvesting. We suggest investigating the Hauraki Gulf shellfish monitoring programme⁸ (which targets soft sediments) as example for developing the monitoring programme for the Coromandel. We consider that with AI, google lens and other supporting software, there have been technical advances that support species identification and could help in the identification and assessment of health of intertidal rocky reef habitats.</p> <p>The Council continues to support two long-term Hauraki Gulf shellfish monitoring sites (Since 2008) in Whitianga and Wharekawa and would have interest in supporting an appropriately developed rocky reef community monitoring programme.</p>
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⁸ [Hauraki Gulf Community Shellfish Monitoring | Waikato Regional Council](#)



Review of measures for shore-based shellfish harvesting in the Auckland Coromandel area

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Guide to this discussion document and consultation

This document discusses measures that aim to address shellfish harvest pressure and associated sustainability risks in the Auckland Coromandel area. We are seeking submissions on:

- Proposed options to fully or partially close a defined intertidal closure area to recreational take of shellfish and other invertebrates along the Auckland Coromandel and Waiheke Island coastline.
- Proposed changes to the recreational daily limits for shellfish in the Auckland Coromandel area.
- Potential education and monitoring initiatives which may help to support successful management.

How to have your say

We welcome your feedback on the proposed options for these measures and any alternatives. Please provide detailed information and sources to support your views where possible.

We also need you to provide:

- The title of the consultation document (if you are not using the submission template provided)
- Your name and title
- Your organisation's name (if you are submitting on behalf of an organisation, and whether your submission represents the whole organisation or a section of it)
- Your contact details (e.g., phone number, email (preferred) or postal address)
- Whether you support all or any of the proposed measures
- Any alternative measures that we could consider.

Further information

For more information about fisheries management in New Zealand, see our [fisheries management webpage](#), and our [webpage about the Quota Management System \(QMS\)](#).

Sending us your views

You can send a submission on any of the proposed options to FNZ by **5pm on Friday 12 June 2026**, by email to FMSubmissions@mpi.govt.nz.

Please see the FNZ consultation webpage for related information, a submissions template, and information on how to submit your feedback. If you cannot access the webpage or require hard copies of documents or any other information, please email FMSubmissions@mpi.govt.nz.

Note that your submission is public information and therefore subject to the [Official Information Act 1982](#).

Next steps

Your submission will be used to inform advice to the Minister for Oceans and Fisheries (**Minister**) on the proposed options and potential education and monitoring initiatives for the Auckland Coromandel area.

IN-CONFIDENCE

Overview

1. Fisheries New Zealand (FNZ) is reviewing the rules for recreational harvesting of shellfish and other invertebrates in the Auckland Coromandel area. This area is defined in the Fisheries (Amateur Fishing) Regulations 2013 (Amateur Regulations) and includes beaches on the east and west coasts (Figure 1).

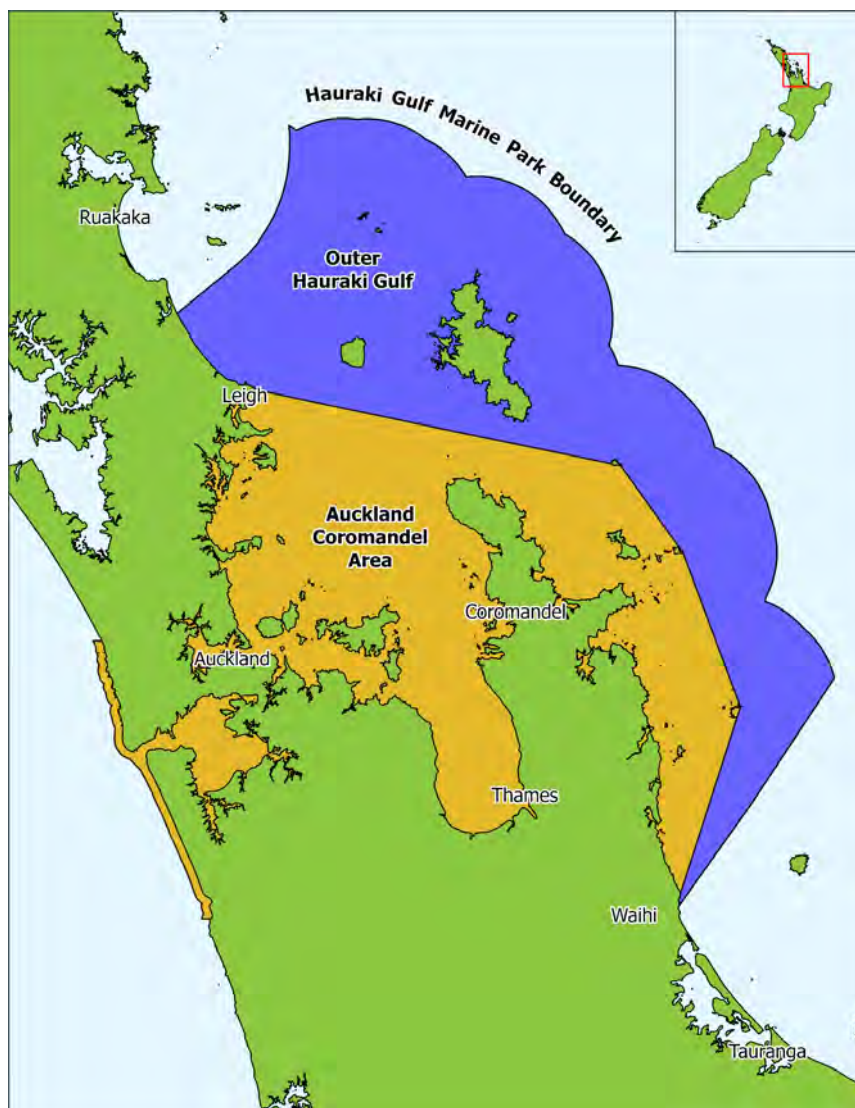


Figure 1. The Auckland Coromandel area (orange) extends from Leigh to Waihi in the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park (blue) and includes a portion of the Auckland west coast from Muriwai Beach¹ to Port Waikato.

2. Intertidal areas include the rocky shore and rock pools as well as sand and mud areas located between the high and low tide marks. A diverse range of plants and animals live in intertidal areas, including limpets, whelks, periwinkles, barnacles, mussels, crabs, sea stars, urchins and seaweeds. Subtidal areas (below the low tide mark) are submerged underwater at all times.

¹ The northern limit of the western Auckland Coromandel area is on Muriwai Beach near Okiritoto Stream (at 36°48.88'S and 174°25.03'E).

3. Auckland has an extensive coastline which is located in proximity to a large urban population. This means intertidal and adjacent shallow subtidal shellfish can be easily accessed by recreational fishers and some beaches can be subject to high harvest pressure.
4. Shellfish and other marine invertebrates are an important part of coastal ecosystems. They are also a valuable source of food, and intertidal shellfish harvesting supports the social and cultural wellbeing of tāngata whenua, local communities and visitors to the Auckland Coromandel area.
5. Certain species of shellfish like tuangi (cockles), pipi and kūtai (green-lipped mussels) have supported recreational and customary harvesting activity in the Auckland Coromandel area for many years. However, harvest practices have changed over time, and anecdotal information suggests a broader range of intertidal species are increasingly being taken by recreational fishers.
6. Tāngata whenua and local communities have expressed ongoing concerns about the sustainability of intertidal shellfish in the Auckland Coromandel area. However, in recent months, FNZ has received increased reports of intensive harvesting of marine life from the intertidal rocky shore and rock pools.
7. Currently, shellfish recreational daily limits and site-specific measures are used to manage shore-based harvesting in the Auckland Coromandel area. Many of the shellfish species being taken by recreational fishers from the rocky shore, such as limpets, cat's eyes, and whelks, fall within a general combined daily limit of 50 shellfish per person. Anecdotal information suggests a broader range of invertebrates (e.g. sea anemones and sponges) are also being taken from intertidal habitats. These species are not subject to recreational daily limits and harvesters can legally take unlimited amounts each day.
8. There is limited information to determine whether the level of recreational harvest at particular locations is a sustainability concern. However, results of long-term monitoring at sites in the Auckland region suggest some intertidal and shallow subtidal shellfish species are likely being negatively affected by cumulative pressures including harvesting, land-based impacts and marine heat waves.
9. To address community concerns about shore-based harvest pressure and associated sustainability risks, FNZ has developed two options for an intertidal area closure:
 - a) **Option 1:** A full intertidal closure (no exceptions). This option would prohibit recreational take of all shellfish and other invertebrate species from a defined intertidal closure area.
 - b) **Option 2:** A partial intertidal closure with exceptions for named shellfish species. This option would prohibit recreational take of all shellfish and other invertebrate species from a defined intertidal closure area. However, exceptions would be made to allow recreational take of named shellfish species from the closure area (the proposed species exceptions are listed in Table 1 below).
10. Under both options, the proposed intertidal closure will extend from the mean high-water mark to approximately 200 m offshore and apply along the Auckland Coromandel mainland and Waiheke Island coastline. The indicative boundaries of the proposed intertidal closure area are shown in Figure 3. The proposed closure area includes intertidal habitats (between the high and low tide mark) as well as some shallow subtidal habitats (below low tide mark) in places where the seafloor has a steep gradient close to shore. The boundaries were developed to support ease of implementation and enforcement.
11. FNZ is also proposing to set a new combined recreational daily limit of ten shellfish for “any other” species without a species-specific limit in the Auckland Coromandel area. The proposed ten shellfish limit would apply in areas outside the intertidal closure area (as **Option 3** or **Option 4**).

Table 1: Proposed options for recreational fishing measures for the Auckland Coromandel area

Proposed intertidal closure area	
Option 1: Full intertidal closure	<p>This option would prohibit recreational take of shellfish and other invertebrates from the defined intertidal closure area.</p> <p>This is a highly restrictive option that would prohibit recreational take of a range of valued shellfish species including spiny and packhorse rock lobsters, pāua, scallops, and squid.</p>

	The existing combined ‘any other’ daily limit of 50 shellfish, as well as the species-specific recreational shellfish limits, would continue to apply outside the intertidal closure area.
Option 2: Partial intertidal closure (with exceptions)	<p>This option would prohibit recreational take of shellfish and other invertebrates from the defined intertidal closure area.</p> <p>However, exceptions would allow the harvest of named shellfish species within recreational daily limits. The named species are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bivalves (i.e. cockles (50), pipi (50), pacific or rock oysters (100), dredge oysters (50), scallops (20), and tuatua (50)) • Crabs (10*) • Kina (150 east coast and 50 west coast) • Octopus (1*) • Blackfoot pāua (10) and yellow-foot pāua (10) • Sea cucumbers (5*) • Shrimps (20*) • Spiny (3) and packhorse rock lobsters (3) • Squid (5*) <p>The recreational shellfish daily limits will include existing limits for some species (shown in brackets above) and new limits for other species shown with a * (i.e. crabs, octopus, sea cucumbers, shrimps, and squid).</p> <p>The existing combined ‘any other’ daily limit of 50 shellfish, as well as the species-specific recreational shellfish limits would apply outside the intertidal closure area.</p>
Proposed intertidal closure area + new combined recreational daily limit of ten shellfish	
Option 3: Full intertidal closure + new combined daily limit	<p>This option is a full intertidal closure (Option 1) plus, outside of the intertidal closure area, a combined recreational daily limit of ten shellfish for any species without its own recreational daily limit, in the Auckland Coromandel area.</p> <p>The ten shellfish limit would apply to a broad range of species (e.g. barnacles, crabs, limpets, octopus, periwinkles, sea cucumbers, shrimps and squid). It would not apply to species that have their own recreational daily limit (e.g., cockles, pipi, tuatua, spiny and packhorse rock lobsters).</p>
Option 4: Partial intertidal closure + new combined daily limit	<p>This option is a partial intertidal closure (Option 2) plus, outside of the intertidal closure area, a combined recreational daily limit of ten shellfish for any species without its own recreational daily limit, in the Auckland Coromandel area.</p> <p>The ten shellfish limit would apply to a narrower range of species (e.g. barnacles, limpets, periwinkles). It would not apply to species that have their own recreational daily limit (e.g. cockles, pipi, tuatua, spiny and packhorse rock lobsters and (as proposed) crabs, octopus, sea cucumbers, shrimps and squid).</p>

Rationale for review

12. Shellfish are an important component of intertidal and subtidal ecosystems in northern New Zealand. Shellfish are also an important source of kaimoana, and shellfish gathering supports the social and cultural wellbeing of tāngata whenua, communities and visitors.
13. The intertidal zone includes rocky reef and soft substrate (i.e. mud and sand) habitats that are exposed to air and submerged by water at different phases of the tide as well as rock pools. A diverse range of animals and plants are found within intertidal habitats, including mussels, crabs, barnacles, worms, limpets, anemones, whelks, periwinkles and seaweeds. Subtidal areas are located below the low tide mark and are submerged underwater at all times. There are important biological connections between the intertidal and subtidal areas.

14. Intertidal habitats are highly dynamic. Throughout the tidal cycle, marine life are exposed to air and water and encounter various stressors at different times of the day (e.g., ultraviolet radiation, heat stress, wave action, and significant fluctuations in oxygen and salinity).² Rock pools provide a refuge for some species during low tide but these species assemblages can face unique stressors due to crowding, heat, rainfall and stagnated flow.³ These factors can make intertidal species more vulnerable to human pressures including pollution, harvesting, sedimentation and climate change.
15. Intertidal shellfish fulfil an important role in the marine food chain, and their removal from an area can impact a range of birds and fish that rely on shellfish as a food source. Certain species, such as limpets, have been identified as keystone species in some intertidal habitats as they control algal cover and maintain habitat to support ecosystem balance. The excessive removal of these species, as result of changing harvesting practices, can lead to changes in the abundance and distribution of other species through competition and other behavioural changes.
16. Intertidal shellfish and other fisheries resources along the mainland Auckland Coromandel coast are easily accessed by harvesters at lower tidal stages, as no boats or special tools are required for harvesting, and many beaches and rockpools in the Auckland region are accessible by car or foot. Anecdotal reports of concentrated harvest activities suggest this ease of access, coupled with the proximity to the large urban centre of Auckland, means intertidal shellfish resources at some beaches may be subject to high harvest pressure on an ongoing basis.
17. While the coastline within the Auckland Coromandel area is extensive, and many areas of the shoreline are not accessible to the public, recreational harvesting and its impact is often concentrated in certain 'hot spots'. This can lead to localised depletion in discrete areas. As fisheries resources in these areas become less abundant there is a risk that displacement to new sections of coast will result in serial depletion⁴ effects over time.
18. Anecdotal information from local communities and fishery officers indicates that a broader range of marine life is currently harvested than what was targeted historically. Changes in target species, as well as increased harvesting pressure, suggests the need for a review of recreational fisheries measures to ensure sustainability of accessible intertidal (above low tide mark) and shallow subtidal (seaward of the low tide mark) species across the region.
19. Tāngata whenua and local communities have expressed ongoing concerns about the sustainability of intertidal shellfish populations. In recent months, FNZ has received increased reports of concentrated and intensive harvesting of marine life from the rocky shore at some locations in Auckland. Communities have requested additional restrictions to support the health of intertidal ecosystems, along with education and compliance initiatives to raise awareness about sustainable shellfish gathering practices and to ensure adherence to the recreational fishing rules that are in place.
20. Intertidal shellfish gathering in the Auckland Coromandel area is primarily managed through recreational daily limits. Reduced limits apply to certain shellfish species, such as pipi, cockles, tuatua, rock or pacific oysters, and green-lipped mussels, to address sustainability risks associated with harvest pressure in the region. However, a broader range of shellfish species (e.g., whelks, limpets and cats eyes) have become popular with recreational harvesters. Currently, these species are subject to a general combined daily limit of 50 shellfish per person, which means large quantities of these species can be taken from easily accessed locations, particularly if there are large numbers of harvesters.
21. Several site-specific closures have been put in place to address specific sustainability concerns and to manage harvest pressure on shellfish populations at those locations. Some of these closures have been initiated by tāngata whenua under section 186A of the Fisheries Act 1996 (**Act**) (e.g., at Te Mātā, Waipatukahu, Umupuia Beach, Ōmaha Bay, Kawau Bay and Whangaparāoa Peninsula). Others have

² See Leeuwis, R.H. and Gamperl, K. (2022) for a review focused on the high intertidal zone.

³ Leeuwis, R.H. and Gamperl, K. (2022).

⁴ Serial depletion refers to a sequential pattern of fishing activity, where intensive fishing occurs in an area until resources become depleted and fishers shift effort to a new target species or location until those resources become depleted. Over time, intensive fishing activities and spatial changes in fishing effort can result in sequential depletion of fisheries resources across a large area.

- been implemented as sustainability measures under section 11 of the Act (e.g., Cockle Bay/ Tūwakamana), and as regulated closures under section 297 of the Act (e.g., Karekare Beach).
22. In October 2025, FNZ received a request from the Ngāti Manuhiri Settlement Trust for a temporary closure under section 186A of the Act to prohibit take of all marine invertebrate and seaweed species from a large stretch of coastline on the east coast of Auckland. Following consultation, in February 2026, the Minister decided to implement a 2-year closure of fisheries waters at Ōmaha Bay, Kawau Bay and Whangaparāoa Peninsula. The closure is in addition to existing section 186A closures applying to shellfish in other parts of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park.
 23. In 2025, FNZ commenced a review of recreational measures applying to shellfish in the Auckland Coromandel area as part of the actions within the Hauraki Gulf Fisheries Plan 2023. This work has been undertaken in parallel to, and in communication with, the Ngāti Manuhiri Settlement Trust. The consultation on the wider shellfish review was scheduled to follow the Minister’s decision on the Trust’s section 186A application and provides an opportunity to support sustainable management of intertidal fisheries resources at a regional scale.
 24. There is a high level of compliance with the existing recreational fishing rules in the Auckland region. In 2025, the level of compliance observed during inspections was 93% across the region, which is consistent with the national average. Incidents of non-compliant shellfish gathering have mostly related to excess take of cockles on the east coast and green-lipped mussels on the west coast. However, some non-compliant shellfish harvesting has related to excessive take of cats eyes, crabs, prawns, limpets, and whelks at particular locations.
 25. Overall, the high level of compliance observed across different beaches and species suggests community concerns primarily relate to the quantity of harvest that is permitted by the recreational fishing rules, and not to poaching or other unlawful harvesting activities.
 26. To address potential sustainability risks associated with shore-based harvesting activities, FNZ is seeking views on proposed options for intertidal area closures and changes to the daily limits for certain shellfish species in the Auckland Coromandel area.
 27. The proposed options will apply to the Auckland Coromandel area, which comprises the majority of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park (Figure 1). These options align with the Hauraki Gulf Fisheries Plan. Management Objective 2.5 seeks to ensure that harvest of intertidal and shallow subtidal species is sustainable, while Management Action 2.5.2 involves a review of the settings for shellfish (Management Action 2.5.2).⁵

⁵ Hauraki Gulf Fisheries Plan 2023, [here](#).

Background

28. In 1998, the Auckland Metropolitan Area (a recreational fisheries management area) was established to enable tailored shellfish measures to be set to address harvest pressure in this area. After concerns were expressed about the sustainability of shellfish resources on the Coromandel Peninsula, the Auckland Metropolitan Area was extended in 1999 to include the Coromandel Peninsula and re-named the Auckland Coromandel area (Figure 1).
29. Currently, shore-based harvesting activity is primarily managed through daily limits for shellfish in the Auckland Coromandel area (Table 2). Reduced limits restrict recreational take of traditionally targeted species, including pipi, cockles, pacific or rock oysters, green-lipped mussels and tuatua, in this area.
30. Several site-specific fisheries closures have also been put in place to address sustainability concerns, to manage harvest pressure on shellfish populations at particular locations, or to provide for customary fishing rights (Table 3).

Current management settings (*status quo*)

Recreational daily limits in the Auckland Coromandel area

31. Recreational daily limits are set in accordance with the Fisheries (Amateur Fishing) Regulations 2013 (**Amateur Fishing Regulations**). The Regulations empower the Minister to set or vary recreational daily limits for shellfish by issuing a separate instrument.⁶ In practice, the recreational daily limits for shellfish are set in the Fisheries (Recreational Management Controls) Notice (**Recreational Notice**), which is revoked and re-issued to reflect changes to the daily limits over time.⁷
32. A recreational daily limit refers to the maximum number of shellfish that a person can take from an area each day.⁸ There are two types of recreational daily limits:
 - a) An individual species daily limit: the total number of a specific species of shellfish that one person can take per day; and
 - b) A combined daily limit: the total number of any combination of specified shellfish species that one person can take per day.
33. Individual species and combined daily limits can operate together or separately, and these limits can also differ depending on the region. A daily limit is intended to ensure sustainable harvesting levels and to share the resource equitably between individual fishers. However, as daily limits do not constrain the total number of harvesters at any given location, significant quantities of shellfish can be taken at accessible locations. While management measures have typically applied at a regional scale, responding to high harvest pressure in certain areas means that more conservative limits may need to be set and enforced to ensure sustainability at a local level.
34. Recreational daily limits apply to 11 named species of shellfish in the Auckland Coromandel area, including bivalves (i.e., cockles, pipi, mussels, tuatua, scallops, oysters), rock lobsters (i.e packhorse and spiny), kina and pāua (a full list of species limits is provided in Table 2 below). Toheroa take is prohibited. "Any other" shellfish species without its own daily limit is subject to a combined recreational daily limit of 50 shellfish per person. This general limit applies in most fisheries management areas around the country.⁹
35. The Act defines the term "*shellfish*" broadly to include all species of the phylum Echinodermata, the phylum Mollusca and all species of the class Crustacea.¹⁰ This captures a diverse range of species with different life histories, including (but not limited to) barnacles, chitons, limpets, cats eyes, periwinkles,

⁶ Fisheries (Amateur Fishing) Regulations 2013, regulation 5A.

⁷ Fisheries (Recreational Management Controls) Notice No. 1 2026, available [here](#).

⁸ The Amateur Fishing Regulations defines the term "daily limit" as "daily limit, in relation to a species of fish, aquatic life, or seaweed, means the maximum number or quantity of that species that a person may, on any day, take or possess from or in an FMA or other specified area."

⁹ Except for Kaikōura and Fiordland where lower combined recreational daily limits and a wider range of species-specific daily limits apply for shellfish.

¹⁰ Fisheries Act 1996, section 2(1).

whelks, crabs, starfish, slipper lobsters, octopus, squid and sea cucumbers. Currently, a person can take up to 50 shellfish from this broad range of species each day.

36. There are no recreational daily limits for other invertebrates (such as sea anemones, sea squirts and sponges) or seaweeds in the Auckland Coromandel area. The extent to which these species are being targeted by intertidal harvesters is uncertain. However, FNZ has received reports of indiscriminate harvesting practices, with some fishers targeting shellfish and taking other marine life in the process.

Table 2. Current recreational daily limits for shellfish in the Auckland Coromandel area.

* Identifies limits that are lower than the general nation-wide daily limits for these species.

Shellfish species	Current daily limit per fisher	Minimum length (mm) ¹¹	Other restrictions ¹²
Cockle <i>Chione (Austrovenus) stutchburyi</i>	50*	-	-
Kina Kina - <i>Evechinus chloroticus</i> Long spined urchin - <i>Centrostephanus rodgersii</i>	150 (east coast) 50 (west coast)	-	-
Mussel Green-lipped mussel - <i>Perna canaliculus</i> Horse mussel - <i>Atrina zelandica</i> Blue mussel - <i>Mytilus edulis aoteanus</i>	50 combined (up to 25* green-lipped mussel)	-	-
Dredge oyster <i>Ostrea chilensis</i>	50	58 mm	-
Pacific or rock oyster Pacific oyster - <i>Crassostrea gigas</i> Rock oyster - <i>Saccostrea glomerata</i>	100*	-	Prohibition on opening oysters while attached
Blackfoot Pāua <i>Haliotis iris</i>	10	125 mm	Method restrictions and an accumulation limit of 20 pāua applies ¹³
Yellow-foot Pāua <i>Haliotis australis</i>	10	80 mm	
Pipi <i>Paphies australis</i>	50*	-	-
Rock lobster¹⁴ Spiny - <i>Jasus edwardsii</i> Packhorse - <i>Sagmariasus verreauxi</i>	6 combined (3 spiny and 3 packhorse)	Minimum tail widths apply	Method restrictions; Prohibited states
Scallop¹⁵ <i>Pecten novaezelandiae</i>	20	100 m	Closed season from 1 April to 31 August
Tuatua <i>Paphies subtriangulata</i>	50*	-	-
Any other shellfish (whether of the same or different species)	50	-	Method restrictions apply to octopus

Area closures and other site-specific harvest restrictions in the Auckland Coromandel area

37. A range of site-specific measures have been implemented following requests by tāngata whenua under section 186A of the Act as well as Government-led action including sustainability measures under section 11 and regulated closures under section 297 of the Act (Figure 2; Table 3).

¹¹ The Amateur Fishing Regulations require all shellfish to be measurable (regulation 20). Seaward of the mean high-water mark, a person must not possess any shellfish to which a minimum length restriction applies in a state that cannot be measured.

¹² Key restrictions regulated under the Amateur Fishing Regulations. This excludes any site-specific measures which are addressed separately below.

¹³ Fisheries (Recreational Management Controls) Notice 2026, cl 6.1. If the number of pāua cannot be determined, a shucked weight of 2.5 kg applies.

¹⁴ Parts of the spiny rock lobster fishery (CRA 2) within the eastern Auckland Coromandel area are subject to section 11 closures under the Act.

¹⁵ The scallop fishery (SCA CS) within the eastern Auckland Coromandel area is subject to a section 11 closure under the Act.

38. Under section 186A of the Act, the Minister may temporarily close or restrict fishing methods in an area if satisfied these measures will recognise and provide for the use and management practices of tāngata whenua in the exercise of non-commercial fishing rights, by either improving the availability and/or size of fish, aquatic life or seaweed; or recognising a customary fishing practice in the area. A temporary closure under section 186A may be in force for a maximum of two years and extended for an additional (up to) two-years at a time.
39. Under section 11 of the Act, the Minister may implement a range of measures, including area closures that restrict take of all or select species, for the purpose of ensuring sustainability. The Act defines the phrase “ensuring sustainability” broadly to mean:¹⁶
 - a) Maintaining the potential of fisheries resources to meet the reasonably foreseeable needs of future generations; and
 - b) Avoiding, remedying or mitigating any adverse effects of fishing on the aquatic environment.
40. Sustainability measures can be implemented by Notice in the *Gazette* or through regulations. This provides flexibility to implement changes quickly to address sustainability risks without amendments to regulations (which can take longer). Notices can be revoked if measures are no longer considered necessary to ensure sustainability.
41. Permanent area closures can be implemented under section 297 of the Act by making regulations. However, the process for making or amending regulations takes time and can be less responsive to changes in available information (e.g., if new information comes to light from monitoring that suggests utilisation opportunities are available and changes are necessary to achieve consistency with the purpose of the Act).

¹⁶ Fisheries Act 1996, section 8(2). Refer also to section 2(1) which defines the term “*sustainability measure*”.

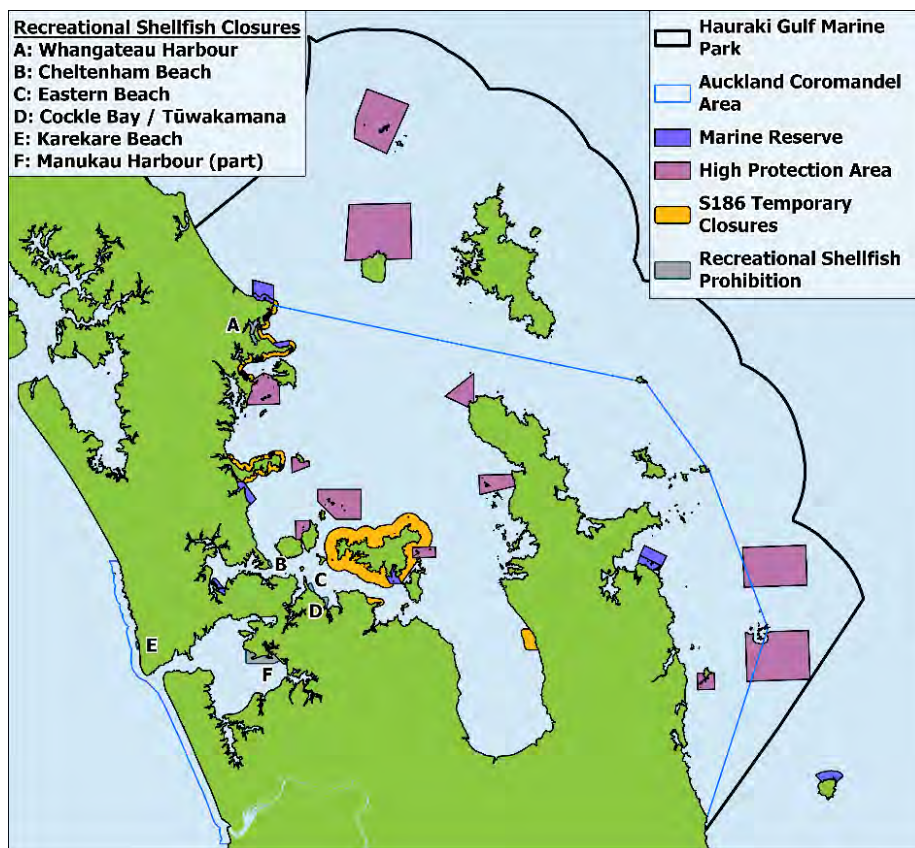


Figure 2. Current area closures, including Marine Reserves (purple), High Protection Areas (pink) and closures under the Act (yellow and grey), in the Auckland Coromandel area and the wider Hauraki Gulf Marine Park. The species-specific closures for spiny rock lobster and scallops are not shown on the map.

42. There are four section 11 shellfish closures in the Auckland Coromandel area, at Whangateau (Site A, Figure 2), the Inner Hauraki Gulf, from Pārengarenga Harbour to Te Arai Point (not shown in Figure 2), and at Cockle Bay/Tūwakamana (Site D, Figure 2). Three of these closures apply to select shellfish species (i.e., pipi and cockles or spiny rock lobsters). The Cockle Bay closure applies to all shellfish.
43. Three area closures have been implemented under section 297 of the Act at Cheltenham Beach, Eastern Beach and Karekare Beach (shown as Sites B, C and E in Figure 2). These closures prohibit recreational take of all shellfish from areas where a wider range of habitats and species are found (e.g., whelks, sea snails and crabs across rocky shore and soft substrate habitats).
44. Several temporary fisheries closures have been implemented under section 186A of the Act, including at Te Mātā and Waipatukahu, Waiheke Island and Umupuia Beach in the Auckland Coromandel area (shown in yellow in Figure 2). These section 186A closures were requested by iwi to manage harvest impacts on particular shellfish species, including rock lobsters, cockles, pipi, and mussels (a list of species covered by each closure is provided in Table 3).
45. In October 2025, FNZ received a request from the Ngāti Manuhiri Settlement Trust for a temporary closure under section 186A of the Act. Public consultation on the request occurred between October and November 2025. More than 300 submissions were received, along with a petition led by a member of the local community. The majority of submissions and the petition supported the request. In February 2026, the Minister decided to implement a 2-year closure of fisheries waters at Ōmaha Bay, Kawau Bay and Whangaparāoa Peninsula.

46. This temporary closure prohibits the harvesting of all seaweed and invertebrate species from a coastal strip between the mean high-water mark to approximately 200 m offshore. The prohibition applies to all shellfish species (including squid, octopus, cats eyes, cockles, limpets, mussels, oysters, pāua, barnacles and crabs) as well as other marine invertebrates (e.g., sea anemones, sea squirts, and sponges) and seaweeds. The closure does not apply to spiny rock lobsters or scallops as these species are already subject to existing spatial measures. Kina are also excluded from the closure and can be taken within the current recreational daily limits.

Table 3. List of current area closures for shellfish in the Auckland Coromandel area as shown in Figure 2.

Site of closure	Covered species	Type	Year implemented
Cheltenham Beach	All shellfish	Section (s) 297	1995
Cockle Bay / Tūwakamana	All shellfish	s 11	Seasonal 1998, permanent 2021
Eastern Beach	All shellfish	s 297	1993
Inner Hauraki Gulf (Cape Rodney to Port Jackson)	Spiny rock lobster	s 11	Closure from 2025 with 3-year review
Karekare Beach	All shellfish ¹⁷	s 297	1998
Ōmaha Bay, Kawau Bay and Whangaparāoa Peninsula	All invertebrates and seaweeds (except kina, spiny rock lobsters and scallops)	s 186A	2026
Pārengarenga Harbour to Te Arai Point Closure	Spiny rock lobster	s 11	Closure from 2026 with 5-year review
Te Mātā & Waipatukahu	Cockles, pipi, mussels and oysters	s 186A	2-year closures since 2020
Umupuia Beach	Cockles	s 186A	2-year closures since 2008
Waiheke Island	Mussels, rock lobsters (spiny and packhorse) and pāua	s 186A	2-year closures since 2021
Whangateau	Cockles and pipi	s 11	3-year closures in 2010, 2013; unbounded closure in 2016

47. Recreational harvesting is also prohibited in marine reserves under the Marine Reserves Act 1971 and High Protection Areas under the Hauraki Gulf / Tikapa Moana Marine Protection Act 2025 (Figure 2).

Recreational shellfish harvesting activity in Auckland

Shellfish harvesting in the Auckland Coromandel area

48. In the Auckland Coromandel area, intertidal shellfish are a significant customary Māori resource and are also harvested recreationally.
49. Customary non-commercial shellfish gathering is provided for by the Fisheries (Kaimoana Customary Fishing) Regulations 1998 and the Amateur Fishing Regulations. In recent years, most customary fishing authorisations for the take of shellfish in the northern fisheries (FMA 1 and FMA 9) has been for kina, red spiny and packhorse rock lobsters, scallops and pāua. However, there is limited quantitative

¹⁷ FNZ recently consulted on amendments that would enable commercial and recreational fishers to take shellfish from this area. The proposal would prohibit take of gastropods and bivalves but allow utilisation of other shellfish, such as crustaceans. Further information is available [here](#).

information on customary non-commercial harvesting of shellfish and the level of recreational harvest from the Auckland Coromandel area is uncertain.

50. A broader range of shellfish species were likely of significance to tāngata whenua in the past. A study looking at the contents of middens in northeastern New Zealand (around the Bay of Islands) found limpets (ngākihi, kākihi), Cook's turban (karaka, ngāruru), black nerita, black mussels, cats eyes (pūpū), mud snails (whētiko), mud whelks (kawari), and surf clams.¹⁸ It is not known whether all of these species were targeted for use, and some species may have been attached to other harvested species.
51. The best available information on recreational fishing effort is the National Panel Survey of Marine Recreational Fishers 2022-2023 (NPS).¹⁹ However, FNZ considers shore-based harvesting is not well represented in the NPS estimates because:
 - a) The surveys provide information about recreational fishing effort in coastal waters throughout New Zealand at a coarse spatial resolution, which does not capture spatial patterns or information about specific sites that are popular for harvesting.
 - b) The NPS does not produce estimates of recreational harvest for species that are known to be targeted across intertidal and shallow subtidal habitats in the region (e.g., limpets, whelks, cats eyes, sea cucumbers).
 - c) Intertidal harvesting is highly valued by diverse communities who may be less likely to participate in surveys, which are voluntary, due to language barriers and practical constraints (e.g., international visitors undertaking sporadic harvest activities).
52. Given the above factors, FNZ considers it is likely the NPS underestimates the level of shore-based harvesting of shellfish and other invertebrates occurring in the Auckland Coromandel area. This view is supported by inconsistencies between the NPS estimates and the observations of fishery officers and local communities who have reported high harvest pressure at beaches in Auckland including around the Whangaparāoa Peninsula and near Māori Bay, Muriwai Beach.
53. Information gathered by fishery officers during inspections suggests a range of shellfish species are being taken by recreational fishers from beaches in the Auckland region, including crabs, pipi, tuatua, cockles, kina, green-lipped mussels, whelks, starfish, prawns, periwinkles, limpets, cats eyes, sea cucumbers, spiny rock lobsters, whelks, oysters and (from the west coast) scallops. Based on inspections undertaken in 2025, there is a high level of compliance (approximately 93% on average) with the current recreational harvesting rules in the region. However, as noted previously, tāngata whenua and local communities have expressed concern that the ongoing level of harvest observed at accessible intertidal habitats is not sustainable.

Status of intertidal shellfish and other invertebrates in the Auckland Coromandel area

54. There is insufficient information available to determine the status of recreationally targeted shellfish populations and other invertebrates (such as sea anemones and sponges) in the Auckland Coromandel area. However, ongoing monitoring at some sites gives some insights into trends in abundance.

FNZ shellfish monitoring

55. Since the early 1990s, cockle and pipi populations have been monitored across different sites in Northland, Auckland, Waikato, and Bay of Plenty. The objective of the surveys is to determine the distribution, abundance and size frequency of cockles and pipi. Both species occur throughout the Auckland region, where they are often abundant and easily accessible for hand-gathering, making them popular targets for shellfish fishing activities.
56. The latest surveys were undertaken in the summer of 2024-25.²⁰ Cockle and pipi populations across surveyed sites in the Auckland region, which included Cockle Bay, Kawakawa Bay (West), Mill Bay, Ōkahu and Ōkoromai bays, were generally large, consisting of millions of individuals. Their densities

¹⁸ Booth (2016).

¹⁹ Heinemann, A. and Gray A. (2024).

²⁰ Berkenbusch, K. and Hill-Moana, T. (2025).

varied dependent on the site but were a minimum of over 140 individuals per square metre for cockles, and over 180 individuals per square metre for pipi.²¹

57. Few large cockles (defined as ≥ 30 mm shell length) were found across the surveyed cockle populations. However, a number of survey sites were characterised by strong recruitment²² including cockle populations at Kawakawa Bay (West), Ōkahu Bay and Ōkoromai Bay.
58. Pipi populations were assessed at six of the northern sites which are located outside of the Auckland Coromandel area. Pipi densities were generally high (i.e. several hundred individuals per square metre) across all the sites. However, similar to cockles, large pipi (≥ 50 mm shell length) were scarce or absent.
59. The recent survey results indicate that cockle populations at surveyed sites in the Auckland Coromandel area are relatively abundant despite some areas, such as Ōkoromai Bay, being subject to ongoing harvesting activities.
60. FNZ is currently developing an expanded monitoring programme that will include intertidal rocky shore sites at popular harvesting locations (this is addressed further below under '*role of scientific and community monitoring*').

Auckland Council State of the Environment monitoring

61. Auckland Council has undertaken long-term monitoring of intertidal and shallow subtidal sites as part of its State of the Environment reporting.²³ These surveys provide insights on changes in the abundance and distribution of intertidal species assemblages over time at a regional scale.
62. Results from the latest surveys²⁴ suggest cumulative pressures, including sedimentation, heavy metal contamination, pollution, harvesting and climate change, are negatively impacting biodiversity and community structure at intertidal and shallow subtidal sites in the Auckland region. In particular:
 - a) Chronic sedimentation issues were apparent across the monitoring network. Extreme rainfall in 2023 resulted in sediment inundation of intertidal reefs on the east coast. Subsequent surveys found marked declines in species richness and macroinvertebrate abundances and site-specific changes in community structure. For example, dense cockle beds were recorded at Ōmana Beach, near Beachlands, in what was previously characterised as rocky reef habitat.²⁵
 - b) Large declines in the cover of green-lipped mussels (*Perna canaliculus*) were observed across the low tidal zone at Piha (~44% to ~11%) and Te Henga (~62% to ~11%) between 2022 and 2024. This coincided with much of the low tidal zone being buried by sand following heavy rainfall events. By 2024, black mussels (*Xenostrobus pulex*) had replaced green-lipped mussels as the primary mussel species within the low tidal zone at Piha and Te Henga. Barnacle cover increased at the Te Henga site during the same period.²⁶
 - c) The abundance of macroinvertebrates has fluctuated over time. However, some declining trends have been recorded which indicate potential sustainability risks. Across survey sites in the Hauraki Gulf, periwinkle (*Risellopsis varia*) declined in abundance between 2011 and 2013 and it has not been recorded again.²⁷ In the mid tidal zone, densities of black nerite sea snails (*N. melantotragus*) halved between 2021 and 2023 from ~53 per m² to ~26 m², having been stable up to that point.²⁸ Densities of black topshell (*Diloma aethiops*) were stable from 2011 to 2021 then declined significantly in 2023; and snakeskin chiton (*Sypharochiton pelliserpentis*) declined over the same period. In the low tide zone, cats eyes (*L. smaragdus*) declined to a historic low point in 2023, and limpets (*Siphonaria* sp) declined to near zero.

²¹ There is uncertainty associated with model estimates of cockle populations because high-density cockle patches shift between surveys.

²² Indicated by a relatively high proportion (i.e. over 20% of the total population) of recruits (≤ 15 mm shell length).

²³ Auckland Council State of the Environment Monitoring Reports, [here](#); refer Spyskma, A. and Shears N. (2025); Shears, N. (2025); and Drylie, T. (2025).

²⁴ Results from intertidal reef surveys undertaken in 2023 (east coast mainland sites) and 2024 (west coast mainland sites) were reported in the 2025 Auckland Council State of the Environment Monitoring report.

²⁵ Spyskma, A. and Shears, N. (2025).

²⁶ Spyskma, A. and Shears, N. (2025) at page 41.

²⁷ Spyskma, A., and Shears N. (2025) at page 52.

²⁸ Spyskma, A., and Shears N. (2025) at page 52.

- d) Region-wide declines in the abundance of multiple gastropod and seaweed species have occurred at shallow subtidal reef sites in the Hauraki Gulf.²⁹
 - e) Declines in indicator species, including wedge shells and nut shells, have been recorded in shallow soft sedimentary habitats at certain sites in estuaries and harbours.³⁰
63. Despite these trends, Auckland Council's 2023 surveys indicate that certain shellfish species remain relatively abundant in some areas. For example, sites on the east coast from Mathesons Bay to Arkles Bay were characterised by relatively high abundances of cats eyes and nerite sea snails as well as whelks, chitons and limpets,³¹ and cats eyes were generally the most abundant gastropod species recorded in the low tidal zone across the region (except for exposed sites on the west coast).³²
64. Auckland Council's monitoring was not designed to capture the impacts of specific human stressors or the causes of any changes in community structure. The results of surveys suggest a range of pressures are influencing intertidal and shallow subtidal marine life. These include sedimentation, storm impacts, harvesting, invasive species, pollution, eutrophication (i.e. algal blooms associated with excessive nutrients) and marine heatwaves.

²⁹ Shears, N. (2025).

³⁰ Drylie, T. (2025).

³¹ Spyksma, A., and Shears N. (2025) at page 43.

³² Spyksma, A., and Shears N. (2025) at page 60.

Problem definition

65. There have been ongoing concerns about the sustainability of intertidal shellfish and other fisheries resources in the Auckland Coromandel area. In 2025, FNZ initiated a review of the recreational settings for shellfish in the Auckland Coromandel area, responding to a key management action in the Hauraki Gulf Fisheries Plan (Action 2.5.2) as well as widespread and longstanding community concerns about intertidal harvesting pressure.
66. In recent months, FNZ has received reports of increased shore-based harvest activity with large quantities of shellfish and other invertebrates being taken by recreational fishers from some beaches in Auckland. Anecdotal information provided by community groups and fishery officers suggests there has been a shift in recreational fishing effort towards species found across the rocky shore and in rock pools (e.g., cats eyes, crabs, limpets, periwinkles, starfish, and whelks). Tāngata whenua and members of the public have expressed concerns about the quantity of shellfish and other marine life being taken from some locations and requested additional measures to reduce impacts of recreational harvesting on intertidal marine life and ecosystems.
67. FNZ acknowledges these concerns and note they highlight the growing popularity of intertidal harvest activity for recreational fishers, particularly of shellfish species found across the rocky shore at locations which are easily accessed during low tide. Many of these species currently fall within the general recreational daily limit of 50 shellfish per person and some invertebrate species (such as sea anemones and sponges) do not have limits constraining daily take.
68. FNZ considers there is a need to update the recreational management settings to address harvest pressure on intertidal shellfish and other invertebrates that are being increasingly targeted by recreational fishers at locations in the Auckland Coromandel area.

Objectives and scope of review

Objectives

69. The purpose of this discussion document is to seek feedback on proposals to manage shore-based harvest pressure and sustainability risks for shellfish and other invertebrates in the Auckland Coromandel area.
70. The primary objective of this review is to explore options to better ensure the sustainability of shellfish that currently fall within the general combined daily limit of 50 per person per day. This limit applies to a range of shellfish species, including crabs, sea cucumbers, periwinkles, whelks, limpets, and cats eyes, which are being taken by recreational fishers across intertidal rocky shore and shallow subtidal sites in the Auckland region.
71. An associated objective is to mitigate the potential impacts of indiscriminate harvesting practices. FNZ has received reports of some fishers using indiscriminate harvesting methods to take shellfish and other invertebrates (including sea anemones and sponges) from the intertidal rocky shore. Currently in the Auckland Coromandel area, invertebrate species are not subject to recreational daily limits (as they are not shellfish) which means fishers can legally take unlimited quantities of these each day under the Act and Amateur Fishing Regulations.
72. To address these core objectives, FNZ is seeking feedback on proposed area closure options, which would either prohibit or restrict recreational take of invertebrates from a defined intertidal closure area that extends from the mean high-water mark to 200 m offshore along the Auckland Coromandel mainland and Waiheke Island coastline (a map of the indicative boundaries of the closure area is provided in Figure 3).
73. The existing general combined recreational daily limit of 50 shellfish applies to a wide range of species with different life histories and biological characteristics, including species found across the intertidal rocky shore (e.g., barnacles, periwinkles, limpets and cats eyes) as well as species with predominately subtidal life histories that may be more resilient to shore-based harvest activities (e.g., rock lobsters,

scallops, sea cucumbers, octopus and squid). To account for the different characteristics of shellfish species found across intertidal habitats, FNZ is seeking feedback on a partial intertidal closure option that would permit some ongoing utilisation of named shellfish species within defined daily limits. To implement this option, it would be necessary to set new daily limits for certain shellfish species that currently fall within the default limit of 50 shellfish (i.e., crabs, octopus, squid, shrimps and sea cucumbers).

74. In addition to options for a full or partial closure to intertidal harvesting, FNZ is seeking feedback on whether to:
- Retain the general combined daily limit of 50 shellfish (which applies to species without their own defined limit); or
 - Set a new combined daily limit of 10 shellfish (to apply to any species without a defined daily limit).
75. The intent of this measure is to ensure that recreational harvest of shellfish in areas outside of the intertidal closure (e.g., subtidal areas beyond the 200 m limit and intertidal habitats around offshore islands) does not exceed a level that is sustainable or reasonable for daily utilisation.
76. FNZ intends to review the management settings for shellfish species on an ongoing basis. Available information from monitoring surveys and other sources will be assessed and a review initiated if any sustainability risks are identified that warrant further management action.

Scope of review

77. This review focuses on measures that aim to reduce shore-based harvest pressure on shellfish and other invertebrate species in the Auckland Coromandel area.
78. The following activities are out of scope of this review:
- Commercial fishing:** in recent years there has been limited commercial take of shellfish from the proposed intertidal closure area. Red spiny and packhorse rock lobsters and kina have been commercially targeted in the area, and some octopus have been taken as bycatch during rock lobster potting activities. Implementing additional restrictions on commercial take of shellfish and other invertebrate species would not address the issue of high harvest pressure and associated sustainability risks related to shore-based gathering of shellfish from accessible locations at low tide.
 - Recreational harvest of seaweed species:** while some gathering of beach cast seaweed (i.e. seaweed that has washed ashore) occurs in the Auckland Coromandel area, anecdotal information suggests wild seaweeds are not being regularly targeted by groups of recreational fishers.³³ A broader review of restrictions for seaweed gathering can be undertaken if fisher behaviour changes and increased seaweed gathering is observed.
79. The proposals in this document would restrict recreational take of shellfish and other invertebrates to varying degrees in the intertidal closure area. Under all options, FNZ is proposing to create an exception for shellfish species that are being managed under the Biosecurity Act 1993. For example, Asian paddle crab (*Carybdis japonica*) and Japanese mantis shrimp (*Oratosquilla oratoria*). Marine pests³⁴ can negatively impact endemic shellfish populations through competition, predation and habitat alteration. An exception is necessary to ensure restrictions on recreational take of pest species do not inadvertently result in negative impacts for endemic shellfish species.

What we are proposing to change: *status quo*

80. In the Auckland Coromandel area, recreational take of shellfish is managed using a combination of daily limits and site-specific closures (Table 2; Table 3). No daily limits have been set for other invertebrate species (i.e. non-shellfish) as these were not historically targeted by recreational fishers.

³³ Anecdotal information suggests *Undaria pinnatifida*, an invasive brown seaweed, is targeted by recreational fishers on the northeast coast.

³⁴ The exception would apply to species that meet the definition of a "pest" or "unwanted organism" under s 2(1) of the Biosecurity Act 1996. Under that Act, the definition of "pest" includes organisms that have been specified as a pest in a pest management plan (e.g., Asian paddle crab, Japanese mantis shrimp) while the definition of "unwanted organism" includes species registered as unwanted organisms that have not been recorded in New Zealand waters (e.g., Northern Pacific seastar and European shore crab).

However, in response to concerns about intertidal harvest pressure, the Minister recently decided to implement a 2-year temporary closure at three locations on the east coast of the Auckland Coromandel area. In the temporary closure area, which extends from the mean high-water mark to approximately 200 m offshore, recreational and commercial take of all invertebrate and seaweed species is prohibited. Exceptions apply to kina, scallops and spiny rock lobsters as these species are subject to regular review and bespoke management settings.

81. Under the *status quo*, most of the Auckland Coromandel coastline remains open to recreational harvest of shellfish and other invertebrate species. Currently, a broad range of species fall within the general combined daily limit of 50 shellfish, including popular species targeted by recreational fishers across the intertidal rocky shore (e.g., limpets, periwinkles, cats eyes and whelks) as well as popular species with predominately subtidal life histories (e.g., crabs, octopus, squid, shrimps and sea cucumbers). Table 4 illustrates how these measures apply to the proposed intertidal closure area (high-water mark to 200 m offshore) and other areas (beyond 200 m offshore) areas.
82. While the recently implemented temporary closure prohibits take of all invertebrate and seaweed species from three areas on the east coast of the Auckland Coromandel area, local communities in other places that experience concentrated harvest pressure, such as Muriwai and Piha on the west coast and Takapuna and Devonport on the east coast, have requested further restrictions to reduce intertidal harvest pressure and support sustainable harvesting activity across the region.
83. FNZ is not proposing to retain the *status quo* recreational management settings for shellfish and other invertebrates in the Auckland Coromandel area because this would not address community concerns about increased intertidal harvest pressure and sustainability risks associated with utilisation up to the current combined daily limit of 50 shellfish or, for invertebrates, unconstrained harvest.

Table 4. Scope of recreational measures under the *status quo* daily limits which apply to most of the Auckland Coromandel area (i.e. this does not account for site-specific measures which apply to particular locations).

Intertidal areas (i.e. from the mean high-water mark to 200 m offshore)	
Fishers can take	Fishers cannot take
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any shellfish within existing daily limits (Table 2) “Any other” shellfish without species-specific daily limits, including periwinkles, chitons, limpets, whelks, sea cucumbers, squid, octopus, within the existing combined daily limit of 50 per person Any other invertebrates (e.g., worms, sponges, sea anemones, and sea squirts) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Toheroa
Other areas (seaward of the 200 m limit in the wider Auckland Coromandel area)	
Fishers can take	Fishers cannot take
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any shellfish within existing daily limits (Table 2) “Any other” shellfish without species-specific daily limits, including periwinkles, chitons, limpets, whelks, sea cucumbers, squid, octopus, within the existing combined daily limit of 50 per person Any other invertebrates (e.g., worms, sponges, sea anemones, and sea squirts) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Toheroa

Proposed options

Summary of options

84. FNZ is seeking submissions on proposed options for area closures and changes to the recreational daily limits for certain shellfish species in the Auckland Coromandel area.

Table 5: Proposed options for recreational fisheries measures for the Auckland Coromandel area

Proposed intertidal closure area	
<p>Option 1: Full intertidal closure</p>	<p>This option would prohibit recreational take of shellfish and other invertebrates from the defined intertidal closure area.</p> <p>This is a highly restrictive option that would prohibit recreational take of a range of valued shellfish species including spiny and packhorse rock lobsters, pāua, scallops, and squid.</p> <p>The existing combined ‘any other’ daily limit of 50 shellfish, as well as the species-specific recreational shellfish limits, would continue to apply outside the intertidal closure area.</p>
<p>Option 2: Partial intertidal closure (with exceptions)</p>	<p>This option would prohibit recreational take of shellfish and other invertebrates from the defined intertidal closure area.</p> <p>However, exceptions would allow the harvest of named shellfish species within recreational daily limits. The named species are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bivalves (i.e. cockles (50), pipi (50), pacific or rock oysters (100), dredge oysters (50), scallops (20), and tuatua (50)) • Crabs (10*) • Kina (150 east coast and 50 west coast) • Octopus (1*) • Blackfoot pāua (10) and yellow-foot pāua (10) • Sea cucumbers (5*) • Shrimps (20*) • Spiny (3) and packhorse rock lobsters (3) • Squid (5*) <p>The recreational shellfish daily limits will include existing limits for some species (shown in brackets above) and new limits for other species shown with a * (i.e. crabs, octopus, sea cucumbers, shrimps, and squid).</p> <p>The existing combined ‘any other’ daily limit of 50 shellfish, as well as the species-specific recreational shellfish limits would apply outside the intertidal closure area.</p>
Proposed intertidal closure area + new combined recreational daily limit of ten shellfish	
<p>Option 3: Full intertidal closure + new combined daily limit</p>	<p>This option is a full intertidal closure (Option 1) plus, outside of the intertidal closure area, a combined recreational daily limit of ten shellfish for any species without its own recreational daily limit, in the Auckland Coromandel area.</p> <p>The ten shellfish limit would apply to a broad range of species (e.g. barnacles, crabs, limpets, octopus, periwinkles, sea cucumbers, shrimps and squid). It would not apply to species that have their own recreational daily limit (e.g., cockles, pipi, tuatua, spiny and packhorse rock lobsters).</p>
<p>Option 4: Partial intertidal closure + new combined daily limit</p>	<p>This option is a partial intertidal closure (Option 2) plus, outside of the intertidal closure area, a combined recreational daily limit of ten shellfish for any species without its own recreational daily limit, in the Auckland Coromandel area.</p> <p>The ten shellfish limit would apply to a narrower range of species (e.g. barnacles, limpets, periwinkles). It would not apply to species that have their own recreational daily limit (e.g. cockles, pipi, tuatua, spiny and packhorse rock lobsters and (as proposed) crabs, octopus, sea cucumbers, shrimps and squid).</p>

85. Under all options:
- a) The proposed intertidal closure would not affect existing shellfish area closures, Marine Reserves or High Protection Areas. In practice, this means existing site-specific fishing restrictions would be retained. However, in some areas, the proposed intertidal closure would introduce *additional* restrictions by prohibiting recreational take of a broader range of species than under the *status quo*. For example, if Option 1 were implemented (as proposed), the existing ban on recreational take of cockles at Umupuia Beach would continue to apply. In addition, recreational take of other shellfish, including green-lipped mussels, would be prohibited from this area (within the 200 m limit).
 - b) Authorised customary fishing would not be affected by any of the proposed harvesting restrictions.

Proposed intertidal closure area

86. FNZ has explored a range of options for defining an intertidal closure area. For ease of implementation and enforcement, FNZ is proposing to align the boundaries of the proposed closure area with the recent section 186A temporary closure at Ōmaha Bay, Kawau Bay, and Whangaparāoa Peninsula.
87. Under all options, the proposed closure would extend seaward from the mean high-water mark to a distance that is approximately 200 m offshore along the Auckland Coromandel mainland and Waiheke Island coastline. In some places, the seaward boundary would extend slightly further offshore to include coastal islands that may be accessible on foot from the mainland during low tidal stages and accommodate the unique geomorphology of bays, harbours and rivers. A map showing the indicative boundaries of the intertidal closure area is provided in Figure 3.
88. FNZ is not proposing to implement an intertidal closure around other offshore islands in the Auckland Coromandel area as these are not highly populated and/or require boat access. However, we welcome your views on whether you consider additional intertidal closures are necessary.
89. All the proposed options would restrict recreational harvesting of invertebrates to varying degrees within the proposed intertidal closure area.
90. The intent of the proposed options is to mitigate impacts of high harvest pressure and a broadening of recreational effort toward shellfish and other marine invertebrates that are easily accessed from shore.
91. Intertidal closures have been implemented in certain states in Australia to manage high harvest pressure. Anecdotal information suggests these fisheries restrictions are widely accepted and easily understood by the public but require targeted education and ongoing compliance efforts.
92. Spatial closures can sometimes result in the displacement (movement) of fishing effort to other locations where fishing is still allowed. Many intertidal species rely on interactions with adjacent waters for reproduction and survival. A 200 m seaward limit would capture a larger area than the intertidal zone in certain places (due to local geomorphology and other factors) and mitigate some of the risks associated with displacement of effort toward shallow subtidal habitats that are easily accessed from shore. FNZ is proposing to address any residual risks by setting a reduced combined daily limit of 10 shellfish for species without defined daily limits in these areas (Option 3 or Option 4). The scope of species falling within this limit would depend on the scope of any species exceptions to the proposed intertidal closure area.
93. This approach provides a clear and well-defined space in which intertidal harvesting is not permitted and would provide for ease of compliance and enforcement because the boundaries can be clearly mapped and communicated.

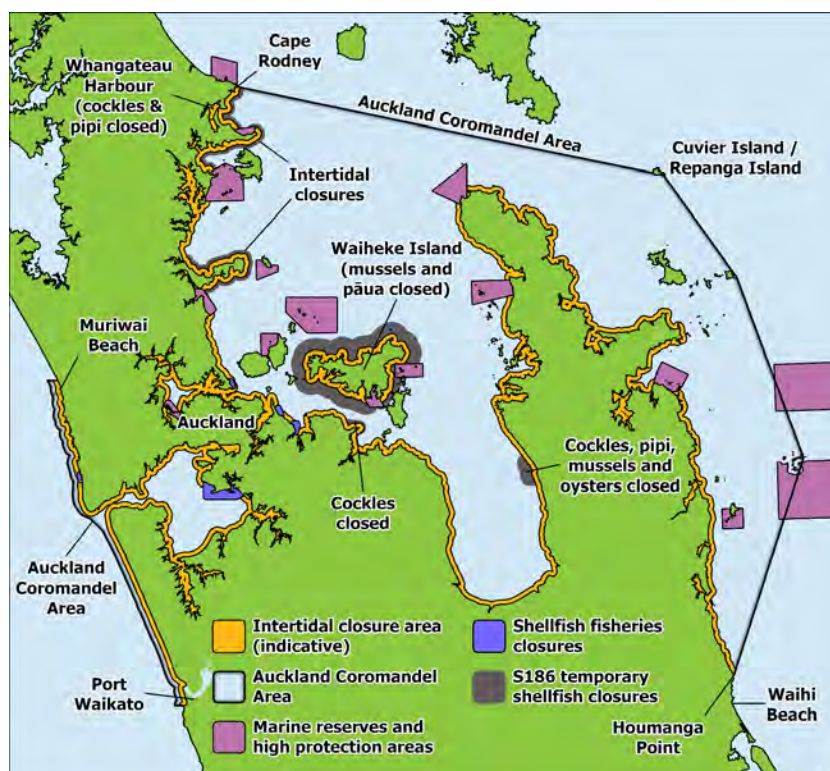


Figure 3. Proposed intertidal closure area showing existing area closures within the Auckland Coromandel area. The indicative intertidal closure area is shaded yellow and extends seaward from the high-water mark to approximately 200 m offshore along the mainland and Waiheke Island coastline.

Questions for submitters

- Do you support the boundaries of the proposed intertidal closure area (i.e. high-water mark to 200 m offshore)? If not, what are some details of an alternative boundary you support?
- Do you support the proposed intertidal closure area applying to the Auckland Coromandel mainland and Waiheke Island coastlines? If not, where do you consider the proposed intertidal closure area should apply?
- Are there any other areas, including other populated islands, that you would like to see included in the intertidal closure? If so, please indicate what additional areas you think should be included and provide information to support your views.
- Are there any areas you would like to see excluded from the proposed intertidal closure (e.g., harbours, estuaries or other specific locations)? If so, please indicate the areas you think should be excluded and provide information to support your views.
- How would the proposed closure boundaries impact you? Please provide details to support your response.
- Do you have any other feedback on the benefits and/or risks associated with the proposed boundaries and spatial extent of the intertidal closure area?

Option 1: Full intertidal closure (no exceptions)

Proposal

94. Under this option, recreational take of all species of invertebrates would be prohibited within the proposed intertidal closure area (i.e. from the high-water mark to 200 m offshore along the mainland and Waiheke Island coastline). Recreational fishers would still be able to access shellfish resources in areas beyond the seaward limit of the closure (more than ~200 m offshore (Table 6)).

Table 6. Scope of restrictions under Option 1 (this does not account for site-specific measures).

Proposed intertidal closure area (from the mean high-water mark to 200 m offshore)	
Fishers can take	Fishers cannot take
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any shellfish species that meets the definition of a <i>pest or unwanted organism</i> in the Biosecurity Act. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any shellfish including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rock lobsters (spiny or packhorse) Kina Bivalves (e.g., scallops, mussels, tuatua, pipi, cockles, oysters, and toheroa) Pāua Sea cucumbers Squid Periwinkles Limpets Cats eyes Whelks Chitons Octopus Any other invertebrates (e.g., worms, sponges, sea anemones, and sea squirts)
Other areas (seaward of the 200 m limit in Auckland Coromandel area)	
Fishers can take	Fishers cannot take
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any shellfish within existing daily limits (Table 2) Up to 50 of “any other” shellfish without a species-specific daily limit, including crabs, periwinkles, limpets, whelks, shrimps, sea cucumbers, squid, octopus Any other invertebrates (e.g., worms, sponges, sea anemones, and sea squirts). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Toheroa

Key benefits

95. Removing recreational fishing effort from the proposed intertidal closure area would address community and tāngata whenua concerns about increased intensity of shore-based harvesting activities and a broadening of effort toward a wider range of rocky shore species.
96. A full closure to recreational harvest of all invertebrates would protect intertidal marine life and ecosystems from any impacts of ongoing recreational harvesting, including direct impacts on target species and indirect impacts resulting from the use of hand-held tools to gather shellfish from rocky shore and other hard shore substrates.
97. Environmental monitoring suggests a range of cumulative stressors, including sedimentation, pollution, and marine heat waves, are negatively impacting intertidal and shallow subtidal ecosystems in the region.³⁵ Removing harvest pressure may better support the long-term sustainability of target species,

³⁵ Auckland Council State of the Environment Monitoring Reports, [here](#).

any other species impacted by harvesting activities, and promote greater resilience to other stressors that are more difficult to manage.

98. A full closure may increase the likelihood of recovery for depleted shellfish populations compared to options that enable some level of ongoing utilisation. International research shows intertidal area closures can be effective at supporting higher abundances, and larger sizes, of certain shellfish species with potential flow on benefits for reproductive output, sex ratios, and recruitment for some species and areas. However, any benefits of protection are highly uncertain and influenced by a range of local biological and environmental factors.³⁶
99. This option may future proof against further broadening of recreational harvest effort toward intertidal invertebrate species that increase in popularity to the point that utilisation becomes unsustainable.
100. A full closure may be easier to communicate to harvesters and lead to improved compliance, compared to a partial closure with multiple species exceptions (i.e. Option 2). This may support ease of implementation and enforcement.
101. An area closure can be implemented relatively quickly to address sustainability concerns under section 11 of the Act without regulatory amendments.

Key risks

102. A full closure is a highly restrictive option that would prevent recreational fishers from accessing all shellfish resources (except pest species) and significantly limit utilisation opportunities in the Auckland Coromandel area. This would negatively impact recreational fishers who value undertaking shore-based harvesting activities as well as fishers who access shallow subtidal areas for harvesting. It is likely to disproportionately impact any communities that rely on sustenance shellfish gathering. The closure may increase costs for some recreational fishers who alter their harvesting practices to access open subtidal areas or travel to open areas in adjacent regions (e.g., Waikato and Northland).
103. While any closure would not affect authorised customary fishing, it may affect harvesters who collect shellfish under recreational daily limits to fulfil customary practices.
104. A full closure may go beyond what is necessary to ensure sustainability of shellfish populations and other marine life in intertidal habitats. It may disproportionately restrict recreational take of species that are predominately harvested from subtidal areas by diving or potting methods within 200 m of the high-water mark (e.g., spiny red rock lobsters, packhorse rock lobsters, pāua, scallops, and squid). Specific risks related to this option include:
 - a) Prohibiting take of species, such as kina that are known to be highly abundant in shallow subtidal and intertidal habitats across the east coast of the Auckland Coromandel area. At high densities, kina can overgraze kelp forests and create urchin barrens. Prohibiting take of kina from intertidal and shallow subtidal habitats may adversely impact kelp forest ecosystems and undermine ongoing restoration initiatives that involve the removal of kina from urchin barrens.
 - b) Prohibiting take of shellfish species from all intertidal areas despite localised abundance and where available information indicates that harvesting activities are unlikely to be negatively impacting the long-term sustainability of localised shellfish populations. For example, recent monitoring of cockle populations in northern New Zealand showed most survey sites supported high densities of cockles, and a number of cockle populations were characterised by strong recruitment, including at Ōkahu Bay and Ōkoromai Bay, where there is ongoing harvesting.³⁷ Long-term data suggest cockle recruitment is highly variable which influences the biomass and spatial distribution of local cockle populations between years. Other bivalves, including tuatua and pipi, have similar biological characteristics and can support highly localised shellfish populations. A broad prohibition on all intertidal harvesting of these species would mean recreational fishers forgo opportunities for utilisation everywhere despite some areas supporting relatively abundant shellfish populations.

³⁶ For example, see: Roy K., et al. (2003); Alexander, T and Gladstone, W. (2013); Marra et al. (2017).

³⁷ Berkenbusch, K. and Hill-Moana T (2025).

- c) A broad spatial closure would prohibit take of recreationally targeted shellfish species with predominantly subtidal life histories that are not constrained to intertidal rocky shore habitats (e.g., crabs, octopus, rock lobsters, scallops, sea cucumbers, shrimps, squid). These species may be more resilient to intertidal harvest activity. Particularly as they are not typically taken by hand-gathering from shore.
- d) There is insufficient information to determine the status of shellfish species falling within scope of the proposed closure (e.g., cats eyes, limpets and whelks). There is a risk that a broad closure may disproportionately constrain utilisation of any species that are abundant in particular locations.
- e) A broad closure to recreational harvesting in the proposed intertidal closure area (high-water mark to 200 m offshore) would have consequences for fishers who harvest subtidal species that are highly valued, such as spiny red and packhorse rock lobsters, pāua, scallops and squid. These species would no longer be available for harvest within 200 m of the shore, and this may remove access to previously harvested subtidal areas. Particularly for rock lobsters, where coastal rocky reef habitat within 200 m of shore would not be available, and some scallop beds that are close to shore would also be closed under this measure. While the east coast scallop fishery (SCA CS) and parts of the spiny rock lobster fishery (CRA 2) are currently subject to closures under section 11 of the Act, prohibiting take of these species from across the proposed closure area could represent an opportunity cost if these areas were reopened in the future, as well as for areas that currently remain open (e.g., for scallops on the west coast and spiny red rock lobsters on the east coast around Coromandel).
- f) This arrangement may be viewed as inequitable because it does not prevent commercial harvesting activities in the same areas. In recent years there has been commercial take of red rock lobsters, packhorse rock lobsters and kina from the proposed intertidal closure area and a limited amount of octopus were taken as bycatch during potting for rock lobsters in the area. Recreational fishers may view the closure as inequitable given it would not prevent commercial take of these shellfish species. Given species that are commercially targeted in the proposed intertidal closure area (mean high water mark to 200 m offshore) are not known to be subject to high harvest pressure from shore-based harvesters who gather shellfish by hand, this risk can be mitigated by implementing a partial closure with exceptions to allow take of named species (Option 2, below).
105. A full closure may not be effective for increasing the abundance of large shellfish in areas where illegal poaching or other (non-fishing) factors are constraining shellfish growth. Results from long-term monitoring of pipi and cockle populations in northern New Zealand show large sized pipi and cockles are scarce across surveyed areas, including areas that have been closed to shellfish gathering for some time (e.g. Cockle Bay/ Tūwakamana).³⁸ This means applying a broad prohibition on harvesting may disproportionately restrict utilisation without delivering any sustainability benefits.
106. A full closure may have unintended negative consequences by allowing certain species to become highly abundant, with associated increases in predation and competition for food and habitat, which can have adverse impacts for other species (including endemic shellfish populations). For example, an over-abundance of predatory seastars, such as the eleven-armed seastar (pātangaroa, *Coscinasterias muricata*) led to depletion of mussels, pipi and cockles at Ōhiwa Harbour.³⁹ Studies have also shown that feeding aggregations of carnivorous whelks can cause high mortality of juvenile cockles (up to 50%) and significantly affect cockle recruitment on intertidal sandflats in northeast New Zealand.⁴⁰
107. A full closure may lead to displaced effort and increased harvest pressure on shellfish resources in open areas. FNZ considers there is a low risk of a seaward shift in recreational effort because the proposed intertidal closure area extends approximately 200 m offshore and subtidal shellfish resources are more difficult to access from shore without equipment (e.g. dive/snorkel) or a boat. Anecdotal

³⁸ Berkenbusch, K. and Hill-Moana T (2025).

³⁹ The abundance of starfish in Ōhiwa Harbour was a catalyst for scientific research looking at ways to utilise starfish for commercial activities. Further information is available from the *Sustainable Seas Challenge* website [here](#).

⁴⁰ Stewart, M.J. and Creese, R.G (2010).

information suggests an increase in subtidal harvesting was not observed in Australian states following implementation of similar intertidal measures. Any sustainability risks associated with ongoing utilisation up to the current recreational daily limit of 50 shellfish can be mitigated through lowering this limit for areas outside the proposed intertidal closure (i.e. Option 3 or Option 4).

- 108. This option may result in displaced effort and increased harvest pressure in areas that remain open (e.g., Northland and Waikato). FNZ considers there is an elevated risk of displaced shore-based harvesting effort during summer months and around holidays when most recreational shellfish gathering occurs.⁴¹
- 109. Implementing a broad prohibition on recreational harvesting activities in accessible intertidal areas may lead to increased rates of non-compliance. Ongoing education and enforcement initiatives will be important to ensure recreational fishers understand and comply with the intertidal closure.

Questions for submitters

- Do you support a full prohibition on recreational take of all species of shellfish and other invertebrates from the proposed intertidal closure area? Please provide details supporting your views.
- Do you have any other feedback on the benefits and/or risks associated with this option?
- How would this option of a full intertidal closure to recreational harvesting of invertebrates impact you?
- Do you consider it appropriate to exclude seaweed species from the scope of the closure? If not, what are the reasons you think seaweed should be included within the scope of the closure?

Option 2: Partial intertidal closure (with exceptions for named shellfish)

Proposal

- 110. Under this option, recreational take of all species of invertebrates would be prohibited within the proposed intertidal closure area. However, exceptions would apply to named shellfish species to allow some ongoing utilisation within recreational daily limits (as shown in Table 7).
- 111. Recreational fishers would retain access to a wider range of shellfish species in areas located beyond the 200 m limit.

Table 7. Scope of restrictions under Option 2 (this does not account for site-specific measures).

Proposed intertidal closure area (from mean high-water mark to 200 m limit)	
Fishers can take	Fishers cannot take
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any shellfish species that meets the definition of a <i>pest or unwanted organism</i> in the Biosecurity Act • The following named shellfish species within existing daily limits (Table 2): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Bivalves (i.e. cockles, pipi, scallops, tuatua, rock/pacific or dredge oysters) ○ Kina ○ Pāua ○ Rock lobsters (spiny or packhorse) • The following named shellfish species within proposed daily limits (Table 8): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Crabs ○ Octopus ○ Sea cucumbers ○ Shrimps ○ Squid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Any other” species of shellfish including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Periwinkles ○ Limpets ○ Cats eyes ○ Whelks ○ Chitons ○ Barnacles ○ Mussels (including green-lipped mussels) ○ Toheroa • Any other invertebrates (e.g., worms, sponges, sea anemones, and sea squirts)

⁴¹ The 2022-23 NPS estimates that a third of all fishing events in the northern fisheries management areas (FMA 1 and FMA 9) occurred in December and January. However, the number of fishing events increased substantially from October, with 65 percent of fishing events taking place between October and February inclusive.

Other areas (beyond 200 m limit in Auckland Coromandel area)	
Fishers can take	Fishers cannot take
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The following named shellfish species within existing daily limits (Table 2): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Bivalves (i.e. cockles, pipi, scallops, tuatua, rock/pacific or dredge oysters) ○ Kina ○ Pāua ○ Rock lobsters (spiny or packhorse) ○ Mussels (including green-lipped mussels) (<i>this differs to the intertidal closure area</i>) • The following shellfish species within proposed daily limits (Table 8): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Crabs ○ Octopus ○ Sea cucumbers ○ Shrimps ○ Squid • Up to 50 of “any other” shellfish without a species-specific daily limit, including periwinkles, limpets, and whelks. • Any other invertebrates (e.g., worms, sponges, sea anemones, and sea squirts) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toheroa

112. FNZ is proposing to make exceptions for certain shellfish species that are already subject to:
- a) Reduced daily limits within the Auckland Coromandel area;
 - b) Species-specific daily limits; and/or
 - c) Regular stock assessments, monitoring, reviews and spatial closures.
113. FNZ is also proposing to create exceptions for certain groups of recreationally targeted shellfish species that may be more resilient to intertidal harvesting activities because they:
- a) Are relatively mobile (i.e., not attached to intertidal substrate);
 - b) Are widely distributed across intertidal and subtidal habitats; and/or
 - c) Have predominately subtidal life histories.
114. Many of these species, including some bivalves (e.g., scallops), sea cucumbers, squid, octopus and rock lobsters (spiny and packhorse) are not known to be subject to high shore-based harvest pressure because they are predominately found in subtidal areas (below the low tide mark). Creating exceptions for these species may better provide for sustainable utilisation in accordance with the purpose of the Act (the legal framework is further addressed in Appendix Three).
115. A list of the proposed species exceptions and key factors informing their development is provided in Table 8 below. Based on available information, FNZ’s preliminary analysis has not identified any sustainability concerns associated with permitting ongoing utilisation up to the daily limits proposed. However, we welcome feedback on the proposed limits and any alternative limits.
116. Existing recreational daily limits would be retained (where applicable) for any species exceptions. However, certain shellfish species do not have existing species-specific daily limits. Therefore, FNZ is proposing to set reduced daily limits for these species to mitigate any sustainability risks associated with ongoing harvest in the Auckland Coromandel area. These limits would be set through the Fisheries (Recreational Management Controls) Notice and apply alongside existing limits.

- 117. This option generally aligns with the spatial management approach adopted in most parts of Victoria, Australia, where a targeted intertidal closure prohibits take of all molluscs except for a relatively broad range of named species including bivalve shellfish such as pipi, scallops, and oysters, rock lobsters, squid, octopus, urchins, marine worms, and burrowing shrimps. These intertidal harvesting restrictions have been in place for many years, and anecdotal information suggests they are widely accepted by shellfish gatherers and easy to understand and comply with.
- 118. FNZ is not proposing to allow recreational gathering of mussels from the intertidal closure area. Available information suggests green-lipped mussels, which are the most popular recreationally harvested mussel species in the Auckland region, have declined at certain locations, including Te Henga and Piha, on Auckland’s west coast in recent years alongside large changes in sand levels and temperature fluctuations.⁴² These recent declines on the west coast follow large-scale declines in the extent of green-lipped mussel beds on the east coast within the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park.
- 119. Green-lipped mussel beds in the Hauraki Gulf supported commercial dredge fisheries until the late 1960s.⁴³ Beds were serially depleted over time and green-lipped mussel populations around Coromandel and the eastern firth shoreline declined. The declines are thought to reflect excessive harvesting of green-lipped mussels as well as removal of suitable substrate (e.g., dead shells) for mussels to settle on.
- 120. Green-lipped mussel beds have not recovered in the Hauraki Gulf. Surveys in 2001 and 2002 of the Firth of Thames and the western inner gulf,⁴⁴ found no sign of green-lipped mussel bed recovery (very few mussel clumps were seen in the Firth of Thames, with the largest being around 0.5 m²).⁴⁵ Potential factors constraining recovery include limited substrate for larvae to settle on (e.g., dead shells) and ongoing silt re-suspension from storms. Considerable efforts are now being made to restore green-lipped mussel beds in the Hauraki Gulf.⁴⁶
- 121. The best available information on recreational harvesting effort is provided by the NPS.⁴⁷ There has been a declining trend in estimated annual harvest of green-lipped mussels within the northern fisheries (FMA 1 and FMA 9). The 2011-12 NPS estimated that 576,000 and 154,000 green-lipped mussels were harvested from FMA 1 and FMA 9 respectively. However, the 2022-23 NPS estimated that 37,000 and 13,000 mussels were harvested from FMA 1 and FMA 9. While recreational fishing effort has declined over the same period and these declines could reflect changes in fisher behaviour, FNZ has received reports of high harvest pressure on green-lipped mussels at popular beaches in the Auckland region and Auckland Council’s state of the environment monitoring indicates that intertidal populations of green-lipped mussels have exhibited declines in cover at survey sites on the west coast. Therefore, FNZ considers there could be sustainability risks associated with ongoing recreational harvesting up to the current daily limit of 25 green-lipped mussels.

Table 8. Proposed species exceptions that would allow utilisation within the intertidal closure under Option 2.

Species	Proposed limit	Key management context informing proposals
Pāua and named bivalves (i.e., cockles, oysters, pipi, scallops, and tuatua)	Retain the existing limits for these species (Table 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These species are already subject to defined daily limits that were set to manage sustainability risks associated with ongoing high harvest pressure. • Certain species are subject to regular monitoring surveys and site-specific measures. • Recent surveys suggest northern cockle populations are relatively abundant at most surveyed locations with high density cockle beds at certain fished sites including Ōkoromai Bay on the Whangaparāoa Peninsula.⁴⁸

⁴² Spyksma, A. and Shears, N. (2025).

⁴³ Morrison, M.A. et al (2023) provides an overview of available information regarding green-lipped mussel beds in the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park.

⁴⁴ Surveys were undertaken using single beam acoustic (both surveys) and sidescan sonar (2001 survey only) methods.

⁴⁵ Morrison et al. (2002) and Morrison et al. (2003) as cited in Morrison, M.A. et al (2023).

⁴⁶ [Revive Our Gulf](#).

⁴⁷ FNZ (2025a).

⁴⁸ Berkenbusch, K. and Hill-Moana, T. (2025).

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The existing management settings can be reviewed if available information suggests further actions are warranted. Pacific oysters have built up into reefs in some places (e.g., Manukau Harbour) which limit the ability for people to safely use areas for boating, wind-surfing and other activities. A prohibition on take of these species may limit community efforts to remove oysters as part of restoration initiatives without delivering any sustainability benefits.
Crabs	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anecdotal information from fishery officers indicates that some fishers are taking large quantities of crabs from nearshore areas in the Auckland Coromandel area. Crabs comprise a group of species that are widely distributed across coastal waters.⁴⁹ Many species occupy a range of different habitat types, spanning rocky shores, other hard substrates (e.g., wharf pilings), and soft sedimentary substrates (e.g., mud and sand flats in estuaries and harbours). Crabs are mobile and move between intertidal and subtidal habitats at different spatial and temporal scales. Most crab species, including paddle crabs, produce juvenile life stages that are capable of dispersal via currents to other areas before settling on suitable substrate. This may promote greater resilience to concentrated harvest pressure in specific locations. A new daily limit of 10 crabs per fisher is proposed. This limit would apply as a combined limit meaning up to 10 of any individual crab species or combination of crab species can be taken per fisher per day.
Kina	Retain the existing limits (Table 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kina barrens are a significant concern in north-eastern New Zealand where high densities of sea urchins can consume most, or all, of the vegetation (kelp and other macroalgae) on a rocky reef. The result of this over-grazing by kina is not just a loss of kelp forests, but also the loss of coastal productivity and biodiversity.⁵⁰ The recreational daily limit for “kina” (which is defined to include <i>Evechinus chloroticus</i> and <i>Centrostephanus rogersii</i> in the Amateur Fishing Regulations) in the northeastern fishery (FMA 1) was increased from 50 to 150 kina per fisher in August 2024 to support management of kina barrens and, as part of a wider suite of measures, to mitigate further formation of kina barrens in fished areas. The recreational daily limit for kina on the northwest coast (FMA 9) is set at 50 kina per fisher. While kina barrens are not known to be prevalent on the west coast, there are no known sustainability concerns associated with ongoing recreational harvest within the existing daily limit. In recent years, commercial fishers have targeted kina in the proposed intertidal closure area (from the mean high-water mark to 200 m offshore) in the Auckland Coromandel area. Providing for recreational take of kina from this area would

⁴⁹ Cox, S.L. and Ahyong, S.T. (2020).

⁵⁰ Spyksma, A. (2025).

		support equitable access between the commercial and recreational fishing sectors.
Octopus	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anecdotal information from fishery officers indicates that some fishers are taking octopus from the proposed intertidal closure area (mean high water to 200 m offshore) in the Auckland Coromandel area. • Octopus species form an important component of coastal marine habitats across New Zealand. • Octopus are mobile and widely distributed across subtidal areas which may promote greater resilience to intertidal harvesting activities. • The common octopus (<i>Pinnoctopus cordiformis</i>) is widespread across New Zealand’s main and outlying islands, occurring from the intertidal zone to around 300 m. The gloomy octopus (<i>Octopus tetricus</i> / <i>O. gibbsi</i> sp.) inhabits shallow (0–40 m) reef habitats of the northeastern North Island and southeastern Australia. The club pygmy octopus (<i>Octopus huttoni</i>) spans a broad geographical and depth range—from the Three Kings to the subantarctic islands—and occurs across a wide depth range (0 to >380 m). • A new daily limit of 1 octopus per fisher is proposed. This limit would apply as a combined limit meaning only 1 of any species of octopus could be taken per fisher per day. • In recent years, commercial fishers have taken a limited amount of octopus as bycatch when targeting rock lobsters in the proposed intertidal closure area (from the mean high-water mark to 200 m offshore). Providing for recreational take of octopus from this area would support equitable access between the commercial and recreational fishing sectors.
Sea cucumbers	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anecdotal information from fishery officers indicates that some fishers are taking sea cucumbers from the proposed intertidal closure area (mean high water to 200 m offshore) in the Auckland Coromandel area. • More than 100 species of sea cucumber are found in New Zealand waters but <i>Australostichopus mollis</i> is the only species of commercial value.⁵¹ • <i>A. mollis</i> is found across a range of subtidal sandy and rocky reef habitats in northeastern New Zealand. • Sea cucumbers are broadcast spawners and juveniles undergo a larval stage (3-4 weeks) before settlement which can support wider dispersal in areas that are influenced by currents. • The NPS does not produce estimates for recreational harvest of sea cucumbers. However, anecdotal information suggests sea cucumbers are highly regarded by recreational fishers. • Fishery officers have observed high recreational harvesting effort for sea cucumbers in particular locations, including the Mahurangi Harbour, and there are concerns that recreational fishers may be taking excessive numbers under the existing combined limit of 50, possibly for black-market activities.

⁵¹ FNZ (2025a). Refer to the Fisheries Assessment Plenary May 2025 for a summary of available information about sea cucumbers.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sea cucumbers are not known to be subject to intensive intertidal harvest pressure as they are found in subtidal areas (i.e. below low tide mark). A new daily limit of five sea cucumbers per fisher is proposed to ensure ongoing harvesting does not exceed a reasonable level for daily utilisation and to support the long-term sustainability of sea cucumber populations in the Auckland Coromandel area.
Shrimps	20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A variety of burrowing shrimp species (<i>Alpheus novaezelandiae</i>, <i>Palaemon affinis</i>, and <i>Callinassa filhollive</i>) are found within intertidal and shallow subtidal soft sediments in the Auckland region. Glass shrimps (<i>Paratya curvirostris</i>) are a popular recreational target species taken from certain estuaries and harbours in the Auckland Coromandel area. Fishery officers have observed high recreational harvesting effort for shrimps in particular locations, and in some instances, excessive harvesting (more than 50 shrimps per fisher) has been identified during inspections in the Auckland region. A new reduced daily limit of 20 shrimps per fisher is proposed. This limit would apply as a combined limit meaning up to 20 of any individual or combined species of shrimps could be taken per fisher per day.
Spiny and packhorse rock lobsters	Retain the existing limits (Table 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The spiny rock lobster fishery on the east coast of the Auckland Coromandel area is highly valued by customary, recreational, and commercial fishers, due both to its close proximity to large population centres and its export value.⁵² In recent years, commercial fishers have targeted both red spiny and packhorse rock lobsters in the proposed intertidal closure area (from the mean high-water mark to 200 m offshore). Providing for recreational take of spiny and packhorse rock lobsters from this area would support equitable access between the commercial and recreational fishing sectors. The management settings for spiny rock lobster in the Hauraki Gulf, Bay of Plenty and Coromandel (CRA 2) fishery were reviewed in April 2025. Despite recent stock assessments indicating that the CRA 2 biomass had increased, the Minister decided to retain the catch limits and allowances for CRA 2, and to close the inner Hauraki Gulf to commercial and recreational spiny rock lobster fishing. In December 2025, the Minister decided to close an additional area of coastline in CRA 2 between Te Ārai Point and the inner Hauraki Gulf at Cape Rodney to commercial and recreational spiny rock lobster fishing. Existing closures to spiny rock lobster fishing cover a large area of intertidal and shallow subtidal habitats on the east coast. However, the spiny rock lobster fishery remains open

⁵² FNZ (2025b). Refer to the Fisheries Assessment Plenary November 2025 for summaries of available information about rock lobsters.

		<p>on the southeast and west coast of the Auckland Coromandel area (Figure 2).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In December 2025, the Minister also decided to set a new recreational daily limit for packhorse (nationally) which reduced the amount of packhorse rock lobster that could be taken by recreational fishers from six to three per fisher. • Rock lobsters are not known to be subject to intensive intertidal harvest pressure as they are found in subtidal areas (i.e. below low tide mark). • The existing measures for spiny and packhorse rock lobster were recently set following a formal review and public consultation. FNZ is proposing to retain these measures.
Squid	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrow squid and broad squid are targeted by recreational fishers using rod/line and jigging methods from shore, including from popular wharves on the east coast of the Auckland region within the intertidal closure area.⁵³ • Squid are widely distributed, mobile and have subtidal life histories. • Squid are not known to be subject to intensive intertidal harvest pressure as they are found in subtidal areas (i.e. below low tide mark). • A new daily limit of 5 squid per fisher is proposed. This limit would apply as a combined limit meaning up to 5 of any individual or combined species of squid could be taken per fisher per day.

122. The proposed exceptions in Table 8 are not expected to compromise the intent of reducing the overall impacts of intensive harvesting along the intertidal closure area. FNZ would continue to monitor harvesting activity and could take further action if sustainability concerns were identified.

Key benefits

123. This option would address community concerns and sustainability risks associated with increased intensity of shore-based harvesting activities and a broadening of effort toward a wider range of rocky shore species at intertidal locations (e.g. mainland and Waiheke Island coastline).
124. Recreational fishers would retain flexibility to harvest a wide range of highly valued shellfish species from accessible intertidal and shallow subtidal locations. Permitting some limited ongoing utilisation of shellfish resources from intertidal habitats in the Auckland Coromandel area may mitigate sustainability risks associated with displaced effort to open areas in other regions.
125. Setting new daily limits for named shellfish species (e.g., crabs, octopus, sea cucumbers, shrimps and squid) would mitigate any sustainability risks associated with potential utilisation up to the current combined daily limit of 50 shellfish. These limits would apply across the entirety of the Auckland Coromandel area to support the long-term sustainability of these shellfish populations across a larger area where recreational harvesting occurs.
126. Setting new daily limits for shellfish species (e.g., sea cucumbers and shrimps) that are being taken in large quantities from certain areas may discourage excessive recreational take for illegal trade and other black-market activities.
127. Permitting ongoing take of kina may better support maintenance and recovery of kelp forests in fished areas that have, or are susceptible to, urchin barrens. It would also retain opportunities for community-scale management of urchin barrens, such as localised kina removal, without the need for special permits under the Act.

⁵³ FNZ (2025a). Refer to the Fisheries Assessment Plenary May 2025 for a summary of available information about arrow squid.

128. Permitting ongoing take of pacific or rock oysters would achieve better consistency with operative regional council planning objectives, which include providing for removal of Pacific oyster beds in areas where they are impeding recreational access or causing safety issues.
129. In recent years, kina, red spiny rock lobsters and packhorse rock lobsters have been commercially targeted in the proposed intertidal closure area (mean high water mark to 200 m offshore). Recent closures to parts of the spiny red rock lobster fishery (CRA 2) on the east coast have limited activity in some historically fished areas but the east coast around Coromandel remains open and commercially fished. While the east coast scallop fishery is currently closed under section 11 of the Act, nearshore areas (particularly around Coromandel) supported commercial operations in the past. Creating exceptions to allow recreational take of these species from the intertidal closure area would support equitable allocation between the commercial and recreational fishing sectors and may mitigate the risk of increased tension over these shared fisheries. Particularly if existing fisheries closures for spiny rock lobsters and scallops are reviewed and commercial harvesting is allowed in these areas while the intertidal closure is operative.

Key risks

130. Recreational fishers may be incentivised to increase their fishing effort and take their daily limit (or close to it) more often for shellfish species that remain open to harvest. Recreational daily limits do not constrain the total number of harvesters at any given site. Therefore, there is a risk that transferred effort from closed species toward open species may lead to increased recreational effort at popular beaches in Auckland, such as Whangaparāoa and Muriwai, where regular shellfish gathering occurs (for Whangaparāoa Peninsula, prior to its section 186A closure which started 12 March 2026).
131. There is greater uncertainty as to whether a partial closure would support the long-term sustainability of shellfish populations that are subject to ongoing utilisation. Scientific research has shown that site-specific full no-take area closures can be effective for restoring certain aspects of depleted shellfish populations.⁵⁴ However, there is limited evidence on the effectiveness of partial closures or daily limits (i.e. allowing for some ongoing utilisation of certain species) for supporting long-term sustainability of recreationally targeted shellfish populations.⁵⁵
132. The status of shellfish species within scope of the proposed exceptions is uncertain. There is a risk that permitting ongoing utilisation within defined recreational daily limits may enable a level of harvesting that exceeds what is sustainable. To mitigate this risk, FNZ is proposing to set reduced limits for these species. FNZ intends to continue monitoring of certain shellfish species that already have reduced daily limits (e.g., pipi, cockles) and to expand this monitoring programme to capture a wider range of shellfish species located across rocky shore habitats. Results of monitoring surveys will be reviewed and used to inform whether changes to the management settings are required.
133. Creating exceptions for a range of shellfish species may create uncertainty for recreational fishers and make compliance and enforcement more challenging.

Questions for submitters

- Do you support making exceptions for named shellfish species to allow ongoing harvest of these species within the intertidal closure area? Please provide details supporting your views.
- Do you consider any other species should be excluded from the proposed area closure? If so, please indicate what species you think should be excluded and provide information to support your views.
- Do you support the proposed daily limits for the species exceptions? In particular, retaining existing daily limits (where applicable) for shellfish (e.g., cockles, pipi) and setting new daily limits for a wider range of species (e.g., crabs, sea cucumber, squid, shrimps, octopus)? If not, what alternative daily limit do you propose for species?
- Do you have any other feedback on the benefits and/or risks associated with this option?
- How would this option of a partial closure to recreational harvesting of invertebrates with named exceptions impact you?

⁵⁴ Alexander, T.J. and Gladstone, W. (2013) this study found significantly larger sized limpets (*Cellana tamoserica*) in protected areas than in fished areas.

⁵⁵ Turnbull, J.W., Johnston, E.L., and Clark, G.F. (2021); see review by Sciberras et al. (2013).

Proposed new combined daily limit for shellfish in the Auckland Coromandel area

134. A combined daily limit of 50 shellfish applies to any species without its own daily limit in most of New Zealand (“any other” shellfish species).⁵⁶ However, in Fiordland and Kaikōura, reduced daily limits of 20 and 30 shellfish have been set respectively to manage harvest impacts on these species.⁵⁷ These limits are lower than the general limit of 50 shellfish which applies in the Auckland Coromandel area.
135. FNZ is proposing to set a new combined daily limit for “any other” species of shellfish in the Auckland Coromandel area.
136. The intention of this proposal is to ensure that recreational harvest of these shellfish species does not exceed what is sustainable or reasonable for daily utilisation.
137. During preliminary stages of this review, FNZ canvassed a range of options for a reduced daily limit including a new limit of 20 or 10 shellfish for the Auckland Coromandel area. A reduced daily limit of 10 shellfish was developed into an option for public consultation because it is considered more likely to reduce harvest pressure and any associated sustainability risks associated with ongoing utilisation of species falling within this category. This is because it would:
- Apply to a large area including some intertidal habitats located around offshore islands that may be accessible to shore-based harvesters who travel to these areas by boat. A reduced limit of 10 shellfish would limit harvest pressure on any popular target species as well as total harvest pressure resulting from group harvest activities in accessible locations.
 - Mitigate against risks of increased effort resulting from fishers choosing to increase the frequency of fishing trips to take their daily limit (or close to it) more often.
 - Better recognise the unique population pressures facing the Auckland region. Auckland has the largest, most diverse and fastest growing population in the country and the proximity of the coastline to the urban centre means that shellfish resources can be easily accessed by residents and visitors. FNZ considers this unique regional context supports implementation of a more cautious combined daily limit than for other, more remote, areas (e.g., Fiordland and Kaikōura) to ensure any impacts of ongoing harvest pressure on shellfish populations are managed sustainably.
138. The proposed new combined daily limit of 10 shellfish would apply to areas located beyond the 200 m intertidal closure boundary, including ‘subtidal areas’ (shown in Figure 4), and intertidal habitats located around offshore islands (such as the Mercury Islands, shown in Figure 3). Existing shellfish daily limits (e.g., for pipi, cockles, green-lipped mussels, and oysters) would also apply in these areas.

⁵⁶ Clause 5 of the Recreational Notice prescribes the general daily limits for shellfish. These limits are overridden by any area-specific limits.

⁵⁷ Te Whata Kai o Rakihouia i Te Tai o Marokura—Kaikōura Marine Area, clause 29.3 Recreational Notice; Fiordland (Te Moana o Atawhenua), clause 40.3 Fisheries Recreational Notice. More information about the area-specific recreational daily limits for Fiordland is available [here](#).



Figure 4. Map of proposed intertidal closure along a section of Auckland’s east coast (Campbells Bay to Castor Bay) showing the seaward limit (200 m) in yellow. Under all options, daily limits for shellfish would continue to apply outside of the closure area (shown as subtidal areas on the map).

Option 3: full intertidal closure (i.e. Option 1) + a combined daily limit of 10 shellfish (for “any other” species)

Proposal

- 139. In addition to a full intertidal closure (i.e. Option 1), this option proposes to set a combined recreational daily limit of 10 shellfish (“any other” species) for the Auckland Coromandel area.
- 140. Under this option, the proposed daily limit of 10 shellfish would apply to a broad range of species including crabs, sea cucumbers, shrimps, squid, octopus, periwinkles, limpets, whelks, cat’s eyes, and sea stars) as indicated by Table 9.

Table 9. Scope of restrictions under Option 3. Note these restrictions do not account for site-specific measures.

Proposed intertidal closure area (high-water mark to 200 m limit)	
Fishers can take	Fishers cannot take
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any shellfish species that meets the definition of a <i>pest or unwanted organism</i> in the Biosecurity Act 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any shellfish including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Rock lobsters (spiny or packhorse) ○ Kina ○ Bivalves (e.g., scallops, mussels, tuatua, pipi, cockles, oysters, and toheroa) ○ Pāua ○ Sea cucumbers ○ Squid ○ Periwinkles ○ Limpets

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cats eyes ○ Whelks ○ Chitons ○ Barnacles ○ Octopus ● Any other invertebrates (e.g., worms, sponges, sea anemones, and sea squirts)
Other areas (seaward of the 200 m limit in Auckland Coromandel area)	
Fishers can take	Fishers cannot take
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Any shellfish species within existing daily limits (Table 2) ● Up to 10 of “any other” species of shellfish, including crabs, periwinkles, limpets, whelks, shrimps, sea cucumbers, squid, octopus ● Any other invertebrates (e.g., worms, sponges, sea anemones, and sea squirts) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Toheroa

Key benefits

- 141. This option would mitigate sustainability risks associated with potential utilisation up to the current daily limit of 50 shellfish in areas outside of the proposed closure including:
 - a) Displaced fishing effort from the proposed closure area and increased harvesting of shellfish resources in areas that remain open to harvesting;
 - b) Further broadening of recreational fishing effort towards a wider range of shellfish species in areas to the point that the level of ongoing harvest exceeds what is sustainable; and
 - c) Discouraging excessive take for use in unlawful trade and other black-market activities.
- 142. Fishers would retain flexibility to harvest a range of species within the combined daily limit of 10 shellfish from areas outside the 200 m closure boundary. In addition, fishers would retain access to named shellfish species (e.g., pipi, cockles, tuatua) that are subject to recreational daily limits. Overall, this option would enable continued utilisation of highly regarded shellfish resources and retain flexibility for fishers to target preferred species in these areas.

Key risks

- 143. A reduced combined daily limit of 10 shellfish may not adequately address sustainability risks associated with ongoing utilisation of resources that are locally depleted or negatively impacted by other non-fishing pressures (e.g., sedimentation, pollution, marine heat waves). This risk can be mitigated for certain shellfish species by setting reduced daily limits that apply to the whole of the Auckland Coromandel area (i.e. proposed limits for crabs, sea cucumbers, shrimps, squid and octopus under Option 2). FNZ considers the residual risk is low for other species falling within the combined ‘any other’ category (e.g., limpets, whelks, periwinkles, barnacles) as these species are usually harvested from intertidal areas that are accessible to shore-based fishers.
- 144. Similarly, applying a reduced limit of 10 shellfish to a broad range of species may unjustifiably restrict harvesting of any species that are highly abundant (generally, or in particular locations) within subtidal areas. For instance, relatively high abundances of predatory starfish have been observed in some areas, and a reduced daily limit of 10 shellfish may require recreational fishers to forgo opportunities for utilisation without delivering any sustainability benefits.
- 145. Applying a lower combined recreational daily limit species may result in increased rates of non-compliance — particularly if shellfish gatherers are taking the maximum (or close to the maximum) daily limit under the current settings (i.e. 50 shellfish). Ongoing education and enforcement initiatives will be important to ensure fishers understand and comply with the new daily limit.

Questions for submitters

- In addition to a full intertidal closure (i.e. Option 1) do you support setting a new daily limit of 10 shellfish for “any other” species without its own daily limit in the Auckland Coromandel area?
- Do you consider an alternative (i.e. higher or lower) combined recreational daily limit to be more appropriate? Please provide details supporting your views.
- Do you have any other feedback on the benefits and/or risks associated with this additional option?
- How would this additional option to set a new combined daily limit for shellfish (species without defined daily limits) impact you?

Option 4: partial intertidal closure (i.e. Option 2) + a combined daily limit of 10 shellfish (for “any other” species)

Proposal

146. In addition to a partial intertidal closure (i.e. Option 2), this option proposes to set a new combined daily limit of 10 shellfish per person (“any other” species) in the Auckland Coromandel area.
147. Under this option, the proposed daily limit of 10 shellfish would apply to a narrower range of species than under Option 3 (Table 10). The scope of species covered by the combined daily limit would be informed by any new limits for shellfish species. For example, if Option 2 were implemented (as proposed) the combined daily limit would apply to a range of shellfish including periwinkles, barnacles, limpets, cats eyes and whelks. However, it would not apply to crabs, sea cucumbers, shrimps, squid or octopus as these species would be subject to the new species-specific daily limits (Table 8).

Table 10. Scope of restrictions under Option 4. Note these do not account for site-specific measures.

Proposed intertidal closure area (high-water mark to 200 m limit)	
Fishers can take	Fishers cannot take
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any shellfish species that meets the definition of a <i>pest</i> or <i>unwanted organism</i> in the Biosecurity Act • The following named shellfish species within existing daily limits (Table 2): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Bivalves (i.e. cockles, pipi, scallops, tuatua, rock/pacific or dredge oysters) ○ Kina ○ Pāua ○ Rock lobsters (spiny or packhorse) • The following named shellfish species within proposed daily limits (Table 8): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Crabs ○ Octopus ○ Sea cucumbers ○ Shrimps ○ Squid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any other shellfish including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Periwinkles ○ Limpets ○ Cats eyes ○ Whelks ○ Chitons ○ Barnacles ○ Mussels (including green-lipped mussels) ○ Toheroa • Any other invertebrates (e.g., worms, sponges, sea anemones, and sea squirts)
Other areas (beyond 200 m limit in Auckland Coromandel area)	
Fishers can take	Fishers cannot take
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The following shellfish species within existing daily limits (Table 2): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Bivalves (i.e. cockles, pipi, scallops, tuatua, rock/pacific or dredge oysters) ○ Kina ○ Pāua ○ Rock lobsters (spiny or packhorse) ○ Mussels (including green-lipped mussels) (<i>this differs to the intertidal closure area</i>) • The following named shellfish species within proposed daily limits (Table 8): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Crabs ○ Octopus ○ Sea cucumbers ○ Shrimps ○ Squid • Up to 10 of “any other” shellfish including periwinkles, limpets, and whelks • Any other invertebrates (e.g., worms, sponges, sea anemones, and sea squirts) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toheroa

Key benefits

148. The benefits are generally the same as for Option 3. However, fishers would retain greater flexibility to harvest a broader range of species and a higher total quantity of shellfish due to the proposed species-specific daily limits (e.g., crabs, sea cucumbers, shrimps, squid, and octopus).

Key risks

149. The risks are generally the same as for Option 3. However, implementing a broader range of tailored species-specific daily limits provides an opportunity to better account for the biological characteristics and life histories of shellfish species that are predominately subtidal (i.e., squid and octopus) and minimises the risks of applying a blanket catch-all limit to species with different harvesting risk profiles.

Questions for submitters

- In addition to a partial intertidal closure (Option 2) do you support setting a new daily limit of 10 shellfish for “any other” species without its own daily limit in the Auckland Coromandel area?
- Do you consider an alternative (i.e. higher or lower) combined recreational daily limit to be more appropriate? Please provide details supporting your views.
- Do you have any other feedback on the benefits and/or risks associated with this additional option?
- How would this additional option to set a new combined daily limit for shellfish (species without defined daily limits) impact you?

FNZ preferred approach

150. FNZ's preference is to implement a partial intertidal closure in addition to a reduced combined daily limit of 10 shellfish for the Auckland Coromandel area (Option 4). This approach would:
- a) Address community concerns about high intensity shore-based shellfish harvesting and a broadening of recreational effort toward intertidal species that do not have defined daily limits.
 - b) Allow for limited ongoing utilisation of certain shellfish species that may be more resilient to concentrated or high intensity shore-based harvesting pressure.
 - c) Prevent potentially unnecessary restriction of highly valued species inside subtidal spaces within the closure areas (spiny red and packhorse rock lobster, pāua, scallops and squid).
 - d) Reduce regulatory complexity and support ease of implementation and compliance.

Wider initiatives to help reduce shore-based harvest pressure

Development of a refreshed education campaign

151. Shore-based shellfish gathering is a popular recreational activity for a range of diverse communities within the Auckland Coromandel area. Harvesting of kaimoana provides social and cultural benefits, including as a food source, and supports important customary practices.
152. The accessibility of intertidal coastal areas means they are valued by a range of recreational users for non-fishing activities. For example, tidal rock pools provide opportunities for people to view marine life and learn about coastal ecosystems and areas with unique characteristics can attract tourists and support local economies.
153. Anecdotal concerns about high intensity shore-based shellfish gathering and indiscriminate harvesting methods suggest certain fishers are taking excessive marine life without regard for environmental consequences. There are also concerns that group harvesting and beachcombing activities are being coordinated by tour operators and informal clubs on social media, which may promote intensive harvesting at popular beaches in the Auckland region.
154. FNZ considers there is a need to raise awareness of sustainable harvesting practices and to support educational programs that foster stewardship and environmental responsibility. FNZ is seeking feedback on potential actions, including:
- a) Pamphlets with clear information on the rules for shellfish harvesting and importance of sustainable harvesting practices for intertidal ecosystems to be distributed through a range of channels.
 - b) Digital communications through social media platforms, advertising campaigns and wider media (i.e. radio, news).
 - c) Community engagement.

155. These actions would build on recent initiatives that FNZ has implemented to support the section 186A temporary closures requested by the Ngāti Manuhiri Settlement Trust. FNZ has upgraded signage at popular harvesting destinations within the closure areas, including at Whangaparāoa Peninsula and Omaha, to ensure the recreational fishing rules are visible. The signage includes translated text and information about further resources to support sustainable harvesting practices.
156. Reaching many communities who enjoy recreational shellfish gathering can require dedicated resources and effort to ensure any educational approach is effective. FNZ is exploring opportunities for specific engagement approaches with these communities, through avenues such as advertising campaigns and translation of education materials into multiple languages.
157. Fishery officers will continue to monitor shellfish harvesting activities and respond to any non-compliance with appropriate enforcement action to ensure the rules are adhered to.
158. We welcome your feedback and insights on these actions and any alternatives that may support raised awareness of the importance of sustainable harvesting practices.

Questions for submitters

- What feedback do you have on the proposed education and engagement actions (pamphlets, digital communications, and community engagement), and how effective do you think these approaches will be in promoting sustainable shellfish harvesting?
- Are there any additional or alternative education, engagement, or communication approaches you believe would more effectively promote sustainable intertidal shellfish gathering?

Role of scientific and community monitoring

159. FNZ is developing a monitoring programme for intertidal rocky shore species in the Auckland Coromandel area. The proposed monitoring aims to complement Auckland Council's surveys. It would:
- Enable information to be collected about intertidal reef assemblages at additional sites in the Auckland Coromandel area (for example, Army Bay and Māori Bay).
 - Expand Auckland Council's survey design to capture information about rock pool life as these habitats are being increasingly targeted by recreational fishers.
160. FNZ is finalising details of the monitoring programme and expects the sites to be established this year.
161. FNZ is exploring opportunities to support community monitoring initiatives (subject to resource prioritisation). This could include providing coordinator support and equipment to groups who wish to undertake annual shellfish surveys as well as education materials for schools and community groups.
162. We are interested in receiving your feedback and insights on potential monitoring sites and survey methods as well as any resources to support community-led shellfish monitoring initiatives.

Questions for submitters

- What feedback do you have on the proposed approach to scientific and community monitoring of intertidal rocky shore species in the Auckland Coromandel area?
- Are there any ideas, approaches, or considerations you would like FNZ to consider to support effective scientific and community-led intertidal shellfish monitoring?

Additional restrictions on shellfish harvesting

163. The focus of this review is on measures that aim to reduce shore-based harvest pressure. However, we welcome your views on other measures including changes to existing daily limits for shellfish, wider use of minimum size limits, and full closures to harvesting in particular locations.
164. FNZ acknowledges there is a risk that area closures could result in displaced effort and increasing harvest of intertidal fisheries resources in locations outside of the Auckland Coromandel area. We are interested in hearing your views and any concerns regarding shore-based harvesting in other regions. Please note that further analysis and public consultation would occur prior to implementation of any measures outside the Auckland Coromandel area.

Who will be affected by the proposed changes?

165. Easily accessed shellfish resources support important shared recreational and customary fisheries in the Auckland Coromandel area. There are also strong community and environmental interests in intertidal shellfish, particularly across rocky shore habitats, where tidal pools provide opportunities to observe and learn about marine species that would otherwise be more challenging to access.
166. Any of the proposed area closures would significantly restrict recreational harvesting of some highly valued shellfish resources in the Auckland Coromandel area. The proposals may disproportionately affect particular communities who are not easily reached through formal engagement, such as migrant groups, people with limited access to digital communication channels, and those for whom English is a second language.
167. Any area closures or changes to the recreational daily limits for shellfish will not change properly authorised customary fishing for hui or tangi under the Amateur Fishing Regulations or properly authorised customary fishing under the Fisheries (Kaimoana Customary Fishing) Regulations 1998. However, additional harvesting restrictions may impact tāngata whenua who fish under the Amateur Fishing Regulations, particularly in areas where rohe moana have not been gazetted under the Kaimoana Regulations, which includes the east coast of the Auckland Coromandel area. This may result in tāngata whenua displacing recreational fishing effort to other areas.
168. The proposed options will not affect commercial fishing in the Auckland Coromandel area.

Initial feedback from key stakeholders

Input and participation of tāngata whenua

169. Section 12(1)(b) of the Act requires that before setting or varying any sustainability measures under section 11, the Minister must provide for the input and participation of tāngata whenua who have a non-commercial interest in the stock or an interest in the effects of fishing on the aquatic environment in the area concerned. In providing for the input and participation of tāngata whenua, the Minister is required to have particular regard to kaitiakitanga.⁵⁸
170. FNZ has provided for input and participation of tāngata whenua through pre-engagement with Iwi Fisheries Forums (IFFs) and by communicating directly with Hauraki and Tāmaki iwi not associated with an established forum.
171. A written summary of initial proposals was shared by email with IFFs and Hauraki and Tāmaki iwi in September 2025 and the review was further discussed at hui with Hauraki and Tāmaki iwi in October 2025 and February 2026. Feedback received at the IFFs is summarised in Table 11 below. General feedback received from Hauraki and Tāmaki iwi included concerns about harvesting pressure on intertidal ecosystems and specific concerns about mussel and pāua abundance.
172. FNZ also engaged with the Ngāti Manuhiri Settlement Trust which requested the recent section 186A temporary closure on the east coast of the Auckland Coromandel area. The Trust has expressed an interest in the broader review and potential longer-term measures for shellfish in the Auckland Coromandel area.
173. There is a risk that additional restrictions on shellfish harvesting in the Auckland Coromandel area could result in displaced effort to other areas that remain open. FNZ invited feedback from the below IFFs as their rohe moana is easily accessed from the urban centre of Auckland and offered to provide more detailed information upon request. Below is a table summarising the feedback received.

⁵⁸ The Act defines kaitiakitanga as “the exercise of guardianship; and, in relation to any fisheries resources, includes the ethic of stewardship based on the nature of the resources, as exercised by the appropriate tāngata whenua in accordance with tikanga Māori”, where tikanga Māori means Māori customary values and practices.

Table 11: Summary of input from Iwi Fisheries Forums held in 2025 and 2026.

Mid-North East	<p>September 2025</p> <p>The forum did not have feedback on the proposal itself but wanted to remain involved and informed.</p> <p>Follow up email correspondence was sent a month later with no further feedback received.</p>
Mid-North West	<p>September 2025</p> <p>The forum had concerns regarding a reduction in numbers and average size of pāua.</p> <p>Follow up email correspondence was sent a month later with no further feedback received.</p>
Mai i ngā Kuri ā Whārei ki Tihirau (Bay of Plenty)	<p>October 2025 and March 2026</p> <p>The forum asked to be kept informed about developments and raised concerns about intertidal overharvesting in parts of their rohe moana. They supported including the Bay of Plenty (BoP) in the intertidal regulations review, were comfortable with initial work focusing on the Hauraki Gulf before expanding to the BoP the following year, but noted concerns about potential displacement effects if new regulations were introduced in the Hauraki Gulf only.</p> <p>The forum requested that FNZ engage directly with specific iwi/hapū with intertidal harvesting concerns and questioned whether some FNZ intertidal monitoring accurately reflects on-the-ground conditions.</p> <p>At a subsequent forum hui including in March 2026, specific iwi raised concerns about high harvest pressure on green-lipped mussel populations in their rohe moana. FNZ is continuing to engage with the forum and those iwi on potential options, including reduced daily limits for green-lipped mussels in defined areas, to address these concerns.</p>
Ngā Hapu o Te Uru o Tainui (Waikato)	<p>October 2025</p> <p>Kaitiaki have observed increased rock pool exploitation and are supportive of stronger compliance and enforcement measures. They are supportive of mātaimai as an effective measure for this but note the process is slow. They note a specific interest in seaweed. Overall, the forum was not interested in having the review extended further south at this stage, but are keen to remain involved and informed.</p> <p>February 2026</p> <p>The forum raised the intertidal shellfish gathering as a continuing concern but had no further feedback regarding the current proposal.</p>

174. Where a hapū or iwi manage their customary fishing activities under the Fisheries (Kaimoana Customary Fishing) Regulations 1998 they are able to determine their own customary practices, which can include the exercise of kaitiakitanga to protect shellfish to rebalance the ecosystem of their customary fishing grounds. There are no mātaimai reserves or taiāpure-local fisheries in the Auckland Coromandel area.
175. Section 186A closures are used to prohibit fishing for any species of fish, aquatic life or seaweed or restrict or prohibit the use of any fishing method. There are four temporary closures in the Auckland Coromandel area (Table 12).

Table 12. Existing section 186A closures in the Auckland Coromandel area

Section 186A temporary closure	Species in scope of closure
Ōmaha Bay, Kawau Bay and Whangaparāoa Peninsula	All invertebrates and seaweeds (except kina, spiny rock lobsters and scallops)
Te Mātā and Waipatukahu	Cockles, pipi, mussels and oysters
Umupuia Beach	Cockles
Waiheke Island	Mussels, rock lobsters (spiny and packhorse) and pāua

176. The area closures proposed as part of this consultation would spatially overlap with these existing closures. Three of the closures apply to named shellfish species. A full intertidal closure option (i.e., Option 1 or Option 3) would complement these closures by prohibiting take of a wider range of shellfish and other marine invertebrates. However, the proposed options would not affect any site-specific closures, including section 186A closures, which are more restrictive than the standard intertidal management measures.
177. The Ōmaha Bay, Kawau Bay, and Whangaparāoa Peninsula temporary closure prohibits take of all marine invertebrates (including shellfish) and seaweeds (except kina, spiny rock lobsters and scallops). If the abundance of shellfish increases because of the reduced daily limits or area closures proposed for the Auckland Coromandel area, it could potentially benefit this customary area by association and may support a narrowing or revocation of the temporary closure at a future time. For instance, if shellfish populations exhibit signs of recovery to the extent that desired cultural practices can be fulfilled in accordance with tikanga. However, any specific impacts are uncertain and would depend on the scope of any intertidal closure.

Feedback from the Hauraki Gulf Fisheries Plan Advisory Group

178. The Hauraki Gulf Fisheries Plan Advisory Group (**HGFPAG**) was established in May 2022 to support the development and implementation of the Hauraki Gulf Fisheries Plan, as well as to identify issues and collate advice for FNZ on fisheries management issues and priorities in the Hauraki Gulf. Members have expertise in fisheries management, fisheries science, environmental policy and represent a range of fisheries management interests.
179. Auckland Council and Waikato Regional Council are represented on the HGFPAG and provided input into the development of the Hauraki Gulf Fisheries Plan, this review and potential monitoring, education and enforcement initiatives through the HGFPAG process.
180. The HGFPAG was advised of this review, and preliminary working proposals were presented at meetings held in 2025. During initial stages of the review, FNZ explored potential changes to the boundary of the Auckland Coromandel area and a broader range of management measures. While members supported the need for a review of the recreational management settings for shellfish, some members considered changes to the Auckland Coromandel boundary would detract from the primary aim of addressing concerns about intertidal harvesting pressure. Following this meeting, FNZ decided to focus the review on recreational controls for intertidal harvesting and to address any administrative changes to the Auckland Coromandel boundary at a future time if necessary.
181. There was differing support for various measures. Some members expressed a desire to see broad closures that prohibited harvesting of all shellfish (no exceptions) at certain sites or across the entire Auckland Coromandel area. Other members preferred seasonal closures during summer months and reduced daily limits that would enable a higher level of ongoing utilisation of shellfish resources.

How to have your say

182. We welcome your feedback on the options proposed in this consultation. Please provide detailed information and sources to support your views where possible. We also need you to provide:
 - The title of the consultation document (if you are not using the submission template provided)
 - Your name and title
 - Your organisation's name (if you are submitting on behalf of an organisation, and whether your submission represents the whole organisation or a section of it)
 - Your contact details (e.g., phone number, email (preferred) or postal address)
 - Whether you support all or any of the proposed longer-term measures below
 - Any alternative measures that we could consider.
183. FNZ invites you to make a submission on the proposals set out in this consultation document, by email to FMSubmissions@mpi.govt.nz. Consultation closes at **5pm on Friday 12 June 2026**.

184. Please see the FNZ consultation webpage for related information, a helpful submissions template, and information on how to submit your feedback. If you cannot access the webpage or require hard copies of documents or any other information, please email FMSubmissions@mpi.govt.nz.
185. A list of optional questions to help guide your submission is located in Appendix One of this document.

Next steps

186. Your submissions will be used to inform advice to the Minister on the proposed options and any wider education and monitoring initiatives to support successful implementation.

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Appendix One: Optional questions to guide your submission

Boundaries of the proposed intertidal closure area (high-water mark to 200 m offshore)

- Do you support the boundaries of the proposed intertidal closure area (i.e. high-water mark to 200 m offshore)? If not, what are some details of an alternative boundary you support?
- Do you support the proposed intertidal closure area applying to the Auckland Coromandel mainland and Waiheke Island coastlines? If not, where do you consider the proposed intertidal closure area should apply?
- Are there any other areas, including other populated islands, that you would like to see included in the intertidal closure? If so, please indicate what additional areas you think should be included and provide information to support your views.
- Are there any areas you would like to see excluded from the proposed intertidal closure (e.g., harbours, estuaries or other specific locations)? If so, please indicate the areas you think should be excluded and provide information to support your views.
- How would the proposed closure boundaries impact you? Please provide details to support your response.
- Do you have any other feedback on the benefits and/or risks associated with the proposed boundaries and spatial extent of the intertidal closure area?

Full intertidal closure (no exceptions) (Option 1)

- Do you support a full prohibition on recreational take of all species of shellfish and other invertebrates from the proposed intertidal closure area? Please provide details supporting your views.
- Do you have any other feedback on the benefits and/or risks associated with this option?
- How would this option of a full intertidal closure to recreational harvesting of invertebrates impact you?
- Do you consider it appropriate to exclude seaweed species from the scope of the closure? If not, what are the reasons you think seaweed should be included within the scope of the closure?

Partial intertidal closure (with exceptions for named shellfish species) (Option 2)

- Do you support making exceptions for named shellfish species to allow ongoing harvest of these species within the intertidal closure area? Please provide details supporting your views.
- Do you consider any other species should be excluded from the proposed area closure? If so, please indicate what species you think should be excluded and provide information to support your views.
- Do you support the proposed daily limits for the species exceptions? In particular, retaining existing daily limits (where applicable) for shellfish (e.g., cockles, pipi) and setting new daily limits for a wider range of species (e.g., crabs, sea cucumber, squid, shrimps, octopus)? If not, what alternative daily limit do you propose for species?
- Do you have any other feedback on the benefits and/or risks associated with this option?
- How would this option of a partial closure to recreational harvesting of invertebrates with named exceptions impact you?

Full intertidal closure + a combined daily limit of 10 shellfish (“any other” species) (Option 3)

- In addition to a full intertidal closure (i.e. Option 1), do you support setting a new daily limit of 10 shellfish for “any other” species without its own daily limit in the Auckland Coromandel area?
- Do you consider an alternative (i.e. higher or lower) combined recreational daily limit to be more appropriate? Please provide details supporting your views.
- Do you have any other feedback on the benefits and/or risks associated with this additional option?
- How would this additional option to set a new combined daily limit for shellfish (species without defined daily limits) impact you?

Partial intertidal closure + a combined daily limit of 10 shellfish (“any other” species) (Option 4)

- In addition to a partial intertidal closure (i.e. Option 2), do you support setting a new daily limit of 10 shellfish for “any other” species without its own daily limit in the Auckland Coromandel area?

- Do you consider an alternative (i.e. higher or lower) combined recreational daily limit to be more appropriate? Please provide details supporting your views.
- Do you have any other feedback on the benefits and/or risks associated with this additional option?
- How would this additional option to set a new combined daily limit for shellfish (species without defined daily limits) impact you?

Development of a refreshed education campaign

- What feedback do you have on the proposed education and engagement actions (pamphlets, digital communications, and community engagement), and how effective do you think these approaches will be in promoting sustainable shellfish harvesting?
- Are there any additional or alternative education, engagement, or communication approaches you believe would more effectively promote sustainable intertidal shellfish gathering?

Role of scientific and community monitoring

- What feedback do you have on the proposed approach to scientific and community monitoring of intertidal rocky shore species in the Auckland Coromandel area?
- Are there any ideas, approaches, or considerations you would like FNZ to consider to support effective scientific and community led intertidal shellfish monitoring?

General

- Do you have any other feedback on the benefits and/or risks of the proposed options?
- How would the options impact you?
- Do you have any further information to share that could help FNZ reduce intertidal harvesting pressure in the Auckland Coromandel area while providing for utilisation of shellfish resources?

Appendix two: Glossary

Amateur Fishing Regulations	Rules set under the Fisheries (Amateur Fishing) Regulations 2013 that apply to a person taking or possessing any fish, aquatic life, or seaweed, for non-commercial purposes.
Anecdotal information	Subjective information that is from observations, opinions and impressions of individuals.
Biodiversity (biological diversity)	Means the variability among living organisms, including diversity within species, between species, and of ecosystems. This term is defined in section 2(1) of the Fisheries Act 1996.
Bivalves	Shellfish which have two hinged shells, such as mussels, oysters, scallops, and clams.
Closed area	A defined area in which all or select fishing is prohibited. May be seasonal or year-round and apply to select or all species.
Crustaceans	Aquatic animals with gills and a dorsal carapace or shell e.g., crabs, lobsters, prawns, shrimps and barnacles.
Customary fishing/harvest	The traditional rights confirmed by the Treaty of Waitangi and the Treaty of Waitangi (Fisheries Claims) Settlement Act 1992, being the taking of fish, aquatic life, or seaweed or managing of fisheries resources, for a purpose authorised by Tangata Kaitiaki / Tiaki, including koha, to the extent that such purpose is consistent with Tikanga Maori and is neither commercial in any way nor for monetary gain or trade. This term is defined in the Fisheries (Kaimoana Customary Fishing) Regulations 1998.
Depletion	Reducing the biomass or abundance of a stock through fishing
Displacement	The redistribution of fishing effort from a closed area to other locations as a result of spatial management measures.
Echinoderms	Shellfish which are characterised by a hard spiny covering or skin such as sea urchins, starfish and sea cucumbers.
Endemic	A species native to and only found to breed in a specific geographical location, and nowhere else in the world.
Fisheries Act 1996	This is the principal Act that contains most of New Zealand's fisheries law.
Fishing effort	The amount of fishing activity exerted in a given area.
Fishing method	The specific technique or gear-type used to catch fish or other marine organisms such as hand gathering or potting
Gastropod	Soft-bodied creatures with a broad, flat creeping sole or foot, generally protected with a well-developed shell of one piece (often coiled) (e.g. pāua). The shell may be completely lacking or small and concealed within the body (sea slugs).
<i>Gazette</i>	The Government's official newspaper. It is published by the New Zealand Gazette Office (part of the Department of Internal Affairs). Regulations are notified in The Gazette after they are made, but before they come into force. Internal Notices are published in The Gazette.
Geomorphology	Geomorphology is the scientific study of Earth's landforms, focusing on their origin, evolution, and the physical, chemical, or biological processes that shape them. It examines how landscapes change over time through erosion, deposition, and tectonic activity.
Habitat of particular significance for fisheries management (HoPS)	An area or areas with attributes that are important for fisheries management in that they are of especially great importance in supporting life-history stages of fisheries resources (e.g., snapper

	nurseries). No shellfish HoPS have been identified on the register at this time.
Hauraki Gulf Marine Park	Hauraki Gulf Marine Park/Ko te Pataka kai o Tikapa Moana Te Moananui ā Toi covers the Hauraki Gulf, Waitemata Harbour, Firth of Thames and the east coast of the Coromandel Peninsula as defined in the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act 2000. It consists of public land, reserves, conservation areas, the foreshore, seabed and sea.
High Protection Area	Areas established under the Hauraki Gulf / Tikapa Moana Marine Protection Act 2025 with a high level of protection for marine life.
Indicator species	A species whose presence or absence is indicative of a particular habitat, community or set of environmental conditions. The presence/absence of such a species is sometimes used as a proxy for characteristics of the environment.
Intertidal	The area between high and low watermarks, which is exposed to air on low tide and submerged by water during high tide.
Invertebrates	Invertebrates or animals without backbones are a diverse assemblage of organisms, exhibiting a range of body forms and life histories. The most common marine groups are shellfish, including molluscs (bivalves, gastropods, octopus and squid) and crustaceans (crabs, crayfish, prawns, shrimps and barnacles). However, other species including sea anemones, sponges, worms and ascidians (sea squirts) also fall within this category.
Kaitiaki	Local guardian or trustee of a specific area. A Tangata Kaitiaki/Tiaki appointed under the Fisheries (Kaimoana Customary Fishing) Regulations 1998 or the Fisheries (South Island Customary Fishing) Regulations 1999 may authorise any individuals, in accordance with these regulations, to take any fish, aquatic life, or seaweed for customary food gathering purposes from within the whole or any part of the area/rohe moana, for which the Tangata Kaitiaki/Tiaki has been appointed.
Keystone species	Organisms that play a disproportionately large role in maintaining the structure, biodiversity, and function of marine ecosystems relative to their population size. Their removal, often through overfishing, can lead to dramatic ecosystem shifts, such as the loss of kelp forests or reduced biodiversity.
Life history	The evolutionary adaptations influencing an organism's survival and reproduction, such as growth rate, age of maturity, offspring number, and lifespan
Localised depletion	Areas where extraction rates in a localised area are higher than that across the entire population unit, leading to reduced abundance (relative to the entire population unit) at localised scales.
Marine reserve	An area fully protected from the sea surface to the seafloor, including the foreshore, for the purpose of preserving them in their natural state as the habitat of marine life for scientific study. All taking of marine life, shells, rocks, and driftwood is prohibited. These areas are established under the Marine Reserves Act 1971.
Minimum size limit	The minimum legal size of fish which may be taken. The limits are set under the Amateur Fishing Regulations (for recreational fisheries).
Pest or unwanted organism	Definition under the Biosecurity Act 1993. An organism a chief technical officer believes is capable of causing unwanted harm to natural or physical resources or human health.
Poaching	The illegal taking, possessing, or selling of fish, shellfish and other fisheries resources.

Productivity	Productivity is the rate at which a population can grow. Productivity is a function of the biology of a species and the environment in which it lives. It depends on growth rates, natural mortality, age of maturity, maximum average age and other relevant life history characteristics. Species with high productivity are able to sustain higher rates of fishing mortality than species with lower productivity. Generally, species with high productivity are more resilient and take less time to rebuild from a depleted state.
Quantitative information	Information that can be measured, counted, and expressed in numbers.
Quantitative stock assessment	Full Quantitative Stock assessment: A stock assessment using a population model and a reliable index of abundance to indicate status in relation to targets and limits. Partial Quantitative Stock Assessment: An evaluation of agreed abundance indices (e.g., standardised catch per unit effort, CPUE) or other appropriate fisheries indicators (e.g., estimates of mortality rates F (Z) based on catch-at-age) is available.
Recreational daily limit	The Amateur Fishing Regulations defines the term "daily limit" as "daily limit, in relation to a species of fish, aquatic life, or seaweed, means the maximum number or quantity of that species that a person may, on any day, take or possess from or in an FMA or other specified area." Daily limits can apply to individual species or combined species (at the species group level).
Recreational fishing	Fishing under the provisions available for amateur fishers i.e. the Fisheries (Amateur Fishing) Regulations 1986; and any relevant regional amateur fishing regulations.
Recreational controls	Controls under the provisions available for amateur fishers i.e. the Fisheries (Amateur Fishing) Regulations 1986; and any relevant regional amateur fishing regulations. Often includes controls such as daily bag limits and minimum legal sizes.
Recruitment	The addition of new individuals to the fished component of a stock. This is determined by the size and age at which fish are first caught.
Residual risk	The level of risk to a protected species that remains after all mitigation measures and management actions have been implemented.
Rohe moana	A defined customary fishing area of tangata whenua where customary fishing takes place.
Seaweeds (rimurimu)	All kinds of algae and seagrasses that grow in New Zealand fisheries waters at any stage of their life history, whether living or dead.
Sessile	An organism that is permanently attached to a substrate or surface.
Shellfish	The Act defines the term " <i>shellfish</i> " broadly to include all species of the phylum Echinodermata, the phylum Mollusca and all species of the class Crustacea. This captures a diverse range of species with different life histories, including (but not limited to) barnacles, chitons, limpets, cats eyes, periwinkles, whelks, crabs, starfish, slipper lobsters, octopus, squid and sea cucumbers.
Spawning	The physical act of freely releasing or depositing eggs and sperm in the water.
Special permit	A special permit issued under section 97 of the Fisheries Act 1996 which allows certain activities that would usually be restricted.
Species assemblage	A group of species co-occurring at one spatial location at one point in time.
Stock	For the purposes of the Fisheries Act 1996, a stock is any fish, aquatic life or seaweed of one or more species that are treated as a unit for the purposes of fisheries management. For the purposes of the Harvest Strategy Standard, a biological stock is a population of a given

	species that forms a reproductive unit and spawns little if at all with other units. However, there are many uncertainties in defining spatial and temporal geographical boundaries for such biological units that are compatible with established data collection systems. For this reason, the term “stock” is often synonymous with an assessment / management unit, even if there is migration or mixing of some components of the assessment/management unit between areas.
Structural complexity	The three-dimensional arrangement and variability of both living and non-living components of an ecosystem. An example of an ecosystem with high structural complexity is coral reefs.
Substrate	The surface or material on which an organism lives, grows, or obtains nourishment
Subtidal	The area where the seabed is below the lowest tide and is submerged under water at all times.
Treaty of Waitangi (Fisheries Claims) Settlement Act 1992	The Treaty of Waitangi (Fisheries Claims) Settlement Act became law in late 1992, and gave effect to the Deed of Settlement, signed in September 1992. This deed (1) settled Māori claims to commercial fishing; (2) clarified Māori rights to customary or non-commercial fishing; and (3) discharged the Crown’s obligations in respect of Māori commercial fishing interests under the Treaty of Waitangi.
Utilisation	In the Fisheries Act 1996, section 8 outlines the purpose of the Act, to “provide for the utilisation of fisheries resources while ensuring sustainability.” Utilisation means conserving, using, enhancing and developing fisheries resources to enable people to provide for their social, economic and cultural well-being.

Appendix three: relevant legal provisions

187. The sections below provide an overview of how the proposals meet key legal requirements of the Act.

Section 5 – International obligations and Treaty of Waitangi (Fisheries Claims) Settlement Act 1992

188. Section 5(a) of the Act requires that the Act be interpreted and applied in a manner consistent with New Zealand's international obligations relating to fishing. New Zealand is party to several international fishing-related conventions including the Convention of Biological Diversity and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).
189. These conventions generally require measures to avoid, remedy or mitigate adverse impacts of fishing on any harvested and associated species, to ensure their status is sustained or improved and that biodiversity is maintained. The proposed options presented in this consultation document aim to reduce harvest pressure on a wide range of invertebrates to support their long-term sustainability and maintain biodiversity of the wider aquatic environment. The proposals are consistent with international obligations.
190. Section 5(b) requires that the Act be interpreted and applied in a manner that is consistent with the provisions of the Treaty of Waitangi (Fisheries Claims) Settlement Act 1992. The proposed options do not impose restrictions on Māori customary fishing, which is authorised by kaitiaki, or on commercial fishing activities that may impact on quota awarded to iwi under the Treaty of Waitangi (Fisheries Claims) Settlement Act 1992. The proposals are consistent with settlement obligations.

Section 8 – Purpose of the Act

191. The Minister's decisions on any measures to address sustainability risks associated with recreational harvesting activities must achieve consistency with the purpose of the Act. The purpose as set out in section 8 is *'to provide for the utilisation of fisheries resources while ensuring sustainability'*. Section 8 defines ensuring sustainability as:
- a) Maintaining the potential of fisheries resources to meet the reasonably foreseeable needs of future generations; and
 - b) Avoiding, remedying, or mitigating any adverse effects of fishing on the aquatic environment.
192. Utilisation means conserving, using, enhancing, and developing fisheries resources to enable people to provide for their social, economic, and cultural well-being.
193. FNZ considers all of the proposed options to be consistent with ensuring sustainability. Implementing a full intertidal closure under Option 1 or Option 3 would prohibit recreational take of all marine invertebrates and place greatest weight on ensuring sustainability of intertidal and shallow subtidal fisheries resources in the Auckland Coromandel area. A full intertidal closure would prevent fishers from using indiscriminate methods to collect target species, which may avoid or remedy adverse effects of these methods for intertidal biodiversity and ecosystems. A partial intertidal closure (Option 2 or Option 4) would reduce harvesting pressure to varying degrees depending on the scope of species exceptions.
194. More restrictive sustainability measures that prohibit recreational take of all or most invertebrate species (Options 1 or 3) are likely to have significant impacts on utilisation. These measures, which apply at a broad spatial scale, carry a risk of going beyond what is necessary to ensure sustainability of harvested species in the intertidal closure area. For instance, by prohibiting harvest of shellfish species (e.g., cockles, oysters and kina) from locations where they are relatively abundant or by prohibiting harvest of shellfish species (e.g., octopus and squid) that may be more resilient to ongoing utilisation.
195. A general prohibition on intertidal harvesting with exceptions for a wider range of shellfish species (Options 2 or 4) would provide for a higher level of utilisation and retain recreational access to valued shellfish resources.

196. There is insufficient information to determine the status of harvested intertidal species in particular locations or at the scale of the Auckland Coromandel area. Under section 10 of the Act (addressed below), the Minister has to be cautious where information is inadequate but must not use that as a reason for postponing or failing to take any measure to achieve the purpose of the Act. The nature and extent of any harvesting restrictions needed to avoid, remedy or mitigate the effects of fishing on intertidal and shallow subtidal marine invertebrates will depend on the balance between sustainability and utilisation the Minister considers appropriate.
197. FNZ considers Option 4 would best achieve consistency with the purpose of the Act. This option would remove harvest pressure for certain species where harvesting impacts are most uncertain, while permitting some limited ongoing utilisation of species that may be more resilient to recreational harvest pressure.

Section 9 – Environmental principles

198. Table 1 below outlines FNZ's initial assessment of the proposed options against the environmental principles in section 9 of the Act, which the Minister must take into account when considering sustainability measures.

Table 1 Initial assessment of the proposed options under section 9 of the Act.

Statutory criteria	Initial assessment
Associated or dependent species should be maintained above a level that ensures their long-term viability - Section 9(a)	<p>199. 'Associated or dependent species' is defined in section 2(1) of the Act as 'any non-harvested species taken or otherwise affected by the taking of any harvested species.'</p> <p>200. A variety of invertebrates and seaweeds are associated with recreationally targeted shellfish species, including algae, barnacles, worms, diatoms and sponges that colonise, encrust or bore into the shells of gastropods. Certain species, such as pea crabs and spider crabs, occupy larger host shellfish, such as horse mussels and pāua, and are reliant on these species for food.⁵⁹ These associated species can be inadvertently harvested when target species are collected.</p> <p>201. The nature and extent of any harvesting impacts on associated species would depend on the target species and methods used for gathering, noting that some methods and harvesting practices pose greater risks for damage to the benthic environment and surrounding marine life.</p> <p>202. Recreational harvest of shellfish from rocky shore habitats is typically undertaken by hand-gathering and this is likely to have minimal to low impacts on non-target species or the wider marine environment. This is because harvesters can identify and select desired shellfish without disturbing other marine life. Mobile species (e.g., crabs, whelks and starfish) can be taken by hand without disturbing benthic habitat while sessile species (e.g., barnacles and mussels) that attach to hard substrates may require dislodging with a knife or other hand-held tool.</p> <p>203. Anecdotal information suggests some fishers are indiscriminately taking marine life from intertidal habitats and/or using hand-held tools including knives, chisels, pliers, wire brushes and piano wire to harvest shellfish from rocky shore habitats. Indiscriminate harvesting practices and using less selective tools to gather shellfish may result in inadvertent capture of other marine life (e.g., seaweeds and invertebrates) and disturb species in proximity to</p>

⁵⁹ Trottier, O. and Jeffs A. (2015).

	<p>harvesting activities. The extent to which recreational fishers use hand-held tools to gather shellfish from intertidal habitats is unknown and any impacts for associated and dependent species are uncertain.</p> <p>204. Certain shellfish species, including mud snails, whelks, and surf clams, are harvested from soft sedimentary substrates (i.e., sand, silt and mud) in estuaries, harbours and beaches. Many of these species are buried in substrate, which makes it more difficult for recreational fishers to target desired species and sizes of shellfish. Rakes and other digging tools are reported as being used to collect shellfish from soft sedimentary habitats, and these methods may result in inadvertent capture or disturbance for other species and associated harm or mortality.</p> <p>205. A broader range of methods are used by recreational fishers targeting shellfish in subtidal habitats. For instance, potting and netting methods are used to target paddle crabs, octopus, and shrimps and inadvertent capture of rock lobster, finfish and other marine invertebrates can occur using these methods. Marine mammal entanglements can occur in potting gear, but recorded interactions of this nature are extremely low.</p> <p>206. The proposed options would prohibit or substantively reduce recreational fishing effort for a broad range of shellfish and other invertebrate species across the Auckland Coromandel area. As a result, the likelihood of invertebrate bycatch and / or the threat to the long-term viability of associated or dependent species populations is expected to substantively decrease.</p> <p>207. All of the proposed options would prohibit gathering of mussels from the intertidal closure area. Mussels are known to host other organisms (e.g., crabs) and this would reduce any impacts of harvesting on associated species.</p> <p>208. Option 1 would amount to a broad prohibition on harvesting of invertebrates, including kina. There is a risk that further restricting kina take could negatively impact kelp forests in shallow subtidal areas that are susceptible to formation of urchin barrens or where there already are prevalent urchin barrens. Permitting ongoing utilisation of kina (Option 2 or Option 4) may support maintenance or recovery of kelp forests in shallow subtidal areas and align better with the section 9(a) environmental principle.</p> <p>209. Option 2 or Option 4 would retain the existing recreational daily limits for scallops, rock lobsters and kina in open parts of the Auckland Coromandel area (i.e., outside of any existing fisheries closures). These daily limits were recently set following review, and the proposed options are not expected to increase harvesting pressure for these species to a level that would threaten the long-term viability of any associated or dependent species in areas where these species remain open to harvest.</p> <p>210. Option 2 and Option 4 would permit ongoing utilisation of a range of shellfish species within the proposed closure area. FNZ is proposing to retain the existing tailored daily limits for shellfish (as applicable) and to set new reduced daily limits for certain groups of shellfish species. The use of recreational daily limits to manage impacts of harvesting on target species would not increase potential</p>
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	<p>utilisation of any species (except marine pests). Indeed, the proposed daily limits for crabs, octopus, sea cucumbers, shrimps and squid would significantly reduce potential utilisation of these species and any impacts on associated or dependent species, including predators.</p> <p>211. Option 3 or Option 4 (reduction in the combined daily limit from 50 to 10 shellfish per fisher) is likely to reduce any potential harvesting impacts for associated species in subtidal areas outside of the proposed closure area.</p> <p>212. There is a risk that recreational effort may shift toward species that remain open to utilisation, including marine pest species (e.g., Asian paddle crab and mantis shrimp) which are caught by potting and netting methods. There is uncertainty about the extent and nature of any impacts for associated or dependent species. However, FNZ notes there are sustainability risks to endemic shellfish species related to restricting take of marine pest species. These need to be balanced against the potential risks and benefits of permitting unconstrained utilisation of these species.</p>
<p>Biological diversity of the aquatic environment should be maintained – Section 9(b)</p>	<p>213. ‘Biological diversity’ means the ‘variability among living organisms, including diversity within species, between species, and of ecosystems.’</p> <p>214. A number of studies have been undertaken to characterise the biodiversity of intertidal and subtidal habitats across coastal areas in northern New Zealand.⁶⁰ These studies demonstrate that rocky reef habitats in the Auckland Coromandel area exhibit distinct ecological zonation patterns which support high levels of biodiversity.⁶¹ Intertidal rocky shore habitats are typically characterised by high structural complexity and include tidal pools which support unique species assemblages.⁶²</p> <p>215. Intertidal and shallow subtidal soft sedimentary substrates (e.g., mud, silt and sandflats) are also highly biodiverse, with a range of shellfish and other marine invertebrates found on and within the sedimentary matrix. These substrates are often associated with important biogenic habitats that support populations of worms, bivalves, crustaceans, echinoderms and algae and fulfil wider ecosystem functions (e.g., nutrient cycling).⁶³</p> <p>216. Anecdotal information suggests recreational shellfish gathering has intensified at popular beaches in the Auckland region and local communities have expressed concerns about groups of fishers using hand-held tools to indiscriminately harvest intertidal marine life. Ongoing high harvest pressure at accessible locations is likely to impact on biodiversity by removing an important food source for other species and limiting keystone species, such as limpets and starfish, from fulfilling their ecological roles as predators in intertidal habitats.</p>

⁶⁰ The biodiversity of intertidal habitats in the Auckland Coromandel area is summarised in several reports, including Hayward, B.W. and Morley, M.S. (2002); Morley, M.S. and Hayward, B.W. (2016).

⁶¹ Hayward, B.W. and Morley, M.S. (2002); Shears, N.T. and Babcock, R.C. (2004).

⁶² Metaxas, A. and Scheibling, R.E. (1993); Trowbridge, C. (1994).

⁶³ For example, see: Taylor, R.B. and Morrison, M.A. (2008); and Lohrer, D. and Hancock N. (2004).

	<p>217. A full intertidal area closure (i.e. Option 1 or Option 3) would remove harvest pressure for a wide range of recreationally targeted shellfish species. The intent of these closures is to support the maintenance and recovery of intertidal shellfish populations over time. There is a high level of uncertainty around what species of shellfish and other marine invertebrates are being taken by fishers. A broad closure would mitigate any impacts of indiscriminate harvesting methods for target species and associated or dependent species. Therefore, these options are consistent with the principle that the biological diversity of the aquatic environment should be maintained.</p> <p>218. A partial intertidal area closure (i.e. Option 2 or Option 4) would reduce harvest pressure on a range of recreationally targeted shellfish species. Access to certain shellfish species (e.g., pipi, cockles and oysters) would be retained within existing recreational daily limits. These species are typically gathered by hand or using a knife (oysters) from intertidal and shallow subtidal areas. These methods are likely to have relatively minimal localised impacts on biodiversity when undertaken within the recreational limits.</p> <p>219. Option 3 or Option 4 will support maintenance of biodiversity by significantly reducing potential utilisation of a range of shellfish species across habitats seaward of the 200 m intertidal closure boundary within the wider Auckland Coromandel area.</p>
<p>Habitat of particular significance for fisheries management (HoPS) should be protected - Section 9(c)</p>	<p>220. FNZ has identified 5 HoPS in the Auckland Coromandel area.⁶⁴ The HoPS primarily relate to snapper spawning areas and nurseries.</p> <p>221. FNZ is currently reviewing habitat data through science working groups. This data will be used to compile a registry of Habitats of Particular Significance for Fisheries Management and assess the risk posed by fishing activity to those habitats. This may see further measures to protect shellfish populations, including bed-forming shellfish species (e.g., mussels, pipi, cockles, scallops), in the Auckland Coromandel area (Habitats of particular significance for fisheries management NZ Government).</p> <p>222. The options presented in this consultation document are intended to support the long-term sustainability of shellfish and other marine invertebrate populations in the Auckland Coromandel area. To the extent there is any overlap between the proposed intertidal harvesting restrictions and the identified HoPS for snapper, the measures are consistent with the principle that HoPS should be protected. Reducing the daily limits for multiple shellfish species in the wider Auckland Coromandel area (all proposed options) may better support maintenance of shellfish populations (e.g., crabs) that are an important food source for snapper in the area.</p>

Section 10 – Information principles

223. The best available information to inform the options proposed for intertidal shellfish and other marine invertebrates is presented throughout this consultation document. In various sections FNZ has noted where information is uncertain or inadequate. As per section 10(c) of the Act, caution is required in decision-making where information is uncertain, unreliable, or inadequate. However, as per section

⁶⁴ Inner Hauraki Gulf (snapper spawning area), Kowhai Bay to Whangaparāoa (snapper nursery), Coromandel Harbour and north along the coast to off Colville Bay (snapper nursery), East Tāmaki Strait to Tarakihi Island (snapper nursery), Whangateau Harbour (parore and snapper nursery).

10(d) of the Act, the absence of, or any uncertainty in, any information should also not be used as a reason for postponing or failing to take any measure to achieve the purpose of the Act.

224. Table 2 provides a summary of the key areas of uncertainty, unreliability or inadequacy associated with the body of information underpinning the proposed options.

Table 2. Best available information and key areas of uncertainty, unreliability or inadequacy.

Best available information	Key areas of uncertainty, unreliability or inadequacy
<p>Recreational harvesting estimates</p> <p>The best available information on recent levels of shellfish harvesting relies on annual estimates of recreational catch produced by the 2022/23 NPS⁶⁵</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The NPS provides spatial and seasonal information about recreational fishing effort for large areas (i.e. FMA 1 and FMA 9). No detailed information is provided on the spatial distribution of harvesting effort in the Auckland Coromandel area or relevant sub-areas (e.g., intertidal and shallow subtidal zones; specific beaches or bays). • The NPS provides estimates of annual fishing effort for certain shellfish species (e.g., pipi, cockles, slipper lobsters, octopus, squid). No species-specific estimates are provided for some recreationally targeted intertidal species including limpets, cats eyes, whelks and sea cucumbers. It is uncertain how many of these species are being taken by recreational fishers from the Auckland Coromandel area or from specific locations (e.g., Muriwai Beach or Army Bay). • Anecdotal information suggests intertidal shellfish gathering in the Auckland Coromandel area is undertaken by diverse groups, including Asian and Pacific Island communities as well as international visitors. It is likely these fishing activities are poorly represented in the NPS surveys. • All of the above means the NPS estimates are uncertain and of limited relevance for understanding recreational harvest pressure on intertidal shellfish populations in the Auckland Coromandel area. FNZ considers it is likely that the NPS underestimates recreational fishing effort for many intertidal and shallow subtidal shellfish species. • There are gaps and uncertainty in available information about customary and illegal harvesting of certain shellfish species in the Auckland Coromandel area. The information on authorised customary harvest is considered incomplete.
<p>Status of shellfish populations</p> <p>The best available information on biodiversity and community structure comes from Auckland Council’s long-term State of the Environment Monitoring Reports: Harbour and estuary ecology state and trends in Tāmaki Makaurau /</p>	<p>No quantitative stock assessments have been undertaken for shellfish populations in the Auckland Coromandel area.</p> <p>Key limitations and uncertainties associated with Auckland Council’s monitoring data include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited monitoring of sites that are thought to be subject to high recreational harvesting pressure. Survey sites include 18 intertidal reef sites (14 on the east coast and 4 on the west coast) and 26 subtidal reef sites (all on the east coast) in the Auckland Coromandel area. The sites include some popular locations for shellfish harvesting, such as Shakespear and Fisherman’s Cove on the east coast. However, Army Bay at Whangaparaoa and Māori Bay at Muriwai, are

⁶⁵ Heinemann and Gray (2024).

<p>Auckland to 2023, TR2025/15</p> <p>Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland east coast subtidal reef monitoring report: 2007 to 2024, TR2025/24</p> <p>Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland intertidal reef monitoring report: 2011 to 2024, TR 2025/25</p>	<p>not monitored. To date there has been no monitoring of reefs in the Waikato Region.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The intertidal rocky shore survey method excludes rock pools. The method was designed to assess spatial and temporal differences in community structure on reef platforms. Surveys were undertaken in three zones at each site (i.e., high, mid and low relative to the tidal height on the shore). However, rock pools were intentionally excluded from surveys. Species assemblages within rock pools differ from the surrounding reef platform. This means monitoring data are not representative of the wider rocky shore and may not capture information about shellfish in rock pools or other reef areas with high structural complexity. The survey method does not capture information about shellfish communities on other hard substrates that are targeted by recreational fishers. The surveys do not capture information about the size of shellfish and population size structure cannot be determined.
<p>Status of cockle and pipi populations</p> <p>Berkenbusch, K. and Hill-Moana, T. Intertidal shellfish monitoring in the northern North Island region, 2024-25, New Zealand Fisheries Assessment Report 2025/27</p> <p>Berkenbusch, K.; Hill-Moana, T. (2024). Intertidal shellfish monitoring in the northern North Island region, 2023–24. New Zealand Fisheries Assessment Report 2024/35.</p> <p>Berkenbusch, K.; Hill-Moana, T. (2023). Intertidal shellfish monitoring in the northern North Island region, 2022–23. New Zealand Fisheries Assessment Report 2023/32.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pipi and cockle recruitment is highly variable which influences the biomass and spatial distribution of local cockle populations. At some sites, unpredictable shifts in high-density cockle patches occur between survey years, which creates resultant high uncertainty in the estimates. Where there are fewer large cockles or large pipi, population estimates have relatively higher uncertainty. Cockle beds tend to be geographically quite stable over time, but pipi beds tend to move from one survey to the next, which adds some uncertainty in the population estimates as the boundaries of the areas surveyed might not accurately reflect the boundaries of the pipi beds at the time of the surveys.
<p>Impacts of harvesting on marine species and the aquatic environment</p> <p>Auckland Council’s State of the Environment Monitoring Reports Auckland Council’s website.</p>	<p>Auckland Council’s monitoring programmes were designed to assess benthic community structure and ecosystem attributes. Monitoring data cannot identify the causes of any observed changes in community structure over time, and it is not possible to differentiate any impacts of harvesting activities from impacts of other stressors. However, trends consistent with certain stressors (i.e., sedimentation, metal contamination, or both) are identified for estuarine and harbour monitoring sites.</p>

Section 11 – Sustainability measures

225. Section 11 of the Act enables the Minister to put in place sustainability measures by regulations or Gazette notices. These measures can include closing areas to fishing or restricting certain fishing methods.
226. Section 11 also sets out various matters that the Minister must take into account (section 11(1)) or have regard to (section 11(2)) when setting or varying sustainability measures such as the proposed intertidal closures. A summary of relevant matters is set out in Table A3 below.

Table 3. Initial assessment of proposed options under section 11 of the Act

Matters that the Minister must take into account	
Statutory criteria	Initial assessment
Effects of fishing on any stock and the aquatic environment – section 11(1)(a)	<p>227. “Effect” is defined broadly in the Act. The direct effects of shellfish gathering need to be considered, as well as the indirect effects of this fishing on any other species and the surrounding ecosystems.⁶⁶</p> <p>228. There is insufficient information to quantify harvesting impacts on intertidal shellfish and other marine invertebrate species in the Auckland Coromandel area. However, international studies show that high harvest pressure on target species can selectively remove large adults and alter the size structure of shellfish populations toward smaller size distributions.⁶⁷ This can lead to reduced reproductive capacity and constrain recovery potential in areas where shellfish populations have been depleted.</p> <p>229. The biological characteristics of certain shellfish species make them particularly vulnerable to localised harvest pressure. For example, spotted whelks and cats eyes, have limited dispersal capacity and exhibit strongly localised population structures.⁶⁸ Intensive harvesting of these species can lead to localised depletion for indeterminate periods because there is limited potential for replenishment.</p> <p>230. The removal of target species can indirectly impact other species through predator-prey relationships and altered ecosystem functioning.</p> <p>231. Certain species of crabs, starfish and whelks are identified as important predators of limpets, periwinkles, sea snails, and other whelks across intertidal habitats. Intertidal and shallow subtidal shellfish are eaten by finfish that underpin important shared fisheries (e.g., snapper in northeastern New Zealand)⁶⁹ as well as protected shore birds and sea birds (e.g., gannets, terns and oystercatchers). Other shellfish with predominately subtidal life histories (e.g., squid and octopus) are important prey for marine mammals. Excessive removal of any prey species through harvesting efforts can negatively impact their predators.</p>

⁶⁶ Section 2(1) of the Act defines “effect” to mean the direct or indirect effect of fishing, and includes any positive, adverse, temporary, permanent, past, present or future effect. It also includes any cumulative effect, regardless of the scale, intensity, duration or frequency of the effect, and includes potential effects.

⁶⁷ For example see, Sousa et al. (2019); Martins et al. (2008); Martins et al. (2017). Substantial scientific literature focuses on effects of fisheries measures for limpets (*patella* species) as these support commercial fisheries overseas.

⁶⁸ For example see Dohner, M. (2016); Walton, K.M. et al. (2018); Arranz, V., Thakur, V. and Lavery, S.D. (2021).

⁶⁹ Underwood, L.H., Van der Reis, A. and Jeffs, A. (2023).

	<p>232. Limpets are recognised as functionally dominant grazers on intertidal rocky shore habitats throughout New Zealand. These grazing species fulfil an important role in intertidal ecosystems by suppressing algal growth and maintaining patches of bare substrate to support successful recruitment of other species.⁷⁰ Small periwinkles and whelks also contribute to maintaining habitat as secondary grazers and their removal may influence community composition and ecosystem balance.</p> <p>233. A number of international studies have shown that the removal of limpets through excessive harvesting can shift rocky shore communities toward canopy-forming and turf macroalgae and influence recruitment of other shellfish species.⁷¹ The depletion of limpets and other grazing species can lead to increased abundance of barnacles and displace other species through competitive interactions, with negative implications for wider ecosystem functioning. There is limited information on the grazing effects of intertidal limpets in northern New Zealand.⁷² However, Auckland Council’s monitoring surveys suggest barnacles are widespread at certain intertidal rocky shore sites in the Auckland Coromandel area and this may indicate an imbalance in grazer populations at these locations.⁷³</p> <p>234. Other recreationally targeted species, such as starfish, regulate grazing invertebrates through predation and fulfil an important ecological role by maintaining habitat and biodiversity in intertidal and shallow subtidal ecosystems. However, under certain conditions in subtidal habitats, starfish have become highly abundant and depleted populations of prey species including mussels, kina and pāua.⁷⁴</p> <p>235. All of the proposed options aim to reduce harvesting pressure on marine invertebrates in the Auckland Coromandel area.</p> <p>236. A full intertidal closure (Option 1 or Option 3) would reduce harvesting pressure on popular target species and increase the likelihood of recovery for any depleted shellfish populations. This would better manage (i.e. avoid, remedy or mitigate) any adverse effects of intertidal harvesting on a wide range of marine invertebrate species. Particularly as a broad prohibition would prevent fishers from using indiscriminate harvesting methods.</p> <p>237. A partial intertidal closure would permit ongoing utilisation of popular target species (Option 2 or Option 4) and there is greater uncertainty around whether this would be effective for supporting the long-term sustainability of harvested species. This option would permit harvesting of certain shellfish species that are subject to regular monitoring (e.g., pipi and cockles) and reduced daily limits. Further measures could be considered for these species if monitoring or other information suggests they are warranted. This option would prohibit ongoing utilisation of species that have not been subject to long-term monitoring or</p>
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⁷⁰ Coleman, R.A., et al. (2006); Dunmore, R.A., and Schiel, D.R. (2003).

⁷¹ Coleman, R.A., et al. (2006).

⁷² Research has looked at certain aspects of limpet grazing in the South Island, for example see Dunmore, R.A. and Schiel, D.R. (2003).

⁷³ Spyksma, A. and Shears N. (2025).

⁷⁴ Further information is available from the *Sustainable Seas Challenge* website [here](#).

	tailored daily limits (e.g., limpets, whelks, cats eyes), which accounts for the higher level of uncertainty around ongoing impacts of harvest of these species.
Existing controls that apply to the stock or area concerned – section 11(1)(b)	<p>238. Recreational gathering of shellfish is subject to a range of restrictions in Auckland Coromandel area, including method restrictions, reduced daily bag limits and area closures.</p> <p>239. Lists of the existing recreational daily limits, key regulated restrictions, and area closures for shellfish are set out in the main consultation document above. A full and detailed description of existing method controls for shellfish can be found in the Amateur Fishing Regulations.</p> <p>240. Fishers would need to comply with any existing method controls when gathering species that remain open to harvest from the Auckland Coromandel area.</p> <p>241. Any stock-specific or site-specific closures restricting harvesting of shellfish in the Auckland Coromandel area would continue to apply. In other words, the proposed options would only create <i>additional</i> restrictions on harvesting. They would not remove or override existing restrictions that are already in place.</p>
The natural variability of the stock – section 11(1)(c)	<p>242. All the proposed options would apply to a diverse range of shellfish species with unique biological characteristics that influence natural variability in productivity and abundance. Breeding and settlement seasons vary markedly between species and fluctuate unpredictably in response to changes in environmental conditions, which can affect recruitment, abundance and availability over different temporal and spatial scales.</p> <p>243. Certain shellfish species, including some species of limpets and chitons, reproduce by releasing eggs and sperm into the water column (broadcast spawning). The reproductive success of these species is highly dependent on mass spawning and requires a healthy breeding stock to support the likelihood of fertilisation.</p> <p>244. Other intertidal species, including barnacles and crabs, reproduce by internal fertilisation and release juvenile propagules. Egg brooding and larval duration differs between species with significant implications for dispersal capacity and spatial patterns of recruitment. For instance, certain crab species release juvenile swimming life-forms that remain close to the adult while other crab species release juveniles with extended larval phases that can travel much further before settling. Some egg-laying carnivorous gastropods produce offspring that remain highly localised after hatching and have limited dispersal potential. Dispersal is impacted by physical and biological factors which vary through space and time, making it challenging to predict connectivity and recruitment patterns.⁷⁵</p> <p>245. Each stage of the reproductive cycle is influenced by environmental factors, including water temperature, ocean</p>

⁷⁵ See Michie et al. (2023) for an overview of the key physical factors influencing patterns of larval dispersal and settlement from 15 locations around Aotearoa New Zealand.

	<p>currents, habitat and food availability and these interacting factors mean recruitment is highly variable between years.</p> <p>246. All of the proposed options aim to prohibit or restrict harvesting of a number of shellfish species with limited dispersal capacity and/or variable recruitment. The proposed options will better account for natural variability and associated risks of localised depletion for many shellfish species that currently fall within the combined recreational daily limit of 50 shellfish per person (e.g., whelks, periwinkles, cats eyes, limpets).</p>
<p>Fisheries plans, and conservation and fisheries services – section 11(2A)</p>	<p>Hauraki Gulf Fisheries Plan</p> <p>247. A large portion of the Auckland Coromandel area overlaps with the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park, except for shellfish on the west coast of Auckland from Muriwai to Port Waikato. The Revitalising the Gulf: Government action on the Sea Change Plan strategy (Revitalising the Gulf) is relevant to the future management of intertidal shellfish that lies within the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park. A key fisheries output from Revitalising the Gulf is the area specific Hauraki Gulf Fisheries Plan approved under section 11A of the Act.</p> <p>248. The Hauraki Gulf Fisheries Plan has three desired outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy, functioning aquatic ecosystems that support sustainable fisheries; • Fisheries resources are at levels which meet the needs of Treaty partners and stakeholders; and • Inclusive and integrated regional participation in the governance of fisheries. <p>249. Within the Hauraki Gulf Fisheries Plan there is a specific management objective and four actions relevant to the proposed options in this consultation document:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 2.5: Ensure harvest of intertidal and shallow subtidal species is sustainable; • Action 2.5.1: Update baseline knowledge of hard shore and soft shore intertidal and shallow subtidal species abundance, distribution and harvest; • Action 2.5.2 Review management approach and settings of intertidal and shallow subtidal shellfish harvest on the hard and soft shore. This could include adoption of seasonal closures or novel approaches to better manage intertidal shellfish harvesting. • Action 2.5.3 Support community efforts to monitor/restore intertidal species; and • Action 3.1.5: Alongside the actions under Management Objective 3.3, assist in the design and piloting of Ahu Moana projects for co-management of intertidal and nearshore environments in relation to fisheries outcomes. <p>250. The proposals in this paper focus on implementing action 2.5.2. FNZ considers all the proposed options in this paper would be consistent with the desired outcomes, management objectives and actions in the Hauraki Gulf Fisheries Plan.</p> <p>Fisheries and conservation services:</p>

	<p>251. Fisheries services of relevance to the review of intertidal shellfish include regular cockle and pipi surveys, and the tools used to enforce compliance with management settings.</p>
<p>Matters the Minister must have regard to</p>	
<p>Relevant statements, plans, strategies, provisions, and documents - section 11(2)</p>	<p>Regional plans:</p> <p>252. The Auckland Coromandel area sits within the boundaries of Auckland Council and Waikato Regional Council. Each region has policy statements and plans to manage the coastal and freshwater environments, including terrestrial and coastal linkages, ecosystems, and habitats. FNZ considers that the proposed management options presented in this document, are in keeping with the objectives of relevant regional plans, which generally relate to the maintenance of healthy and sustainable ecosystems to provide for the needs of current and future generations. A summary of these can be found here.</p> <p>253. The Auckland Unitary Plan Operative in part (AUP) acknowledges that removal of Pacific oyster reefs may be necessary to maintain or restore areas for recreational and commercial use and navigation.⁷⁶ The broader intertidal closures may not achieve consistency with this objective because they would prohibit harvest of Pacific oysters in the intertidal closure area, which may overlap with areas where Pacific oyster reefs have developed. The AUP does not override the rules in the Act or fisheries regulations, which also need to be complied with.</p>
<p>Sections 7 and 8 of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act 2000 – section 11(2)</p>	<p>254. Section 11(2)(c) of the Act requires the Minister to have regard to sections 7 and 8 of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act 2000 before setting or varying any sustainability measure for fisheries resources in the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park (HGMP).</p> <p>255. The boundaries of the HGMP overlap with the Auckland Coromandel area.</p> <p>256. Section 7 recognises the national significance of the Hauraki Gulf and section 8 sets out objectives for management of the HGMP.</p> <p>257. The proposed options in this paper aim to promote sustainable use of shellfish and other marine invertebrate resources in the Auckland Coromandel area. This will help to sustain the life-supporting capacity of the environment of the Hauraki Gulf.⁷⁷</p> <p>258. There are unlikely to be any significant adverse economic implications because the proposed changes apply to recreational harvesting activities. Constraining recreational utilisation of certain species, such as sea cucumber, by setting more reasonable daily limits, may support the legitimate commercial sea cucumber industry by disincentivising illegal trade and black-market activity.</p> <p>259. Broad restrictions on intertidal harvesting (Option 1 or Option 3) would significantly restrict access to highly regarded shellfish species (e.g., pipi, cockles, and oysters). Recreational fishers</p>

⁷⁶ Auckland Unitary Plan Operative in part, chapter F 2 Coastal – General Coastal Marine Zone. Policy F.2.8.3(2).

⁷⁷ Section 8 of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act 2000 states that the objective of the management of Hauraki Gulf, its islands and catchments are: (a) the protection and, where appropriate, the enhancement of the life-supporting capacity of the environment of the Hauraki Gulf.

	<p>may choose to travel to other areas outside of the Auckland Coromandel area if they wish to continue collecting these shellfish and this may incur additional costs. Under narrower restrictions (Option 2 or Option 4) continued daily utilisation of a range of shellfish species will remain available to recreational fishers within the proposed intertidal closure area.</p> <p>260. Under all of the proposed options, gathering of mussels would be prohibited in the intertidal closure area. Green-lipped mussels support shared fisheries and are highly regarded by recreational and customary fishers. Prohibiting take of green-lipped mussels may have negative economic consequences for recreational fishers if they choose to buy mussels instead.</p> <p>261. There may be some adverse impacts on social and cultural wellbeing as the proposed changes would decrease the number of shellfish that can be taken by recreational fishers. The significance of any impacts would vary depending on the scope of the restriction.</p> <p>262. While the proposed options may adversely impact recreational values of shellfish gatherers, they may also contribute to enhanced recreation and enjoyment for people and communities who value natural rocky shore ecosystems (e.g., observing marine life in rock pools).</p> <p>263. Overall, FNZ considers these outcomes are consistent with the management objectives in section 8 of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act 2000.</p>
<p>Not mandatory under section 11</p>	

<p>Other relevant considerations</p>	<p>Te Mana o te Taiao (Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy)</p> <p>264. FNZ considers the proposed options are generally consistent with relevant objectives of Te Mana o te Taiao – the Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy. This includes Objective 10, which is to ensure that ecosystems are protected, restored, resilient and connected from mountain tops to ocean depths; and Objective 12, which is to manage natural resources sustainably.</p> <p>Revitalising the Gulf: Government action on the Sea Change Plan strategy (Revitalising the Gulf)</p> <p>265. Revitalising the Gulf is a government strategy that contains an integrated package of actions capable of addressing multiple pressures on the Gulf, to ensure successful restoration and protection. The strategy seeks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective kaitiakitanga and guardianship in the Gulf; and • Healthy and functioning ecosystems that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Underpin the wellbeing and prosperity of the people who live, work and play in the Gulf; ○ Sustain healthy fisheries that replenish and enhance the pātaka kai (food basket) for customary, recreational and commercial uses; ○ Regulate, support and sustain the Gulf; and ○ Support resilient and diverse habitats and marine life. <p>266. The proposed options in this paper align with Revitalising the Gulf’s overarching outcomes as they aim to ensure fisheries management settings support the long-term health of shellfish populations in the Auckland Coromandel area. The proposed options also support the implementation of the Hauraki Gulf Fisheries Plan, which is a key output of Revitalising the Gulf.</p>
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6.4 WAIKATO WATER SECURITY ACTION PLAN

Rā Date:	3 June 2026
Kaituhi Author:	Thomas Wilding, Team Leader - Hydrology And Groundwater
Kaituku Authoriser:	Tracey May, Director, Science, Policy and Information
Mana whakatau Delegation Status:	For recommendation to Council

TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. To endorse the Draft Water Security Action Plan for the Waikato region.

KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. Water Security is a high priority for the Waikato region, and Beca have been contracted to develop a Water Security Plan by June 2026. The Draft Water Security Action Plan (refer **Attachment 1**) sets out a pathway to prioritise improvements that strengthen drought management and water resource management for the Waikato region.
3. The Piako River and the Waikato River were identified as priority catchments where draft levels of service are not being met or are at risk.
4. The Draft Plan identifies strategic investment options that can materially change supply, storage, reuse, allocation, or efficiency at scale, such as on-farm storage ponds or non-potable wastewater reuse. These can be triggered under an adaptive planning pathway.
5. A base set of actions were identified to improve water security, such as leak detection and efficiency. The base set of actions do not have specific triggers under the adaptive pathways because these should happen regardless.
6. The forecast 'El Niño' climate pattern increases the risk of a dry summer this year. Options for being better prepared for drought this summer will be discussed during the committee meeting. This is in addition to the long-term options for mitigating drought risk as presented in the Water Security Action Plan.

TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

1. That the report *Waikato Water Security Action Plan* (Strategy and Policy Committee, 18 June 2026) be received.
2. That in endorsing the Draft Water Security Action Plan, the Chief Executive KPI “*Develop a water security plan for approval by the appropriate committee by 30 June 2026. The plan will include a preferred pathway and programme using an adaptive planning approach, a monitoring framework to support implementation, identify specific actions, roles, and responsibilities and address information gaps and provide management options*”, is considered achieved.

HOROPAKI | BACKGROUND

7. The Waikato Regional Council (WRC) Strategic Direction (2026-2036) includes outcomes for “Sustainable and reliable access to quality fresh water”. This Water Security Action Plan is the next step in progressing that outcome - *“Deliver the preferred water security plan actions once they are adopted in June 2026”*.
8. Water security was identified as a critical driver in the Waikato Freshwater Strategy (2017). Additionally, the Mayoral Forum, Waikato Regional Council (WRC), stakeholders and the wider community identified water security as a regional priority.
9. WRC produced a Water Security Strategy for the Waikato Region (endorsed June 2024). A regional Water Security Management Plan was recommended by the Strategy to identify actions, roles and responsibilities and considers a range of information gaps and management options. The Business Case for this Plan was supported by Council, and funds were provided over the first two years of the LTP (July 2024 to June 2026). Beca were selected (via competitive tender) to develop the Water Security Action Plan.
10. The endorsement of the project plan by the Strategy and Policy Committee Meeting held on 19 June 2025¹ marked the completion of last years’ KPI for the Chief Executive. Subsequently, Council set the following KPI for the Chief Executive for the 25/26 year:
“Develop a water security plan for approval by the appropriate committee by 30 June 2026. The plan will include a preferred pathway and programme using an adaptive planning approach, a monitoring framework to support implementation, identify specific actions, roles, and responsibilities and address information gaps and provide management options.”
11. A council workshop² was held 20 May 2026 where Beca staff presented key points from the draft Water Security Action Plan.
12. The scope of the project is to build on the Water Security Strategy and the past work of the region to develop a programme of actions which includes an adaptive planning pathway response to the regions’ water security challenges. This extends across the whole region and all major sectors. This is not a limit setting plan - how much water people can take is covered under the policy and rule framework of the regional plan.

WATER SECURITY ACTION PLAN

13. The Water Security Action Plan sets out a pathway to prioritise improvements that strengthen drought management for the Waikato region.
14. Options across policy, infrastructure, data and partnerships were identified. Infeasible options were removed. Feasible options were assessed against service reliability, economics, regulation, ecology, and social and cultural values. Groups of options were then tested with stakeholders.
15. From the outset, councillors highlighted the rapid change in the water space and the implications for water security planning. So rather than commit to a fixed course of action, irrespective of national reforms, floods or oil crises, Beca have set out an adaptive pathway. That sets out the pathway going forward and the triggers for a change of direction.

¹ [2025-06-19 - Strategy and Policy Committee Meeting Minutes \(1\).pdf](#)

² [Agenda of Workshop - Wednesday, 20 May 2026](#)

16. Water security is a bigger problem in areas with low rainfall and high demand. It would be inefficient to invest in the same options for areas with high rainfall. The region-wide approach therefore sets out which catchments are a priority for water security action, starting with:
 - (a) **Piako** River catchment (Hauraki plains)
 - (b) **Waikato** River catchment (Tongariro to Port Waikato)
17. The Piako and Waikato have already reached the triggers identified in the draft pathways, as set out in the Water Security Action Plan.
18. A Catchment Water Security Group is suggested as an implementation method that could be established for each of the two priority catchments. These Water Security Groups could be responsible for developing Level of Service agreements for communities and ecosystems in their respective catchments. Action is then triggered when those Levels of Service are threatened. New assets can then be put in place to meet the design Level of Service.
19. The Water Security Action Plan identifies strategic investment options that can materially change supply, storage, reuse, allocation, or efficiency at scale, including:
 - On-farm storage ponds
 - Non-potable wastewater reuse
 - New or expanded reservoirs
 - Managed aquifer recharge
 - Desalination
 - High-security catchment transfers
20. It is important that adaptive pathway triggers allow for the lead-in time for the actions being considered, which can take decades to reach fruition (scoping, feasibility, consenting, etc.).
21. A base set of actions were identified to improve water security that range from business as usual (e.g. municipal drought management plans) to minimum new interventions (e.g. leak detection audits). The base set of actions do not have specific triggers under the adaptive pathways because these should happen regardless (subject to an approval process for new work).
22. Roles and responsibilities are set out in the plan, including:
 - Waikato Regional Council plays a critical role in water security as the regulator of water use. Te Ture Whaimana and national legislation provide over-arching direction to the regional council.
 - For the majority of the region's population, water flows from the tap every day because of the hard work done by city and district councils to build and maintain water supply networks.
 - From a catchment perspective, how much water is used is driven by the day-to-day decisions of rural, industrial and energy sectors, in addition to their long-term investment decisions on water infrastructure.

SUPER EL NINO

23. A super El Niño weather pattern is likely to develop over coming months, according to various climate agencies around the world. This raises concern of drought risk for the Waikato this summer (2026/27).
24. The Water Security Action Plan provides direction for mitigating future drought impacts. By planning ahead, we hope to avoid measures that are too expensive or too late.
25. WRC have various drought response mechanisms already in place. An incident Management Team can be stood up if there is a drought with serious consequences. On the Hauraki Plains, we have a Drought Response Manual, to deal with botulism outbreaks. Several district councils have Water Management Plans that trigger drought response (e.g. sprinkler bans, back up supplies). Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) can declare an agricultural drought that triggers rural welfare measures.
26. There is an opportunity for council to alert our community to the potential consequences of El Niño. We would use experience from past droughts to inform how people prepare for the next drought and offer existing tools for short term planning and long-term options through water security planning.
27. The suggested Piako Water Security Group could be assembled with the first task to identify near-term actions (e.g. feed supplies, botulism surveillance, emergency water supplies), ahead of the tasks laid out for them in the Water Security Action Plan.

WHAKAKAPINGA | CONCLUSION

28. Waikato Regional Council alone does not have the answers and will need to gain mandate and support from a range of public and private stakeholders and iwi partners, many of whom will need to make investments of their own to improve water security.
29. The Water Security Action Plan provides direction to Council and our partners in where to focus our attention and resources.

ĀPITIHINGA | ATTACHMENTS

1. **Draft Waikato Region Water Security Action Plan – Doc # 35630317** [↓](#)



Water Security Action Plan

June 2026

Waikato Regional Council



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Waikato Region Water Security Plan 2026



Introduction

1.1 Why do we need a Water Security Plan?

Water is fundamental to Waikato’s economy and community wellbeing. Recognised as a critical regional driver, water security is a strategic priority for the Waikato region.

The [Water Security Strategy for the Waikato Region \(2023\)](#) recommended the development of a multi-agency, regional-scale water security plan that identifies actions, roles and responsibilities for key agencies or sectors to provide our communities effective water security solutions.

This is the Waikato Region’s Water Security Action Plan. The plan recognises that an adaptive approach is required to managing water security that is specific to each catchment but based on a common model / method. For two of Waikato Region’s catchments, the Piako and the Waikato, there is some urgency due to already high levels of demand, environmental issues such as recent drought events and potential changes in water flows. This plan sets out a series of immediate operational actions that would improve water security in those catchments as well as a longer term staged approach, should the challenges become more acute as a consequence of issues like climate change or increased demand.

1.2 What is our plan?

The Water Security Action Plan is tackling a critical challenge: water security. It takes a whole-of-system approach to deliver an integrated programme of actions aligned with Waikato Regional Council’s Water Security Strategy objectives by:

- **Upholding** Te Ture Whaimana o te Awa o Waikato and Te Mana o te Wai by ensuring freshwater ecosystems remain resilient during water deficits.
- **Improving** our understanding of water demand and its economic significance.
- **Addressing** increasing constraints on water availability through a climate change lens.
- **Shifting** our thinking from water abundance to water scarcity.
- **Planning** for growth within water limits and creating future “headroom” for growth.
- **Enhancing** knowledge of water movement and retention in the landscape for longer.

The Water Security Action Plan acknowledges the fact that Waikato Regional Council alone does not have the answers and will need to gain mandate and support from a range of public and private stakeholders and iwi partners, many of whom will need to make investments of their own to achieve the strategic outcomes and implement the plan.

This plan focuses on actions required to maintain water security in the lead up to and during droughts. It will inform future thinking about water allocation policy but is not a review of the Waikato Region’s water allocation framework.



Introduction

Our plan on a page

Key Outcomes



Deliver action with clear owners, timelines, and measurable outcomes



Build on what already works and scale proven initiatives



Lift operational efficiency and demand management



Prioritise by risk and use adaptive pathways with clear decision triggers



Integrate catchment-wide outcomes with strong governance and partnerships

Operational actions to improve efficiency

Review guidelines for irrigation efficiency

Review current consent holders water use efficiency

Protect groundwater from contamination rendering it unsuitable for water supply

Engage stakeholders in decision making processes

Promote public awareness campaigns for water conservation

Shade streams to increase resilience to drought and effects of water use

Risk assessment identified Piako & Waikato catchments at highest priority

Strategic options when needed

Managed Aquifer Recharge

Construct new reservoirs or expand existing

Treat wastewater for non-potable uses

Encourage On-Farm Storage Ponds

Desalination

High Security Catchment Transfers



Waikato Region Water Security Plan 2026



1.3 Regional context and current system performance

The Waikato region experienced its driest decade between 2011 and 2021. In recent years, this has been accompanied by more frequent short dry periods, higher summer temperatures, and increasingly variable rainfall patterns. Water demand is highest during summer, which coincides with the time when rivers and streams are at their lowest flows. In several catchments, river flows have dropped to the low flow trigger levels set out in the Waikato Regional Plan, activating water take restrictions and placing increased pressure on available water supplies.

To better understand how the regional water system is performing under these conditions, we undertook an Integrated Systems Assessment. Drawing on available data and stakeholder input, the assessment provided a shared baseline view of water availability, demand, and system resilience across the Waikato region. It highlighted where pressures, gaps, and risks exist, and has informed the development of the Water Security Action Plan.

Water availability and system pressure

The assessment confirmed that summer is the most pressured period for rivers and aquifers. In some catchments, water allocation exceeds what can be sustainably supplied, while other areas retain capacity. Minimum flow requirements are not always met, with low flow periods lasting from days to weeks. Current allocation thresholds and minimum flow settings may not fully protect environmental and cultural values, particularly during prolonged

dry conditions. Confidence in water availability estimates is further constrained by gaps in monitoring and data in some catchments.

Reduced river and stream flows place stress on ecosystems, particularly aquatic habitats and wetlands. Prolonged dry periods also increase soil vulnerability, making dry ground more prone to erosion and, in some cases, causing soils to become water repellent following drought. These effects can persist even after rainfall returns, slowing recovery.

Demand trends and restrictions

Water demand peaks in summer, particularly for agricultural use, and often increases just as supply declines. Irrigation demand has grown steadily over recent decades, and population growth and expanding industry are expected to add further pressure over time. In response to tightening water availability, some users have sought to reduce the likelihood or severity of restrictions by securing additional water take permits or transferring existing consents.

Where rivers fall below minimum flow thresholds, water use restrictions are applied to protect river health and maintain essential supplies. Restrictions can affect connected catchments, increasing monitoring and regulatory complexity. In some catchments, restrictions occur for up to 18% of the time, while most experience restrictions around 3.5% of the time. The average duration of restrictions is approximately 10 days, with some lasting up to 18 days. Operational measures, such as sprinkler bans, have been used to support minimum flows during periods of high system stress.

Consequences and compounding impacts

Dry conditions have had widespread and compounding impacts across the region. Agricultural productivity has been affected through reduced pasture growth and lower crop yields, with flow on effects for rural communities and the wider regional economy. Extended low flow periods have also reduced the reliability of hydropower generation, adding pressure to regional energy supplies during times of high demand. Droughts occur regularly, and when followed by further dry periods, recovery times are extended and impacts compounded.

Looking ahead

Climate change projections indicate that by 2090 the time spent in drought could range from little change to more than double current levels, depending on the climate model and emissions scenario. Areas such as Hauraki District, Matamata, and Thames-Coromandel are especially likely to face an increased risk of drought. Future conditions are expected to include higher temperatures, more variable rainfall, and increasing pressure on water demand.

In addition, approximately 20 percent of the flow of the Waikato River is water diverted from the Whanganui River catchment via the Tongariro Power scheme. Resource consents for this scheme are set to expire in 2039 and there is no certainty that they will remain in their current form.

Implications for the Water Security Action Plan

Taken together, the regional context and system performance assessment show that the Waikato region will need to strengthen its water management systems at both a regional and catchment level to cope with increasingly variable and intense dry conditions. This means the region will need to work together to:

- Prioritise improved monitoring and information in ungauged or data limited catchments.
- Review allocation thresholds and minimum flows to better reflect ecological and cultural needs and seasonal realities.
- Target actions in catchments where water deficits and restriction durations are most persistent, particularly in summer.
- Prepare for increasing variability by setting clear allocation limits, triggers, roles, and staged response pathways.
- Support transparent, easy to audit governance and accessible reporting.
- Integrate cultural, environmental, and economic values into decision making.

Proactive planning and investment in resilience will be essential to safeguard water security for communities, ecosystems, and the regional economy as climate pressures continue to intensify.





Introduction

1.4 Waikato Region’s water security challenges

Communities across the Waikato are increasingly concerned about how climate change is reducing water availability and the resulting impacts on freshwater ecosystems, urban water supply and demand, electricity generation, primary sector productivity and future regional growth. Water security is both affected by, and a critical part of how we respond to, climate change. Any climate action planning must therefore consider water security, and vice versa.

Technical work completed so far confirms that water security is a regional issue with district and catchment specific differences. While the primary focus is on water quantity, it also recognises the interdependence between water quantity, water quality and the broader environment.

Water management and governance are currently undergoing major reform. The National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management, planning system reform and the government’s Local Waters Done Well programme will likely require significant updates to the Waikato Regional Policy Statement and Waikato Regional Plan and possibly resource consents as well. In addition, the government’s Local Waters Done Well reforms will reshape the political and operational context for water security in the region with new entities in decision making roles for community water supplies. These reforms will take years to fully implement, and their final form remains uncertain. For this reason, the Water Security Action Plan does not address detailed resource allocation policies

or governance issues. However, given ongoing reforms to the water sector, Local Government Act and Resource Management Act, interaction with future water services entities needs further consideration in the implementation of the Water Security Action Plan. This may involve revisiting functions of organisations, enhancing cross agency collaboration and adapting to future consenting and regulatory frameworks.

While these organisational and legislative changes are important, the critical point is that water security is an enduring issue, irrespective of the framework used to manage or deliver water. The Waikato Region’s Water Security Strategy shows that climate driven reductions in water availability, increasing demand, environmental pressures and growth are already creating constraints across the region. These pressures will continue, and in many cases intensify, regardless of institutional changes.

To support the Waikato’s long term wellbeing, water security must therefore remain a critical regional priority. Legislative reform may change how services are delivered and by whom, but it does not change the underlying need for a coordinated, future focused approach that ensures reliable, resilient and sustainable water supplies for our communities, environment and economy.

This Water Security Action Plan is not a statutory document. It does not provide detailed regional water allocation accounting or specific local government infrastructure or policy recommendations. Instead, it outlines high level actions, guidance and a decision making process that might be undertaken by local government and other stakeholders, with Waikato Regional Council in a facilitation and co-ordination role.



Waikato Region Water Security Plan 2026





1.5 Roles and responsibilities

The Water Security Action Plan sets out a clear commitment to delivering catchment specific solutions that reflect the needs, values and priorities of each community. Key to this plan is having a common and aligned understanding across all stakeholders in each priority catchment about the outcomes we are expecting to achieve for the community and environment of that catchment. These are referred to as **“Levels of Service (LoS) Objectives.”**

The Waikato Regional Plan sets out the region’s current objectives. However, these objectives are not always sufficient for catchments where increasing demand and changing environmental, cultural, or climatic conditions mean that outcomes anticipated by the Waikato Regional Plan are at risk. In these priority catchments, more tailored and forward looking direction is required.

For these catchments, there is a need to develop catchment specific LoS objectives that clearly define what reliable, environmentally sustainable, and culturally responsible water security looks like. These objectives should be developed in partnership with mana whenua and local stakeholders, reflecting shared values, aspirations, and responsibilities for the catchment. LoS objectives provide a clear foundation to:

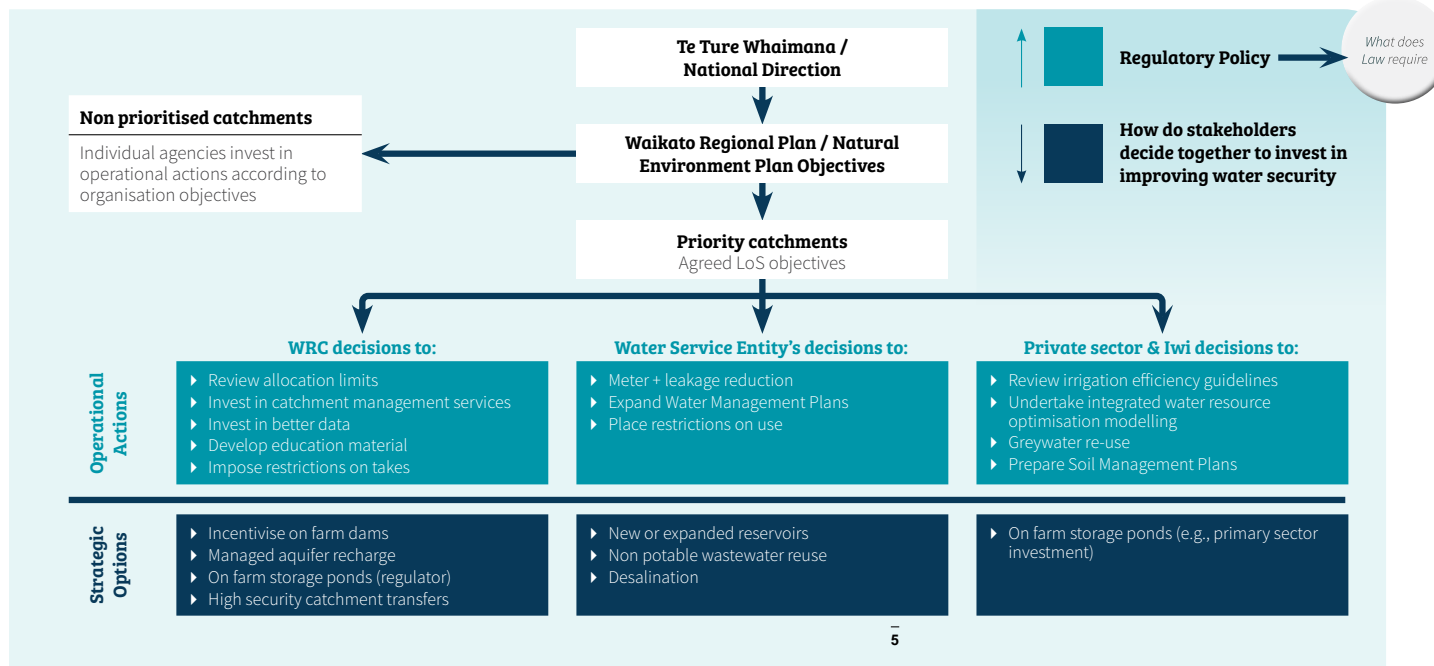
- Guide decision making across agencies and organisations
- Trigger timely actions as risks emerge
- Shape the sequencing and timing of infrastructure and non infrastructure investments

By establishing LoS objectives that are agreed by all potential infrastructure owners and investors within a catchment and adopting them as the basis for internal planning and decision making, actions can be undertaken in a way that is timely, transparent, and aligned with what matters most to communities. This includes protecting ecological health, supporting cultural wellbeing, enabling sustainable growth, and ensuring fair and reliable access to water.

This level of coordinated partnering is not required in every catchment. It is intended only for priority catchments, where risks have become sufficiently acute that multiple agencies and investors must act in concert to maintain agreed levels of service and long term outcomes.

How we envisage the decision making framework for each priority catchment playing out is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Water Security Action Plan decision making framework.



Ultimately, the Water Security Action Plan works towards a future where every catchment has a tailored pathway to resilient water security, where water management planning and investment decisions are made openly and consistently, and communities can see how their input directly shapes the actions taken to safeguard their water now and for generations to come and have certainty to base their own decisions on.

This Water Security Action Plan is not a static document; it is a living framework designed to evolve with new information, changing climate conditions and ongoing engagement with the people of the Waikato.



Waikato Region Water Security Plan 2026

Our plan for the future

2 Our plan for the future

We are taking forward a clear set of options and a practical approach to delivery, starting with near-term operational actions that should be prioritised now while we prepare integrated solutions, and identify strategic options (investments) that will be necessary in prioritised catchments when agreed trigger points tied to LoS objectives are met.

2.1 Operational Actions

Operational actions are the foundation of the Water Security Action Plan.

They provide the “day to day” and “do minimum” interventions that improve water security immediately, while also enabling and informing larger future investments (strategic options).

Their role is to drive early, visible gains in efficiency, monitoring, groundwater protection and demand management, while also improving the data and modelling needed for reliable triggers and adaptive decision making. By enhancing day to day performance

and preserving future flexibility, operational actions help keep the region within agreed LoS objectives and ensure catchment specific pathways can evolve based on evidence and community priorities.

22 operational actions have been identified as feasible for the Waikato region and its catchments. These are:

1. Reviewing guidelines for irrigation efficiency
2. Review current consent holders water use efficiency
3. Protect groundwater from contamination rendering it unsuitable for water supply
4. Engaging stakeholders in decision making processes
5. Promoting public awareness campaigns for water conservation
6. Shade streams to increase resilience to drought and effects of water use
7. Metering and leakage reduction
8. Monitoring and regulating groundwater extraction to prevent overuse
9. Ecological Response Modelling
10. Integrated Water Resource Optimisation Modelling
11. Develop Drought Management Plans with an integrated approach
12. Optimise timing of major water takes
13. Large Consent Holder Water Management Plans
14. Spatial Planning for Water Secure Development
15. Promote new land uses that align with water availability
16. Promoting / enabling greater use of groundwater resources for storage and to ease pressure on surface water
17. Reuse greywater at household/ industrial scale
18. Agricultural leakage management
19. Soil Management Plans
20. Establish regulations to cap water use during droughts
21. Coordinating the management of water, land, and related resources across sectors
22. Education on water security



Each operational action will contribute differently to improving water security; there are no silver bullets. Each operation action is categorised used the ease–impact framework in Table 1. These are:

- **Quick Wins:** low effort, high impact operational actions (e.g., shading streams to increase resilience to drought and water use).
- **Critical Enablers:** moderate–high effort, high impact long term, staged initiatives that strengthen water security and enable future strategic options (e.g., metering and leakage reduction).
- **Strategic Operations:** high effort, high impact initiatives delivered through staged implementation, with actions refined and targeted as water security benefits are demonstrated to maximise overall impact (e.g., spatial

Our plan for the future

- **Incremental Improvements:** moderate impact, moderate difficulty initiatives embedded within ongoing delivery programmes, with built in feedback and lessons learned to continuously improve delivery as data quality and coverage improve (e.g., agricultural leakage management, Soil Management Plans, staged drought cap regulations refined through Drought Management Plans, and expanded metering and monitoring).

Many of the operational actions are already underway in some form and these have also been mapped in Table 1 based on Waikato Regional Councils current work programmes.

This is categorised using:

- BAU** business as usual – work that is already programmed and budgeted for
- BAU+** expanded business as usual – would require additional funding
- New** new work not programmed or currently funded

The expectation is that Waikato Regional Council continue with BAU across all catchments. For BAU+ and New, Waikato Regional Council will need to review these for each priority catchment and prioritise each via the Long Term Plan.

Importantly, not all of the operational actions require Waikato Regional Council leadership. Other agencies need to step up and lead operational actions within their mandates. Notwithstanding this, Waikato Regional Council will play an important role in advocating and supporting others to undertake those tasks.

Table 1: Delivery of operational actions across the region.

Delivery	Operational Action	What Catchment/s?	Current Status	Description	WRC Role	Lead / support / advocate if not WRC	Cost	Time	Impact
Quick Wins	Review irrigation efficiency guidelines	All	BAU	Maintain scheduled updates; apply current guidance at consent application/renewal; publish a concise applicant/assessor checklist.	Lead	Primary sector	\$	T	✓✓
		All	BAU+	Deliver a targeted education programme (factsheets, webinars, on farm demos) aligned to consent cycles and priority sectors.	Lead	Primary sector	\$	T	✓
		All	New	Support development of national irrigation efficiency guidelines and prepare for regional alignment and adoption.	Support	Primary Sector	\$	TT	✓
	Review current consent holders' water use efficiency	Priority	BAU	At renewal, require evidence of efficient use and realised demand; right size allocations in pressure catchments with clear criteria.	Lead		\$	TT	✓✓✓
		Priority	BAU+	Run pre expiry desktop reviews prioritised by catchment pressure; initiate right sizing via plan change or case by case assessment.	Lead		\$\$	TT	✓✓✓
	Protect groundwater from contamination (high risk zones)	All	BAU	Enforce wellhead security and apply source protection zones through consenting and compliance; issue upgrade requirements as needed.	Lead	Taumata Arowai	\$	T	✓✓
		All	BAU+	Update source protection zones definitions and policies for the regional plan review; consult, publish draft maps and implementation timelines.	Lead	Taumata Arowai	\$\$	TT	✓✓
	Stakeholder engagement in decision making	Priority	BAU	Implement a structured engagement plan with iwi, industry and consent holders; document how feedback informs decisions.	Facilitate	All	\$	T	✓✓
	Public awareness campaigns and education on water security	All	New	Design and deliver a water security awareness programme with KPIs (reach, participation) and a monitoring/evaluation loop.	Lead	Water Entities	\$\$	TT	✓✓
Shade streams to increase resilience to drought and water use	All	BAU+	Re-target existing incentives to prioritise riparian shading in hotter, water short catchments; track canopy cover and temperature outcomes.	Lead	Waikato River Authority	\$\$	TT	✓✓✓	
	All	New	Assess and, if viable, implement a user charge to fund riparian fencing/planting, with transparent fund governance.	Lead	Waikato River Authority	\$\$	TTT	✓✓✓	

Waikato Region Water Security Plan 2026



Our plan for the future

Delivery	Operational Action	What Catchment/s?	Current Status	Description	WRC Role	Lead / support / advocate if not WRC	Cost	Time	Impact
Critical Enablers	Metering and leakage reduction	All	BAU	Maintain metering in Cambridge and Te Awamutu; work with providers to scope and prioritise metering expansion across remaining schemes and large industrial users.	Advocate	Water Services Entities	\$	T	✓✓
		All	New	Design and implement a cross sector metering and leakage programme: standardise data capture, embed continuous leakage monitoring with trigger thresholds, and require improvement actions when losses exceed limits.	Support	Water Services Entities	\$\$	TTT	✓✓✓
	Monitoring / regulating groundwater extraction (compliance telemetry and logging)	All	BAU	Operate the groundwater level network; require meters/telemetry for takes; audit data quality and follow up on anomalies.	Lead		\$\$	T	✓✓
		All	BAU	Apply consent conditions and sustainable yield limits; assess local and cumulative effects and enforce compliance.	Lead		\$	T	✓✓✓
		Priority	BAU+	Clarify sustainable yield policy to account for cumulative stream depletion; prepare plan change materials and technical guidance.	Lead		\$\$	TTT	✓✓✓
	Ecological response modelling	Priority	BAU	Set allocation limits informed by ecological response; use conservative defaults in low pressure catchments and detailed models for high value/pressure systems per Method 3.3.4.9.	Lead		\$\$	TT	✓✓✓
		Priority	New	Develop reach/species specific flow-ecology models and resilience metrics; calibrate with historic and simulated flows to inform limits and consent conditions.	Lead		\$\$\$	TTT	✓✓✓
	Integrated water resource optimisation modelling (start with current datasets; iterate)	Priority	BAU	Engage with operators using reservoir/gate optimisation models to ensure compliance with consent limits; share data/scenarios and coordinate during operations.	Support	Consent holders	\$	T	✓✓
		Priority	BAU	Set and maintain limits for run of river takes; provide clear operational guidance to consent holders on day to day decisions within those limits.	Lead		\$	T	✓✓
		All	BAU	Set environmental limits through consents/hearings; require and assess optimisation evidence for large storage proposals as appropriate.	Lead		\$	TT	✓✓✓
		All	BAU	Coordinate with dam operators on release operations.	Support	Energy sector, CDEMG	\$	T	✓✓
		All	BAU+	Advocate for providers to extend operational models to include broader water security and dynamic ecological objectives; convene technical forums to share best practice.	Advocate	Water and energy sector	\$	TT	✓✓
		Priority	New	Build catchment scale optimisation models using current datasets; simulate options against LoS Objectives, test trade offs/sizing, and iterate with monitoring feedback.	Lead	Relevant stakeholders	\$\$\$	TTT	✓✓✓
		All	New	Run optimisation scenarios during plan changes/consent reviews to improve multi user and ecological outcomes under climate variability; use outputs to inform limits and conditions.	Lead	Relevant stakeholders	\$\$	TT	✓✓✓
		Drought Management Plans	Priority	BAU	Encourage water agencies to expand Water Management Plans with alternative sources, meter triggered actions, and extreme event procedures.	Advocate	Water services entities	\$	TT
	All		BAU	Ensure municipal Water Conservation, Demand Management and Drought Management Plans meet Section 3.3.3 Policy 9/Method 8.1.2.2 of Waikato Regional Plan, audit implementation and reporting.	Lead	Consent holders	\$	TT	✓✓✓
	All		BAU	Support CDEM agencies to align drought plans with hydrological triggers and water security objectives; integrate data sharing and communications.	Support	CDEMG	\$	T	✓✓
	Priority		BAU	Maintain a regional Water Security Action Plan to coordinate proactive, region wide drought management across multiple takes.	Lead	All stakeholders	\$\$	TT	✓✓✓
	Optimise timing of major takes	Priority	BAU	Apply and enforce policy/consent restrictions that trigger at low flows; enable global permits to direct water to highest value uses within limits.	Lead	Consent holders	\$	T	✓✓✓
		Priority	New	Develop policy and/or apply consent reviews to require operational optimisation for broader water security objectives, not just compliance.	Lead	Consent holders	\$\$	TTT	✓✓✓
Large Consent Holder Water Management Plans	Priority	New	Require large consent holders to prepare and implement Water Management Plans with demand management, efficiency/leakage targets, drought triggers, reporting, and continuous improvement (phased via consents).	Lead	Consent holders	\$\$	TT	✓✓✓	

Waikato Region Water Security Plan 2026

Our plan for the future



Delivery	Operational Action	What Catchment/s?	Current Status	Description	WRC Role	Lead / support / advocate if not WRC	Cost	Time	Impact	
Strategic Operations	Spatial planning for water secure development	All	New	Embed water security overlays and hazard/availability constraints into spatial plans; align growth areas with reliable sources and infrastructure staging.	Lead	Territorial Authorities, Water Entities	\$\$	TTT	✓✓✓	
	Promote land uses aligned with water availability	All	New	Use regional policy and consenting to encourage land uses matched to local water availability and seasonal variability; provide guidance and mapping to Territorial Authorities.	Lead	Territorial Authorities	\$\$	TT	✓✓✓	
	Greater use of groundwater for storage/pressure relief on surface water	All	New	Assess hydrogeological capacity and risks; enable managed aquifer recharge/seasonal storage and adaptive allocation to relieve surface water pressure.	Lead	Resource Consent holders	\$\$\$	TTT	✓✓✓	
	Greywater reuse (household/ industrial)		All	New	Develop regional guidance and advocacy with three waters agencies to permit safe plumbing systems (e.g., backflow controls) for greywater reuse.	Advocate	Water services entities, Taumata Arowai	\$\$	TT	✓✓
			All	BAU	Maintain permitted frameworks for dairy shed effluent land application; monitor compliance and environmental outcomes.	Support	Dairy sector	\$	T	✓✓
			All	BAU	Continue effects based consenting for industrial process water reuse/land irrigation; promote onsite reuse consistent with Policy 3.4.5.2.	Lead	Resource consent holders	\$	T	✓✓
			All	BAU+	Introduce policy levers and guidance to enable broader greywater reuse while managing health and environmental risks (via plan change and codes of practice).	Lead	Taumata Arowai	\$\$	TTT	✓✓
Incremental Improvements	Agricultural leakage management	All	BAU	Enforce consent compliance; investigate anomalies where metered use exceeds limits; require repairs and report closure.	Lead	Primary Sector	\$	T	✓✓	
		All	New	Establish routine post meter audits and analytics to detect distribution losses; issue remedial notices and provide good practice guidance.	Lead	Primary Sector	\$\$	TT	✓✓	
	Soil Management Plans	All	BAU+	Partner with primary sector to provide guidance/training and pilots that improve soil water holding, infiltration and rooting depth for drought resilience.	Support	Primary sector	\$	TT	✓✓	
		All	BAU	Progress plan changes addressing land use intensification (e.g., PC1) with co benefits for soil moisture and drought tolerance; update consenting guidance.	Lead		\$\$	TTT	✓✓	
		All	BAU+	Strengthen policy/methods to explicitly integrate soil health and drought resilience outcomes alongside contaminant limits.	Lead		\$\$	TTT	✓✓✓	
		All	New	Develop incentives and extension programmes for drought tolerant soil practices (e.g., cover, organics, irrigation scheduling) with monitoring of outcomes.	Lead	Primary Sector	\$\$	TT	✓✓	
	Drought capacity regulations	Priority	BAU	Apply restriction triggers based on allocations and Q5 flows; maintain clear communications and enforcement protocols.	Lead		\$	T	✓✓	
		Priority	New	Update restriction thresholds and triggers based on optimisation modelling and revised levels of service; implement via plan change/consent variations.	Lead		\$\$	TTT	✓✓✓	



Māhikaio Region Water Security Plan 2026



Our plan for the future

2.2 Strategic Options

Strategic options are discrete investments or policy choices that materially change supply, storage, reuse, allocation, or efficiency at scale. They are major investments that require significant capital investment and/or regulatory change.

Six strategic options were identified for consideration when the operational actions are no longer proving adequate. These strategic options are prepared for staged activation through an adaptive approach. The options will not necessarily be relevant in all catchments and require significant investments and planning. Timeframes vary by site; progression is triggered by monitoring evidence, risk evaluation and monitoring against agreed LoS Objectives.

1. Managed Aquifer Recharge	
Purpose	Improve groundwater reliability and baseflows while safeguarding water quality, cultural values and ecological outcomes.
Lead agency	Waikato Regional Council
When to activate	If groundwater reliability or baseflow indicators threaten LoS Objectives.
Key dependencies	Site hydrogeology, consenting pathways, land access, monitoring networks, and construction market conditions; progression depends on evidence from pilots and ongoing monitoring.
Core metrics	Recharge and recovery performance; groundwater and baseflow support.
2. New or expanded reservoirs	
Purpose	Lift seasonal reliability, manage peak demand, and support environmental flows while protecting cultural and ecological values.
Lead agency	Water Services Entities
When to activate	If storage reliability or peak demand coverage falls below LoS Objective targets.
Key Dependencies	Site complexity, consents, land access, funding, and market conditions; staged delivery based on evidence and LoS performance.
Core Metrics	Seasonal yield uplift; peak demand coverage; environmental flow and cultural support; water quality; dam safety Key Performance Indicators.

3. Non potable wastewater reuse (irrigation/industrial)	
Purpose	Substitute industrial and irrigation demands to improve reliability and reduce pressure on freshwater sources.
Lead agency	Water Services Entities
When to activate	Where suitable offtakes exist and reuse can materially reduce restriction days against LoS Objectives.
Key dependencies	Wastewater Treatment Plant capacity and reliability, effluent quality, proximity to demand clusters, consents, land access, funding, conveyance/storage, user readiness and offtake agreements, community acceptance.
Core metrics	Reuse capacity and volumes; reduction in freshwater abstraction and peak demand clipping; reduction in restriction days vs LoS Objectives; cost per m ³ ; energy/carbon intensity; operational reliability.
4. On-farm storage ponds	
Purpose	Improve peak demand management and drought resilience, and protect environmental flows, with safe and efficient design and operation.
Lead agency	Waikato Regional Council as regulator, Primary Sector as investor
When to activate	If agricultural peak demand and drought exposure threaten LoS Objectives.
Key dependencies	Land access and topography, source water availability and conveyance, consent conditions and monitoring, integration with irrigation scheduling and farm operations, adoption rates, and community acceptance.
Core metrics	Storage and supply performance, Waikato Regional Council support to prioritise implementation, adoption and integration.

5. Desalination (seawater and/or brackish)	
Purpose	Provide drought resilient supply independent of local inflows/salinity and relieve pressure on sensitive surface/groundwater systems.
Lead agency	Water Services Entities
When to activate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large, centralised plants: for substantial, long term base supply where regional demand justifies scale. Small, modular package plants: for faster, flexible, lower demand augmentation (including seasonal or mobile deployment).
Key dependencies	Intake/outfall sites, marine works, consents, reliable energy supply (including renewable options), land access, conveyance/storage integration, funding, and community acceptance.
Core metrics	Production capacity/volumes; proportion of demand met; reduction in restriction days vs LoS Objectives; end use water quality compliance; marine receiving environment performance (entrainment/impingement, brine plume thresholds); energy/carbon intensity; recovery efficiency; cost per m ³ .
6. High security catchment transfers	
Purpose	Move water from surplus (donor) catchments to deficit (receiver) catchments to improve allocation reliability, peak demand coverage, and environmental flow support.
Lead agency	Waikato Regional Council
When to activate	If receiver catchment reliability drops below LoS objectives and donor surplus is demonstrably available across hydrological percentiles. Progress is contingent on a thorough feasibility assessment and compelling evidence that benefits outweigh cultural, environmental, legal, energy, and cost risks.
Key dependencies	Donor/receiver hydrology, corridors and easements, cross boundary consents, governance and accounting frameworks, energy/grid availability, funding, and acceptance in both catchments.
Core metrics	Transfer capacity/volumes; proportion of receiver demand met; reduction in restriction days vs LoS Objectives; environmental performance (days within guardrails in receiver; donor guardrails maintained); energy/carbon intensity; cost per m ³ ; cultural indicators (culturally safe access days, co design outcomes); operational reliability and integration with allocation/drought management.

Waikato Region Water Security Plan 2026

Our plan for the future



2.3 Integrated Water Cycle Management Options

The plan acknowledges that a range of other actions designed to address other environmental problems can benefit water security.

These Integrated Water Cycle Management (IWCM) options are enabling measures that enhance overall system performance, resilience, and long term flexibility but are not primarily intended to resolve water security issues during severe droughts. These measures support the health and function of the water cycle by improving water quality and quantity management, ecosystem resilience, ecological outcomes, and urban amenity, and can help maintain flows for longer in the lead up to drought events. Examples of IWCM options include urban stormwater soakage, use of natural lakes and wetlands for water storage, green infrastructure, integrated stormwater management planning, protection and activation of natural recharge areas (e.g., wetlands), and urban heat mitigation measures such as trees and reflective roof colours.

The Water Security Action Plan needs to support and endorse their implementation to achieve broader water management objectives such as Te Ture Whaimana and to assist in maintaining flows for longer in the lead up to drought events, however they are not primary drivers for water security outcomes.

WRC may choose to advance these initiatives under separate programmes or with alternative motivations, such as environmental restoration, community wellbeing, or regulatory compliance. This distinction focuses the Water Security Action Plan on actions directly contributing to water security in drought events, while still recognising the value of broader IWCM options.





Strategic Catchment Prioritisation

3 Strategic Catchment Prioritisation

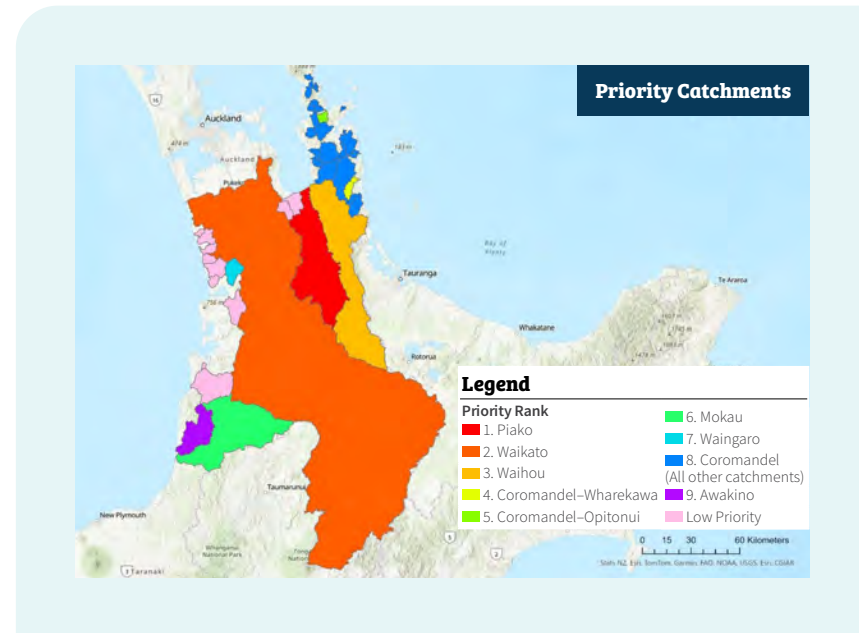
For this Water Security Action Plan catchments were prioritised using a multi-criteria method grounded in the Integrated Systems Assessment, combining restriction exposure (frequency and duration), demand characteristics, and seasonal availability of primary and secondary allocations, with particular attention to peak summer stress and a winter baseline for resilience.

Metrics were normalised and combined into a composite score, then converted to an ordinal rank where '1' denotes the highest priority (most constrained or most in need of intervention) and '10' the lowest. Consistent with this rank approach and to maintain regional coherence, all Coromandel sub-catchments that initially scored at rank 10 have been grouped within rank 8. The resulting prioritisation is:

Table 2: Strategic catchment prioritisation in the Waikato region

Catchment Prioritisation	
1.	Piako
2.	Waikato
3.	Waihou
4.	Coromandel–Wharekawa
5.	Coromandel–Opitonui
6.	Mokau
7.	Waingaro
8.	Coromandel
9.	Awakino
10.	All other catchments including Marakopa and West Coast.

Development of Catchment Specific Action Plans are to be sequenced according to this prioritisation. Other catchments can be added if pressures and demand require and funding is available.



Waikato Region Water Security Plan 2026






4 Dynamic Adaptive Planning Pathways

Conditions in the Waikato Region can shift quickly, especially in summer. Acting too early or too late can harm the environment, reduce reliability, or waste money. A clear, indicator based approach supports fair, transparent decisions under uncertainty.

Strategic options need to be ready to go initiatives that can be switched on when needed. These can be initiated through a Dynamic Adaptive Planning Pathways (DAPP) process.

DAPP is a way to plan and stage decisions under uncertainty. Adaptive planning means watching for the right signals, understanding risk and making well timed decisions when the signals are triggered. In the context of water security this means keeping an eye on river flows, storage, seasonal outlooks, demand patterns, and environmental and cultural considerations.



What “signals” and “triggers” mean:

- **Signals** = early warnings that start planning and pre work for strategic option(s).
- **Triggers** = the point where we decide to deliver a strategic option.

How the approach works

- **Keep doing the basics:** run day to day operational actions across all priority catchments to delay issues.
- **Watch for signals:** early warnings (from reliability, environmental, cultural and economic indicators) tell us to start “enabling works” so strategic options are ready if needed.
- **Decide at triggers:** when evidence is strong, a trigger / decision point is reached, and the preferred strategic option is built. If conditions change, timing can shift.
- **Stay flexible:** we prepare more than one feasible strategic option so we can choose the best one when we need it.

See Figure 2 for a visual overview of how these elements connect over time. Each element is explained further below.

Figure 2: Dynamic Adaptive Planning Pathways overview—current pathway, signals, triggers, and adaptation thresholds.

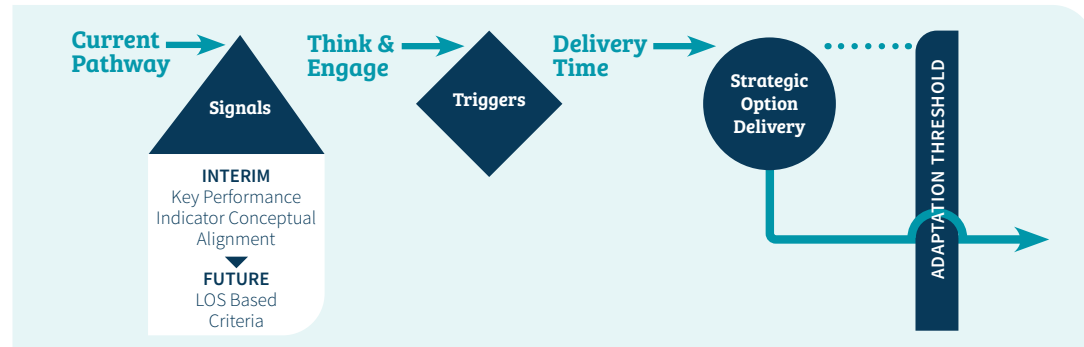


Table 3: Explanation of Dynamic Adaptive Planning Pathways

	▲	◆	■	
	Current pathway:	Signals:	Triggers:	Adaptation threshold:
	This is the baseline sequence of low regret operational actions you commit to now, plus contingent strategic options you keep “ready” with designs / consents so they can be mobilised quickly if needed.	These are monitored indicators showing how the system is tracking and whether risk is rising. They are evidence, not actions.	These are explicit, measurable thresholds on one or more signals that prompt a governance decision and activation of the next step. They are set early enough to allow for delivery lead time.	This is the point at which the current pathway will no longer meet LoS objectives under observed or projected conditions. It defines the latest safe timing by which an adaptation must be in place to avoid service failure or unacceptable impacts.
		For example, signals may be “restriction days trending upward”, “more frequent low flow alerts”, or “demand growth exceeding forecasts”.	For example, a trigger may be that “restriction days exceed the LoS objectives threshold for two consecutive years”).	



What the figure shows: the uncertainty regarding continuity of the Tongariro Power Scheme diversions beyond their consent expiry in 2039 and the expiry of the Waikato hydro scheme consents in 2041. This means that the key decisions on the volume of water available for use in the Waikato River will be made within the next ten to fifteen years. The Water Security Action Plan for the Waikato catchment needs to prepare for a future with significantly lower flows in the Waikato River. This means we work now to optimise our current flows using the operational actions. We work across the catchment to understand the different scenarios and explore means of optimising existing resource consents under different flow conditions as well as examining now, whether the Waikato Regional Plan or its replacement regulatory documents under planning law reform could do more to enable and incentivise on-farm storage ponds.

Once peak demand signals are met, we need to be confident that people are starting to build on-farm storage ponds. As climate changes and a high security reliability signal is met, we initiate planning to treat wastewater for non-potable uses. If transfers into Lake Taupo are reduced, a reliability signal triggers the need for new reservoirs or increased storage. Later signals lead to investigating the suitability of Managed Aquifer Recharge to maintain LoS Objectives.

Why this helps: Builds the right things at the right time, keeps reliability up, and avoids rushed decisions.

4.1.2 Waikato Catchment

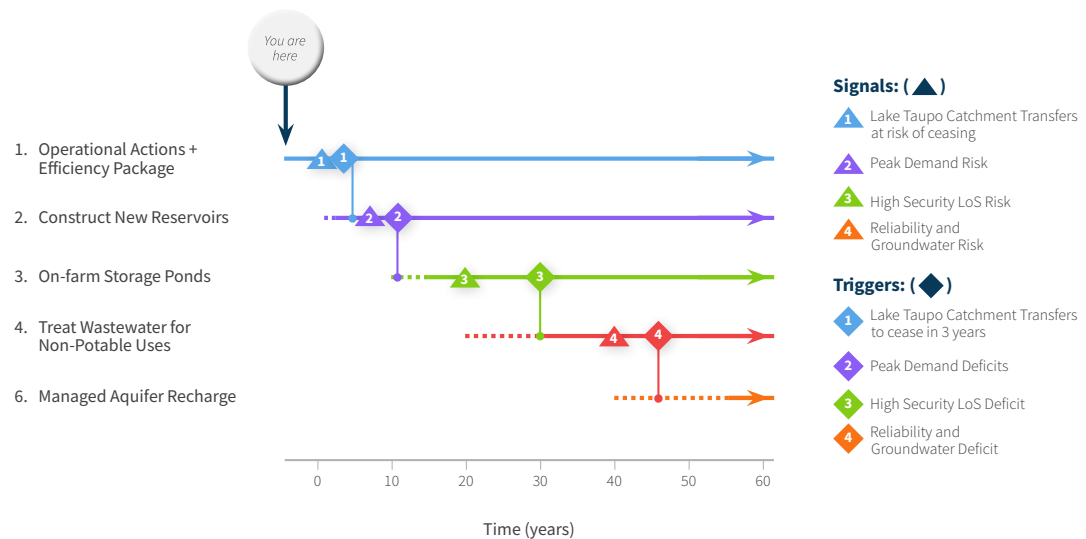


Figure 4: Waikato Catchment recommended Dynamic Adaptive Planning Pathway

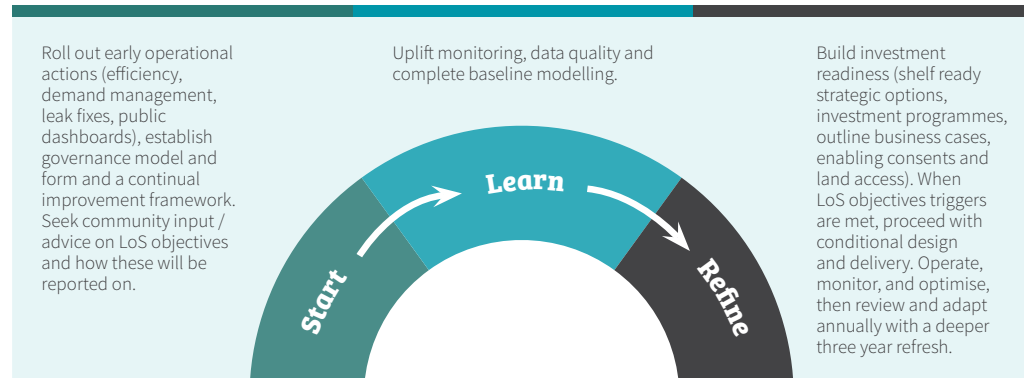


5 Developing Priority Catchment Water Security Action Plans

Once the operational actions identified earlier in the Plan are being implemented across all priority catchments, it is time to move to more catchment specific Action Planning for each prioritised catchment. This action planning should use a **Start-Learn-Refine** prioritisation cycle to move from setup to delivery in clear, staged steps for each priority catchment.

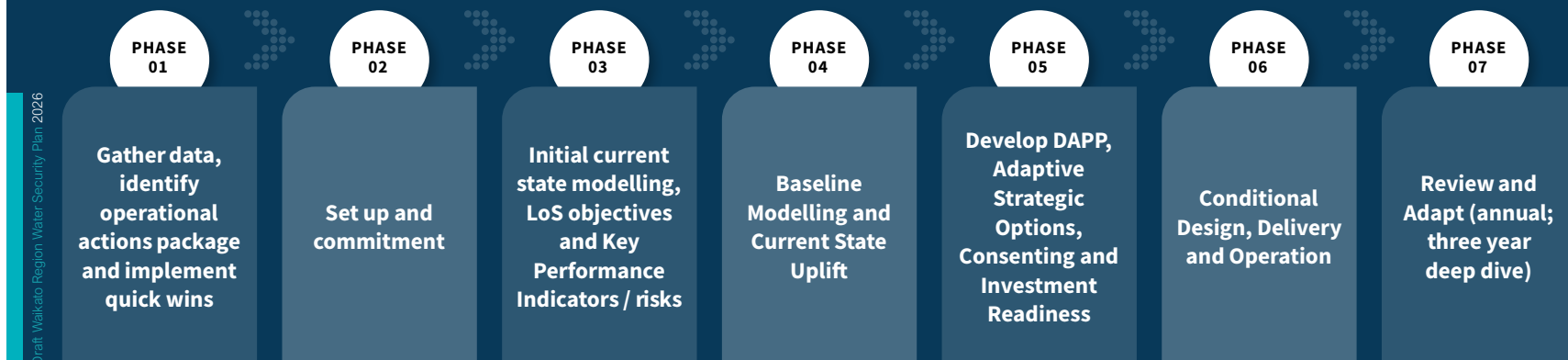
Developing Priority Catchment Water Security Action Plans

5.1 Start-Learn-Refine process



5.2 Delivery Phases

This staged approach shows how we will set up, prioritise, and deliver the water security programme in a way that is transparent, adaptive, and aligned to agreed LoS objectives for each priority catchment.



Draft Waikato Region Water Security Plan 2026

Figure 5: Delivery Phases Overview



PHASE 01

Gather data, identify operational actions package and implement quick wins

Purpose: Deliver visible improvements while larger strategic options are prepared.

Description:

Start with the data:

- Start with your priority catchments first, clean the data up, fill any gaps including additional monitoring stations, if required.
- Analyse your records of water use.
- Require electronic metering for all water takes.
- Confirm that Q5 levels are still appropriate. Where they are not, undertake ecological response modelling to understand consequences and guide settings.

Build value and transparency for water:

- Educate irrigators and water users on water stewardship and efficiency.
- Publish your data so water users have real time view of inflows, outflows and related indicators.
- Increase transparency with open dashboards and regular communications to build trust and shared understanding.
- Identify and implement other operational actions as appropriate.

Use your existing regulatory levers:

- Prioritise resource consent reviews for priority catchments.
- Examine your rule frameworks - could more be done to enable on-farm storage ponds by landowners?

What this phase will deliver:

- Roll out operational action initiatives; fix obvious leaks and data issues.

Outputs:

- Quick win operational action list and benefits realised.

PHASE 02

Set up and commitment

Purpose: Create the foundation for decisions and delivery.

Description:

Accelerate priority catchment approaches:

For the first **two priority catchments** this phase happens in parallel with Phase 1.

- Establish catchment water security groups in the two priority catchments.
- Confirm with them the LoS objectives, risk appetite, willingness to invest, confirm the DAPP map.
- For the Waikato catchment, start with modelling scenarios for no or reduced catchment inflows (from climate change and loss of Tongariro Power Scheme diversion).
- For the Piako develop an integrated model that captures levels of service performance across different demand scenarios which includes ecological responses.
- For both, confirm whether the operational actions will be enough to manage water through droughts. If not, start investigating sites of larger scale water storage and reviewing how existing resource consents will operate under reduced inflows.

It is essential to establish water security groups at the catchment level to enable local communities, water users and mana whenua to actively participate in shaping the Action Plan for their respective catchment. These groups will play a critical role in supporting governance in:

- Defining LoS objectives based on user needs and priorities.
- Determining, at a finer scale, which operational actions are most appropriate for their catchment.
- Providing community leader oversight for water security initiatives, including storage and related infrastructure.
- Setting up an Enterprise Risk Management Framework. This will provide a cohesive approach to identifying, comparing, and managing risk and opportunity across catchments, sources, treatment, networks, consents, drought management, reuse/storage, and customer engagement. Using consistent tools, language, and thresholds aligned to ISO 31000 principles, it enables clearer, evidence-based decisions on strategy, capital investment, resourcing and operations.

Membership should include mana whenua and key stakeholders to ensure diverse perspectives and robust advice to decision makers. For large and complex catchments such as the Waikato, there may be value in establishing subcatchment groups to address local issues in more detail. However, these groups must operate within a unified governance framework to maintain consistency and integration across the wider catchment, ensuring that actions in one area do not create unintended consequences in another.

Given Waikato Regional Council's regulatory responsibilities, it is logical that the Waikato Regional Council takes on a facilitation role in catchments with multiple water users, similar to its approach for flood and drainage infrastructure. In catchments where there is only a single significant water user, such as a municipal authority, leadership arrangements could be jointly determined between that authority, Waikato Regional Council, and other relevant regulators.

At a minimum, each catchment based water security group should include representation from iwi, District Councils, and Waikato Regional Council. Additional participation should be sought from major users such as industry, energy operators, and significant industrial water users (e.g., Fonterra) that are dependent on the catchment. These groups should work on a consensus basis with the ability to make recommendations but with actual decision making on investments or regulatory interventions reserved to the relevant accountable authority / investor.

What this phase will deliver:

- Establish catchment level water security groups that represent the catchment community with clear roles and accountabilities to refine and implement catchment specific programmes based on this Water Security Action Plan.
- The terms of reference for these groups could be based on the existing catchment sub-committees although their focus would be on water security, not flood control so membership may be different.
- Establish operating budgets and implementation funding for these catchment water security groups.
- Funding to come via the agreed lead agency (which could be Waikato Regional Council, a water entity or a local authority).

Outputs:

- Catchment level water security group terms of reference, delegations, budgets for implementation.
- Partnership protocols with key stakeholders and community engagement plans.

Figure 6: Delivery Phases Detailed



PHASE 03

Initial current state modelling, LoS objectives and Key Performance Indicators / risks

Purpose: once the catchment water security groups are established, they work together to use today's evidence to set a baseline, explore future trade offs and choose targets the community can understand and support. Define clear, measurable service expectations for water security that reflect community needs, environmental limits and affordability.

Description:

Initial Current State Modelling

What to collect: supply system configuration, yields and constraints, demand by customer type, past restriction history, emergency measures used, environmental limits, growth forecasts, costs and data quality. The Integrated Systems Assessment is a good starting point but more information at a catchment level is required. For example: catchment-specific demand and ecological requirements. This will help to assess the current level of water supply security and create a sound platform for discussing potential changes and trade offs.

Developing LoS objectives

LoS objectives need to be simple, smart and not applied solely to regulatory approaches. LoS objectives are not the same as the Objectives recorded in the Waikato Regional Plan in that they should be specific to catchments and not written in legal language required to inform carefully balanced consent decisions. They need to be meaningful to the average user or member of the community and not ambiguous or subjective.

LoS objectives set out:

- **What we aim to deliver:** reliable supply, safe water quality, healthy environments, cultural wellbeing, fair and affordable service, and meeting rules and standards.
- **How we measure it:** things like the number and length of outages, test results for water quality, impacts on streams and aquifers, and feedback from mana whenua and customers.
- **When we act:** clear thresholds for stepping in, with regular public reporting and a focus on continual improvement.

Examples of LoS objectives

These simple examples show how LoS objectives work in practice. Final thresholds are confirmed through detailed analysis and engagement.

Table 4: Draft LoS objectives

Draft LoS objectives	What we watch:	If we see:	We do:
Restrictions and reliability	The likelihood and duration of water restrictions (modelled stochastically, probability based modelling of weather, demand and storage).	The chance of restrictions rising above agreed levels, or restrictions needed more often or for longer.	Step up demand management, communicate early about potential restrictions, and bring forward supply, storage or network upgrades.
Highest and best use of water	Economic productivity per litre (e.g., \$/ML), efficiency of use by sector, and outcomes from allocation reviews.	Persistent lower value use or efficiency trending down.	Review and adjust allocations, support transitions to higher value, lower impact uses, and expand innovation and best practice programmes.
Transparent, user friendly allocation system	Time to decision, guidance clarity, application rework rate, compliance and appeals, and completeness of published data.	Delays, confusion, rising appeals or gaps in published information.	Simplify processes and tools, publish clear rationale and data and increase user support and training.
Environmental flows reflect ecological requirements	Flows against ecological thresholds, water temperature, and key habitat/health indicators.	Flows approaching minimum ecological requirements or temperatures trending high.	Adjust abstraction and operations to restore natural variability, enhance shading/thermal refugia, and prioritise restoration actions.
Year round, culturally safe and equitable access to awa	Culturally safe access days at key sites, mauri indicators co developed with mana whenua, and real time data transparency.	Access constrained or mauri indicators declining.	Co design actions with mana whenua, publish timely advisories and data, and adjust operations to restore safe, equitable access.

In short, LoS objectives make it clear what matters, how we track it, and when we act so decisions are timely, transparent, and aligned with community values.

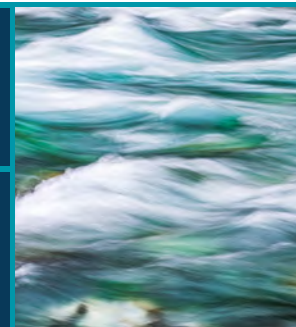
Example: Water security LoS objectives during drought

Piako catchment

- Waikato Regional Council will retain sufficient instream flows and manage water allocation to safeguard the life supporting capacity of the Piako River, its tributaries and associated ecosystems.
- People and stock have access to drinking water they need for wellbeing and sanitation.

Waikato catchment

- No more than 7 days in water restrictions per annum.
- No fish kills arising from drought conditions.
- Habitat is not permanently lost.





PHASE 03

Continued

Establishing Key Performance Indicators / risks (signals and triggers)

We use an adaptive “signals and triggers” approach to make timely, transparent decisions about water security. As we set clear LoS objectives (what we aim to deliver and how we measure it), our signals (early signs) and triggers (when we act) move from broad concepts to specific, measurable thresholds the community can see and we can audit.

How it works:

- 1. Align with what matters:** Link signals to the outcomes people care about – for example: reliable and resilient water, value for money, meeting rules and standards, healthy environments and cultural wellbeing. While we finalise the LoS objective KPIs, we note the assumptions and data we need to stay aligned with the Water Security Action Plan.
- 2. Set the thresholds:** Once the LoS objective measures are set, each outcome gets clear criteria, how often and how long an issue must occur, our confidence in the data, and the window for action so we respond at the right time, consistently.
- 3. Keep it traceable and accountable:** We document how signals and triggers link to measures, decision points and actions. Any changes go through governance and version control, ensuring transparency, data integrity and alignment with our water security goals.

What this phase will deliver:

- Work with the catchment water security groups to set LoS objectives with the community, water users and mana whenua (e.g., reliability, restriction days, environmental and cultural guardrails).
- Agree indicators, targets, data sources, and reporting cadence.
- Run initial current state modelling using available data to estimate performance against LoS objectives (with confidence ranges). Focus areas include:
 - Supply–demand balance and near term restriction day likelihood.
 - Source reliability and consent constraints.
 - Network losses (e.g., leaks) and demand patterns.
 - Environmental/cultural guardrails and compliance status.
 - Document assumptions, data gaps, and uncertainty; publish plain language LoS objective statements and initial status.

Outputs:

- A concise baseline report and data pack that is specific to the catchment in question (including uncertainties and gaps).
- LoS objectives framework, indicator set, and an initial LoS objectives baseline (with uncertainty bands).
- Assumptions and data gap log; reporting schedule and method.
- Public LoS objective statements and an initial dashboard of current performance.

PHASE 04

Baseline Modelling and Current State Uplift

Purpose: Strengthen the evidence base and complete an integrated baseline model that clearly describes current system performance and supports robust triggers, decision windows, and timely investment decisions.

Description: Phase 4 establishes a decision ready understanding of how the water resource system is performing today, where pressures are emerging, and when intervention is required to stay within agreed LoS objectives. It builds on the Phase 3 initial baseline by improving data quality, strengthening system integration, and explicitly accounting for uncertainty and delivery lead times.

What this phase will deliver: An enhanced integrated baseline model will:

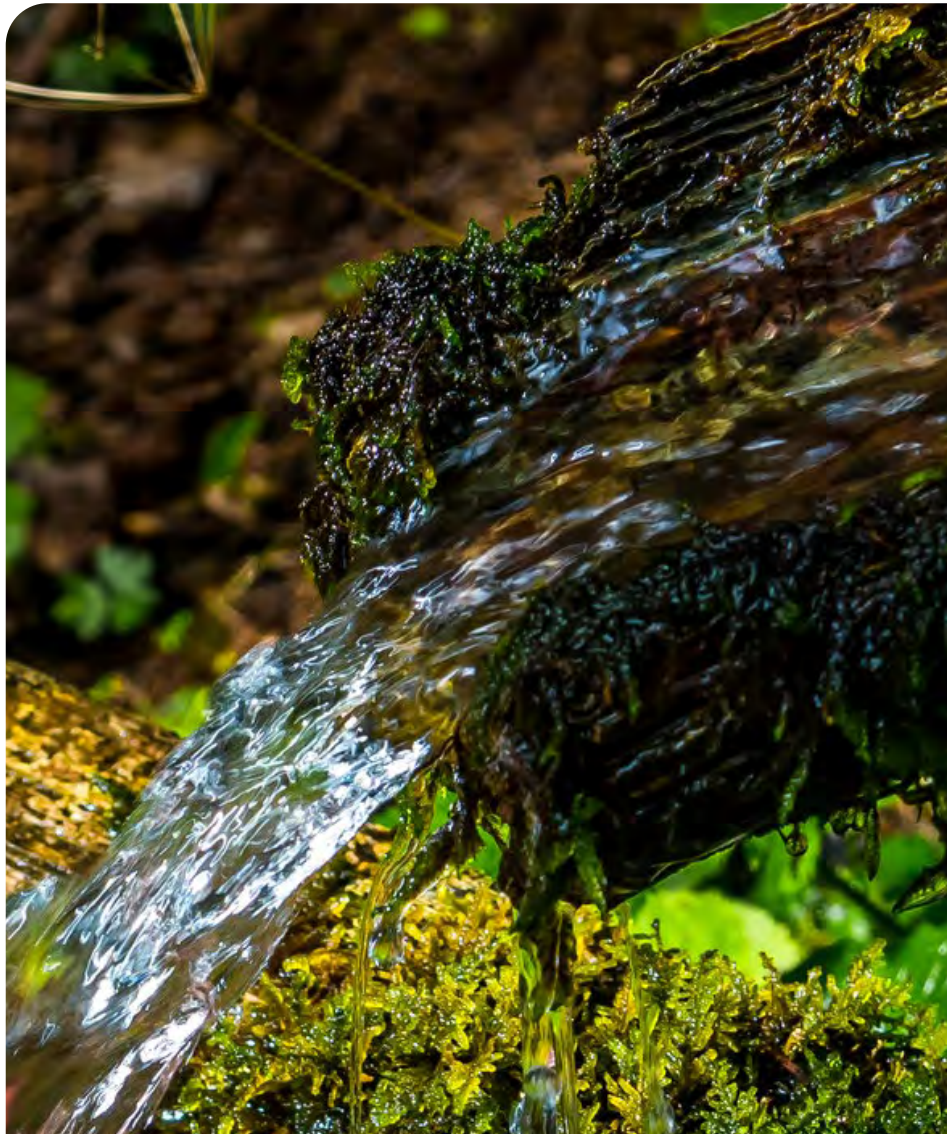
- **Integrate decision critical information in one coherent view**
Bring together LoS objectives, hydrology, demand, system constraints, delivery timeframes, early warning indicators, decision triggers, and risk.
- **Improve data quality and confidence**
Uplift monitoring, instrumentation, telemetry, and QA/QC processes so that model outputs are reliable, transparent, and suitable for public reporting and formal decision making.
- **Clarify current system status**
Recalculate the current (“now”) system performance against LoS objectives using improved data and methods, clearly identifying performance gaps, emerging risks, and uncertainty ranges.
- **Define decision windows and trigger thresholds**
Establish trigger points and decision windows aligned to LoS objectives expectations and real world planning, consenting, and construction lead times, identifying the latest safe points to initiate interventions.
- **Support investment prioritisation and staging**
Enable comparison across options and catchments by assessing urgency, benefits, readiness, risk reduction, and affordability, supporting near term investments to be staged in the most effective order.
- **Test plausible future conditions**
Assess system performance under a range of credible futures (e.g. climate variability, growth and demand scenarios) to keep options flexible and reduce the risk of over or under building.

Outputs:

- Integrated baseline model, supported by a targeted data quality improvement plan.
- Updated public summary of current performance vs LoS objectives, including confidence levels and key uncertainties.
- Technical notes documenting modelling methods, assumptions, limitations, and the derivation of triggers and decision windows.



PHASE 05	PHASE 06	PHASE 07
<p>Develop DAPP, Adaptive Strategic Options, Consenting and Investment Readiness</p>	<p>Conditional Design, Delivery and Operation</p>	<p>Review and Adapt (annual; three year deep dive)</p>
<p>Purpose: Build “ready to go” strategic options without over committing.</p> <p>Description: This phase delivers a prioritised, adaptive pipeline of shelf-ready strategic options and investment programmes, aligned to Levels of Service objective triggers. It is underpinned by robust option screening and outline business cases that clarify sequencing, dependencies, and trade-offs. The phase advances preparatory design, consenting, and land access to reduce future delivery lead times without committing to construction, and establishes a transparent decision-making framework with clear activation criteria, accountabilities, and funding pathways. These are captured in a living options register with defined readiness levels.</p> <p>What this phase will deliver:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop shelf ready strategic options and investment programmes linked to specific LoS objectives triggers. • Complete option screening / Multi Criteria Analysis and prepare outline business cases. • Progress enabling activities (preliminary design, indicative consents, land access) to reduce time to deliver, without committing to build. • Define activation criteria, decision gates, accountabilities and funding pathways. • Maintain an options register with clear readiness levels. <p>Outputs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Option investment programmes and outline business cases. • Readiness register, with activation criteria and dependencies. 	<p>Purpose: Move to delivery and ongoing operation when evidence confirms it is required, while maintaining performance against LoS objectives and improving over time.</p> <p>Description: This phase is activated when agreed Investment objective triggers are met and validated. It integrates conditional delivery with ongoing operations, ensuring capital works proceed only where justified by performance data, forecasts, and thresholds. Design, procurement, construction, and operation are managed as a single adaptive lifecycle, allowing work packages to be progressed, paused, scaled, or stopped as conditions change, in line with agreed guardrails and governance.</p> <p>What this phase will deliver:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When an LoS objective trigger is met and validated, activate the relevant option(s) per the investment programmes. • Confirm full business case, funding, and governance approvals. • Proceed to detailed design, procurement, construction, commissioning, and operation for triggered work packages. • Operate assets to meet LoS objectives, supported by monitoring, optimisation, and forecasting. • Publish performance against LoS objectives and respond to alerts when thresholds are reached. • Pause, scale, sequence, or stop delivery if conditions change, supported by adaptive review and assurance. • Drive incremental improvement in operations, data quality, and decision models. <p>Outputs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailed designs, contracts, constructed assets, and operational delivery for triggered packages. • Operational performance reports demonstrating outcomes against LoS objectives. • Optimisation actions implemented through operations. • Ongoing alerts and trigger responses informing future investment decisions. • Change and decision logs documenting activations, pauses, scaling, or stops and the evidence supporting them. <p>Note:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timeframes vary by option scale and the level of readiness achieved in Phase 5. 	<p>Purpose: Learn, update, and reprioritise - continual improvement in action.</p> <p>Description:</p> <p><i>Review and adjust:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep tracking the key data (drought frequency, demand vs supply, inflows etc.) for all catchments. • Adjust priorities as these change over time. <p>What this phase will deliver:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review outcomes, update LoS objectives/targets, and refresh the model and data. • Adjust the programme and investment priorities based on new evidence. <p>Outputs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual public review and a deeper three year refresh. • Updated roadmap, LoS objectives and prioritised portfolio.



Water Security Action Plan

June 2026

6.5 2027-2037 LONG TERM PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Rā | Date: 26 May 2026

Kaituhi | Author: Jane Apperley, Manager, Corporate Planning

Kaituku | Authoriser: Janine Becker, Director, Customer and Corporate Services

TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. To provide the Strategy and Policy Committee (the committee) with an update of the 2027–2037 Long Term Plan (LTP).

KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. Through the current planning and decision-making provisions set out in the Local Government Act 2002 (LGA), Council must adopt a new 10-year plan no later than 30 June 2027.
3. In setting *Te Pae Tawhiti Strategic Direction 2026–2036* Council have clearly set priorities for the next three years. Council have also set clear direction that this LTP should deliver Waikato Regional Council outcomes for the community in an effective and efficient manner, with LTP decisions to be supported by a comprehensive review of Council’s expenditure.
4. The 2027–2037 LTP is being developed in an environment of sector-wide change that is likely to transform the way regional functions are delivered. Advice to the sector has been that this does not remove the requirement to undertake this long-term planning. Instead, the needs for high-quality plans, backed by clear planning assumptions is seen to be key to support any future transition to a new entity.
5. The timing and impact of anticipated Government announcements may require adjustments to be made to the LTP programme throughout the development process.
6. As part of the 2027–2037 LTP, it is expected that Council will consult on the future of Te Huia interregional passenger rail beyond its current trial period. Additional matters for consultation may be identified through the development of the LTP, guided by Council direction, legislative requirements and Council’s Significance and Engagement Policy.
7. A schedule of LTP engagements with Council has been developed focusing on key aspects of the plan. LTP project updates will be provided regularly to the Committee with all formal decisions to be made by full Council.

TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That the report *2027-2037 Long Term Plan Development* (Strategy and Policy Committee, 18 June 2026) be received.

HOROPAKI | BACKGROUND

8. Under the LGA, councils must update their LTP every three years. The LTP process provides the opportunity to review the services that Council provides, the extent to which these services are provided, and how they are funded. After a period of community consultation, the refreshed LTP sets a roadmap for the next decade, providing the basis for Council accountability for service delivery to its communities.
9. Waikato Regional Council's current LTP was adopted in June 2024, and through the current planning and decision-making provisions set out in the LGA, a new 10-year plan must be adopted no later than 30 June 2027. The LTP must comply with legislation and should receive an unmodified audit report.

TE TAKE | ISSUE

10. The development of the LTP requires active ownership and engagement from councillors to ensure confidence in the decisions required by 30 June 2027. A structured programme of engagement with councillors has been developed with a series of workshops throughout the second half of 2026 leading into key decision points in early 2027. Regular updates are provided to the Strategy and Policy Committee, with all formal decisions to be made by full Council.
11. The timing and impact of anticipated Government decisions is likely to require adjustments to the LTP programme. This includes uncertainty regarding future rates capping settings. These uncertainties may impact the approach taken for this LTP and will be closely monitored. Guidance will also be sought from The Audit Office as required in relation to audit expectations.
12. While the sector is operating within an environment where change to operations and operating models is likely, staff are working on the basis that all aspects of the LTP will be completed, however where possible the approach will be streamlined to avoid additional drag for the organisation.

Dates	Workshop / Meeting
17 June 2026	Council workshop: 2027 – 2037 LTP Initiation and approach
20 August 2026	Council workshop: Levels of service
16 September 2026	Council workshop: Introduction to financial policies
29 September 2026	Council workshop: Infrastructure Strategy
14 October 2026	Council workshop: Financial Strategy
15 December 2026	Council workshop: Draft LTP budget
January / February 2027	Council meeting: Draft LTP budget approval
February 2027	Council meeting: Draft LTP and Consultation Document approval for audit
March 2027	Council meeting: Draft LTP and Consultation Document approval for consultation
April 2027	Public consultation on the draft LTP

May 2027	Council meetings: Hearings and deliberations
June 2027	Council meeting: Final LTP approval

WHAKAKAPINGA | CONCLUSION

13. Development of the 2027–2037 Long Term Plan is now underway, with the first Council workshop scheduled for 17 June 2026. A programme of engagement will support elected members through key stages of the process, leading to adoption of the LTP by 30 June 2027.

NGĀ TOHUTORO | REFERENCES

14. [Te Pae Tawhiti Strategic Direction 2026-2036](#)

ĀPITI HANGA | ATTACHMENTS

Nil

6.6 SIGNIFICANCE AND ENGAGEMENT POLICY REVIEW 2026

Rā Date:	12 May 2026
Kaituhi Author:	Jane Apperley, Manager, Corporate Planning
Kaituku Authoriser:	Janine Becker, Director, Customer and Corporate Services
Mana whakatau Delegation Status:	For recommendation to Council

TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. The purpose of this report is to outline, and seek approval for, the recommended changes to Waikato Regional Council (WRC) Significance and Engagement Policy.

KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. The Local Government Act 2002 (LGA) requires all councils to have a Significance and Engagement Policy (SEP)³. A SEP must include:
 - (a) the council's approach to determining the significance of matters and proposals,
 - (b) the criteria or procedures for assessing matters and proposals,
 - (c) how the local authority will respond to community preferences about engagement, and
 - (d) how the council will engage with communities on matters.
3. The Significance and Engagement Policy (the SEP) is reviewed every three years to ensure it remains fit for purpose.
4. A review of the SEP has been undertaken, and minor changes have been identified to future proof the policy and improve understanding of its application.
5. A council must consult with the community before amending a SEP. It is recommended that consultation occurs on the proposed changes via Council's website, enabling the updated policy to be applied to the Long Term Plan (LTP) consultation.

TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

1. That the report *Significance and Engagement Policy Review 2026* (Strategy and Policy Committee, 18 June 2026) be received.
2. That the Strategy and Policy Committee endorses the proposed changes set out in Attachment 1, being the Draft Waikato Regional Council Significance and Engagement Policy 2027.
3. That the Strategy and Policy Committee recommends to Council that the proposed amendments to the Draft Waikato Regional Council Significance and Engagement Policy

³ Section 76AA of the Local Government Act 2002

2027 (Attachment 1) be approved for consultation via Council's website and inform consultation for the 2027-2037 Long Term Plan.

HOROPAKI | BACKGROUND

6. The Local Government Act 2002 (LGA) requires all councils to have a Significance and Engagement Policy (SEP)⁴. A SEP must include:
 - (a) the council's approach to determining the significance of matters and proposals,
 - (b) the criteria or procedures for assessing matters and proposals,
 - (c) how the local authority will respond to community preferences about engagement, and
 - (d) how the council will engage with communities on matters.
7. A council must consult with the community before amending a SEP, and it is best practise to review the SEP every three years as part of the Long Term Plan (LTP) process.
8. In 2014, a standardised SEP template was developed by the Mayoral Forum's regulatory policy and bylaw workstream. WRC, along with most of the other councils in the region, adopted this policy with minor alterations to suit the individual council needs.
9. Council's SEP has been reviewed every three years since, as part of the LTP process.
10. A review of the SEP has been undertaken. The review focussed on:
 - (a) What other regional councils include in their SEPs
 - (b) Review of how 'significant activity' is defined.
 - (c) Review of the assessment criteria
 - (d) Review of the community engagement guide.

TE TAKE | ISSUE

11. The recommended changes are tracked in the draft policy attached to this report (refer **Attachment 1**). The rationale for these changes is outlined below.

Legislative references

12. The Resource Management Act 1991 is referenced under the 'purpose and scope' in paragraph 4.
13. To future proof the policy we recommended that this is replaced with a generic reference to 'resource management legislation', acknowledging that the Resource Management Act 1991 will be replaced by the Planning Act and Natural Environment Act, but that legislation had not been enacted at the time of this review.
14. Proposed change 1: Update Resource Management Act 1991 to 'resource management legislation.'

Significant activities

15. Section 97 of the LGA states that an LTP amendment is required, if there is a decision to alter significantly the intended level of service for a **significant activity** undertaken by the council.

⁴ Section 76AA of the Local Government Act 2002

16. However, our SEP states that ‘Council **does not** provide **activities** that are defined as **significant** in the LGA’. We consider that this is misleading as there may be circumstances where an LTP amendment would be required, and where our activities could be deemed significant.
17. Independent legal advice confirms that determining whether an activity is a significant activity is a matter for the council’s judgement, as the Significance and Engagement Policy does not conclusively define the threshold.
18. This advice also confirms that there is no statutory requirement for a SEP to specify what constitutes a ‘significant activity’. Accordingly, Council must exercise its judgement, taking into account the guidance in the SEP, and any other available information at the time.
19. A review of how other Councils approached the definition a significant activity shows that:
 - Most regional councils do not define ‘significant activity’ in their policies.
 - Bay of Plenty Regional Council define ‘significant activity’ as all activities in their long term plan, except those in the Corporate Services Group.”
 - Several district councils in our region list their core activities as ‘significant activities’.
20. To reduce future ambiguity, it is recommended that the definition of ‘significant activity’ is removed from the SEP. This would enable Council to exercise its discretion when determining if an activity is significant (using the criteria set out in the SEP and the relevant circumstances at the time).
21. Proposed change 2: Remove the definition of ‘significant activity.’

Assessment of significance

22. Council’s SEP sets out a list of criteria to be considered when assessing the degree of significance of proposals and decisions, and to inform the appropriate level of engagement.
23. No weighting is applied to the criteria in this list. Instead, an internal assessment tool supports staff in forming an overall judgement.
24. This approach is consistent with Taituara’s guidance that supports a continuum approach and reflects legislative changes that removed the requirement for thresholds, with the intent of moving away from a binary (“black and white”) assessment model.
25. A review of policies from other councils indicates that most regional councils include a list of criteria like our own.
26. However, a small number of councils take a more prescriptive approach by explicitly identifying matters that will result in a ‘high degree’ of significance. These councils specify three key criteria, with corresponding thresholds. If these thresholds are met, the matter is deemed to be of high significance.
27. Whilst this approach may provide greater clarity, staff have indicated a strong preference for retaining the ability to exercise judgement, considering the specific circumstances of each decision or proposal.
28. Instead, to provide greater clarity about how to apply the SEP, it is recommended that an additional explanatory paragraph is included, supported by a flow chart in internal guidance documents.
29. Proposed change 3: Add an additional paragraph as follows:

“Assessing the level of significance of a decision or proposal will be a matter of judgement. All the above criteria will be considered but depending on the circumstances, some criteria may carry greater relevance than others. The outcome of the assessment will be high, medium, or low significance.”

Assessment criteria

30. Following this review, the list of criteria is considered generally fit for purpose. However, two minor changes are recommended.
31. First, it is recommended that bullet 6 in the list of criteria is updated. The current criteria refer to ‘whether the proposal affects the level of service of a significant activity.’ Under the proposed removal of the definition of significant activity this criterion is likely to be consistently assessed as ‘not applicable’.
32. Given the recommendation to remove the definition of ‘significant activity’, it is proposed that this criterion instead focus on levels of services as set out in Council’s LTP.
33. Proposed change 5: Amend bullet point 6 under ‘Assessment of Significance’ in the SEP, to reference levels of service instead of significant activities.

~~Whether the proposal affects the level of service of a significant activity~~

Whether the proposal impacts on the level of service provided by Council or the way in which the level of service is delivered.

34. Secondly, staff highlighted the need to recognise where Council has already made a commitment to engage with a specific group or the community on key topics. For example, previous commitments to engage with iwi, or references in our LTP consultation document committing to consult on the future of Te Huia when funding arrangements change.
35. Proposed change 5: Include the following new criterion:

Whether there has been a prior commitment to consult with the community on a specific matter.

Strategic assets

36. The strategic assets section has been reviewed and is considered to remain appropriate. However, it is noted that this section may be impacted by future changes following the reform of local government.

Schedule 2: Community Engagement Guide

37. No significant changes have been proposed for this section. Minor changes have been proposed to the table of engagement tools and techniques to provide more up to date examples of the types of tools that we might use for the different levels of engagement.
38. Proposed change 6: Make minor changes to the example tools listed in the engagement tools table.

TE URUTAI KI TE HURIHANGA ĀHUARANGI | ADAPTATION TO CLIMATE CHANGE

39. This decision will have no impact on the ability of the council or region to proactively respond to the impact of climate change now or in the future.

TE WHAKAMAURU – TE WHAKAHEKE I NGĀ PĀNGA KI TE ĀHUARANGI | MITIGATION – REDUCING IMPACTS ON THE CLIMATE

40. The decision is likely to result in no impact in greenhouse gas emissions.

TE HAUTŪ ĀHUARANGI | CLIMATE LEADERSHIP

41. This decision will have no impact on the council’s ability to show climate leadership.

TE AROMATAWAI I TE HIRANGA | ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

42. Having regard to the decision making provisions in the LGA and the council’s *Significance and Engagement Policy* a decision in accordance with the recommendations is considered to have a high degree of significance. Consultation on the proposed changes will occur via Council’s website, enabling adoption ahead of any policy changes ahead of the commencement of the 2027 – 2037 Long Term Plan. In doing this, requirements for consultation through the LTP can be assessed against the new SEP.
43. Staff are of the opinion that the content and recommendations in the report are consistent with the decision making requirements contained in Part Six of the LGA and that the decision making requirements of the LGA have been met.

TE HOROPAKI Ā-TURE | LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

44. Section 76AA of the Local Government Act 2002 (LGA) requires every council to have a Significance and Engagement Policy. A SEP must include:
- (a) the council’s approach to determining the significance of matters and proposals,
 - (b) the criteria or procedures for assessing matters and proposals,
 - (c) how the local authority will respond to community preferences about engagement, and
 - (d) how the council will engage with communities on matters.
45. When adopting or amending a policy under section 76AA, the local authority must consult in accordance with section 82 unless it considers on reasonable grounds that it has sufficient information about community interests and preferences to enable the purpose of the policy to be achieved.

KŌWHIRINGA I MANAKOHIA | PREFERRED OPTION

46. That the Council adopts the proposed changes to the SEP and resolves to consult with the community on the changes through the Long Term Plan consultation process.

NGĀ WHAIWHAKAARO KAUPAPAHERE | POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

47. To the best of the writer’s knowledge, this decision is not significantly inconsistent with, nor is anticipated to have consequences that will be significantly inconsistent with any policy adopted by Council or any plan required under the LGA or any other enactment.

TE TIRITI O WAITANGI | THE TREATY OF WAITANGI

48. Council is obligated under the LGA to recognise and respect the Crown's responsibility to take appropriate account of the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi and to maintain and improve opportunities for Māori to contribute to local government decision-making processes.
49. The SEP requires consideration of the likely impact on Māori cultural values and their relationship to land and water, when assessing the significance of a decision. The SEP is also supported by the Māori Engagement Framework, which provides guidance on best practice engagement to those looking to engage with Māori.

WHAKAKAPINGA | CONCLUSION

50. Council's SEP remains fit for purpose, and there are no substantive changes required. Several minor amendments are proposed to future-proof the Policy and enhance clarity in its application.

ĀPITI HANGA | ATTACHMENTS

1. **Waikato Regional Council Significance and Engagement Policy – (Doc # 35554516)** [↓](#)

TE KAUPAPAHERE MŌ TE TĀPUATANGA ME TE WHAKAPĀNGA SIGNIFICANCE AND ENGAGEMENT POLICY



Kupu whakataki | Introduction

Waikato Regional Council's Significance and Engagement Policy was adopted in 2014 and has since been reviewed every three years to meet our legislative requirements under the Local Government Act 2002 (the LGA). The policy:

- enables the council and our communities to understand the significance council places on certain issues, proposals, assets, decisions and activities
- identifies how and when communities can expect to be engaged or specifically consulted on these items.

The Significance and Engagement policy applies across our council. When assessing the degree of significance and deciding on appropriate engagement or consultation processes, the policy requires us to take into consideration other legislative requirements, as well as any other agreements that might already be in place. To ensure council engages as effectively as possible with the Waikato region's diverse communities, we gather information on people's views and preferences in a variety of ways. Sometimes that might be via formal statutory consultation, or it might be via a more informal engagement process. Either way, the overall intent is to ensure that, wherever possible, anyone who wishes to contribute ideas or information to important council processes and decisions has the opportunity to do so.

Koronga me te aronga | Purpose and scope

1. To enable the council and its communities to identify the degree of significance attached to particular issues, proposals, assets, decisions and activities.
2. To provide clarity about how and when communities can expect to be engaged in decisions made by the council.
3. To inform the council from the beginning of a decision-making process about the extent, form and type of engagement required.
4. This policy does not apply to decision making under the [Resource Management Act 1991](#) and or other legislation that includes a prescribed consultative/engagement process.

Rārangi whakamārama | Definitions

Asset class	Council operational assets and council infrastructure assets, as disclosed in the council's Annual Report - Property, Plant and Equipment table.
Community	A group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common. Includes interested parties, affected people and key stakeholders.
Decisions	Refers to all the decisions made by or on behalf of the council including those made by officers under delegation. (Management decisions made by officers under delegation during the implementation of council decisions will not be deemed to be significant).
Engagement	Is a term used to describe the process of providing information to or seeking information from the community to inform and assist decision making. There is a continuum of community involvement.

Significance	As defined in Section 5 of the LGA “in relation to any issue, proposal, decision, or other matter that concerns or is before a local authority, means the degree of importance of the issue, proposal, decision, or matter, as assessed by the local authority, in terms of its likely impact on, and likely consequences for,— (a) the district or region: 2. (b) any persons who are likely to be particularly affected by, or interested in, the issue, proposal, decision, or matter: 3. (c) the capacity of the local authority to perform its role, and the financial and other costs of doing so.
Significant Activity	Council does not provide activities that are defined as significant in the LGA.
Strategic Assets	As defined in Section 5 of the LGA “in relation to the assets held by a local authority, means an asset or group of assets that the local authority needs to retain if the local authority is to maintain the local authority’s capacity to achieve or promote any outcome that the local authority determines to be important to the current or future well-being of the community; and includes— (a) any asset or group of assets listed in accordance with section 76AA(3) by the local authority; and (b) any land or building owned by the local authority and required to maintain the local authority’s capacity to provide affordable housing as part of its social policy; and (c) any equity securities held by the local authority in – (i) i. a port company within the meaning of the Port Companies Act 1988: (ii) ii. an airport company within the meaning of the Airport Authorities Act 1996”.

Kaupapahere | Policy

- Engaging with the community is necessary to understand the views and preferences of people likely to be affected by or interested in a proposal or decision.
- An assessment of the degree of significance of proposals and decisions, and the appropriate level of engagement, will therefore be considered in the early stages of a proposal before decision making occurs and, if necessary, reconsidered as a proposal develops.

Whakataunga o te tāpuatanga | Assessment of significance

1. The council will take into account the following matters when assessing the degree of significance of proposals and decisions, and the appropriate level of engagement:
 - There is a legal requirement to engage with the community
 - The level of financial consequences of the proposal or decision
 - Whether the proposal or decision will affect a large portion of the community
 - The likely impact on present and future interests of the community
 - The likely impact on Māori cultural values and their relationship to land and water (also refer section 9)
 - Whether the proposal impacts on the levels of service provided by Council or the way in which the level of service is delivered proposal affects the level of service of a significant activity
 - Whether community interest is high
 - Whether the likely consequences are controversial and/or has a likely impact on the reputation of Council
 - Whether community views are already known, including the community’s preferences about the form of engagement

- [Whether the council has already made a commitment to consult with the community on a specific matter](#)
 - The form of engagement used in the past for similar proposals and decisions.
2. The council will take into account the degree to which the issue has a financial impact on the council or the rating levels of its communities, using the following thresholds:
- An unbudgeted operating expenditure greater than 5 per cent of council's total operating expenditure in that year, excluding amortisation and depreciation.
 - An unbudgeted capital expenditure greater than 2 per cent of the total value of council's assets in that year, excluding amortisation and depreciation.
3. If a proposal or decision is affected by the above considerations, it is more likely to have a high degree of significance.
4. [Assessing the level of significance of a decision or proposal will be a matter of judgment. All of the above criteria will be considered but depending on the circumstances, some criteria may be more relevant than others. The outcome of the assessment will be high, medium or low.](#)
- 5.[4.] In general, the more significant an issue, the greater the need for effective community engagement.

Te whakapānga me te akoakotanga | Engagement and consultation

- 6.[5.] The council will apply a consistent and transparent approach to engagement.
- 7.[6.] The council is required to undertake a special consultative procedure as set out in Section 83 of the LGA, or to carry out consultation in accordance with or giving effect to Section 82 of the LGA on certain matters (regardless of whether they are considered significant as part of this policy).
- 8.[7.] For all other issues requiring a decision, the council may determine the appropriate level of engagement (section 82 of the LGA) on a case by case basis.
- 9.[8.] The Community Engagement Guide (schedule two, attached) identifies the form of engagement the council will use to respond to some specific issues. It also provides examples of types of issues and how and when communities could expect to be engaged in the decision-making process.
- 10.[9.] Where Joint Management Agreements, Memorandum of Understanding or any other similar high-level agreements exist, these will be considered as a starting point when engaging with Māori.
- 11.[10.] For mana whenua groups without a formal agreement a separate engagement plan will be developed as appropriate.
- 12.[11.] When the council makes a decision that is significantly inconsistent with this policy, the steps identified in Section 80 of the LGA will be undertaken.

Note: A Māori Engagement Framework, developed in 2017, initially formed Schedule 3 of the Significance and Engagement Policy. This framework is now a standalone document which provides guidance on best practice engagement to those looking to engage with Māori. The framework can be accessed on our website [here](#).

WĀHANGA 1 | SCHEDULE 1 NGĀ RAWA MAUROA | STRATEGIC ASSETS

Section 5 of the Local Government Act requires the following to be listed in this Policy:

- (a) any asset or group of assets listed in accordance with section 76AA(3) by the local authority; and
- (b) any land or building owned by the local authority and required to maintain the local authority's capacity to provide affordable housing as part of its social policy; and
- (c) any equity securities held by the local authority in –
 - (i) a port company within the meaning of the Port Companies Act 1988;
 - (ii) an airport company within the meaning of the Airport Authorities Act 1996.

The following is a list of assets or group of assets that the council needs to retain if it is to maintain its capacity to achieve or promote any outcome that it determines to be important to the current or future well-being of the community.

- infrastructural fixed assets owned or maintained by the Waikato Regional Council such as its river management, flood protection and drainage assets
- the overall system of communications for flood and resource monitoring and control, including the radio communication system and associated computer systems
- the council's investment fund
- data held in the council's geographic information system (GIS) and environmental databases

WĀHANGA 2 | SCHEDULE 2 NGĀ TOHUTOHU WHAKAPĀNGA HAPORI | COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GUIDE

Te whakapānga ki te hapori | Community engagement

- is a process
- involves all or some of the public
- is focussed on decision-making or problem-solving

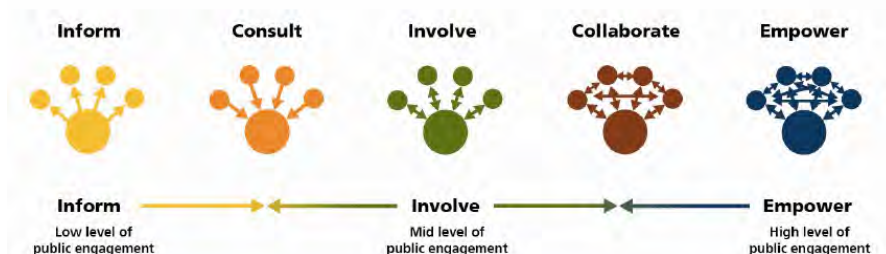
The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) has developed a Public Participation Spectrum to demonstrate the possible types of engagement with the community. This model also shows the increasing level of public impact as you progress through the spectrum from left to right - 'inform' through to 'empower'. In simply 'informing' stakeholders there is no expectation of receiving feedback, and consequently there is a low level of public impact. At the other end of the spectrum, 'empowering' stakeholders to make decisions implies an increase in expectations and therefore an increased level of public impact. Differing levels of engagement may be required during the varying phases of decision-making on an issue, and for different stakeholders.

It will not always be appropriate or practicable to conduct processes at the 'collaborate' or 'empower' end of the spectrum. Many minor issues will not warrant such an involved approach. Time and money may also limit what is possible on some occasions.

In general, the more significant an issue, the greater the need for effective community engagement.

When engaging with the community, the council will:

- Seek out and encourage contributions from people who may be affected by or interested in a decision,
- Provide reasonable access to relevant, timely and balanced information so people can contribute in a meaningful way,
- Provide a variety of appropriate ways and opportunities for people to have their say and
- Tell the community what the council's decision is and the reasons for that decision
- Provide a clear record or description of the relevant decisions made by council and explanatory material relating to the decision.



Ngā tūmomo hanga o te whakapānga | Forms of engagement

The council will use the Special Consultative Procedure (as set out in section 83 of the LGA) where required to do so by law, including the following issues requiring decisions:

- Adoption or amendment of the long term plan (sections 93(2) and 93A).
- Making, amending or revoking a bylaw that the council identifies using this policy as having significant interest to, or significant impact on, the public (section 156(1)(a))

The council will consult in accordance with, or using a process or a manner that gives effect to the requirements of, section 82 of the LGA 2002 where required to do so by law, including for the following specific issues requiring decisions:

- Adopting the annual plan if required under section 95 of the LGA.
- Transferring responsibilities to another local authority under section 17 of the LGA.
- Establishing or becoming a shareholder in a council-controlled organisation.
- Adopting or amending a revenue and financing policy, development contributions policy, financial contributions policy, rates remission policy, rates postponement policy, or a policy on the remission or postponement of rate on Māori freehold land.

For such consultation, Council will develop information fulfilling the requirements of Section 82A of the LGA.

For all other issues, the following table provides an example of the differing levels of engagement that might be considered appropriate, the types of tools associated with each level and the timing generally associated with these types of decisions/levels of engagement.

Ngā utauta me ngā āhua ā-mahi o te whakapānga | Engagement tools and techniques

Over the time of decision making, the council may use a variety of engagement techniques on any issue or proposal and the tools may be adapted based on a range of other factors, including history and public awareness of the issue, stakeholder involvement, and timing related to other events and budgets. The council will also take into consideration other engagements underway, and combined initiatives will be utilised where appropriate to maximise efficiencies and to alleviate 'consultation/engagement fatigue'.

Each situation will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Level	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
What the consultation involves	One-way communication providing balanced and objective information to assist understanding about something that is going to happen or has happened.	Two-way communications designed to obtain public feedback about ideas on rationale, alternatives and proposals to inform decision making.	Participatory process designed to help identify issues and views to ensure that concerns and aspirations are understood and considered prior to decision-making.	Working together to develop understanding of all issues and interests to work out alternatives and identify preferred solutions.	The final decision making is in the hands of the public, however, under the LGA, the Regional Council Chair and Councillors are elected to make decisions on behalf of their communities.
Types of issue that we might use this for	Flood warnings	Consultation document for the LTP	Regional Policy Statement Regional Plan	Healthy Rivers: Plan for Change/Wai Ora: He Rautaki Whakapaipai	Local body elections
Tools we might use	Websites Social media Apps (e.g. Antenno) Digital and/or print advertising NZone newsletters Public notices Subscribed email/text alerts	Formal submissions and hearings Social media Apps (e.g. Antenno) Digital and/or print advertising NZone newsletters Websites Public notices Focus groups, surveys .	Websites EngagementHQ Workshops Focus groups Citizens panels / assembly	Websites EngagementHQ Collaborative stakeholder group Technical alliance	Binding referendum Local body elections
When the community can expect to be involved	The council would generally advise the community once a decision is made	The council would advise the community once a draft decision is made and the council would generally provide the community with up to 4 weeks to participate and respond.	The council would generally provide the community with a greater lead in time to allow them time to be involved in the process.	The council would generally involve the community throughout the process - at the start to scope the issue, throughout the information collection, and to consider options.	The council would generally provide the community with a greater lead in time to allow them time to be involved in the process. e.g. typically a month or more.

6.7 UPDATE ON NATIONAL DIRECTION - NATURAL HAZARDS, INFRASTRUCTURE, MARINE AQUACULTURE, COMMERCIAL FORESTRY, PAPA KĀINGA, ELECTRICITY NETWORK ACTIVITIES AND TELECOMMUNICATION FACILITIES

Rā | Date: 7 May 2026

Kaituhi | Author: Naomi Crawford, Team Leader - Policy Implementation

Kaituku | Authoriser: Tracey May, Director, Science, Policy and Information

TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. This report provides an update on recent and proposed changes to national direction under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA), which form part of a wider reform programme led by the Ministry for the Environment and have implications for the Waikato Region specifically:
 - The new National Policy Statement for Natural Hazards (NPS-NH);
 - The new National Policy Statement for Infrastructure (NPS-I);
 - Amendments to the National Environmental Standard for Marine Aquaculture (NES-MA);
 - Amendments to the National Environmental Standards for Commercial Forestry (NES-CF);
 - The National Environmental Standards for Papakāinga (NES-P);
 - Amendments to the electricity transmission regulations which are now renamed the National Environmental Standards for Electricity Network Activities (NES-ENA);
 - Amendments to the National Environmental Standards for Telecommunication Facilities (NES-TF).
2. The report is provided to support the Strategy and Policy Committee's understanding of the current state of national direction and its interaction with regional planning instruments

KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

3. There have been numerous recent and proposed changes to national direction under the RMA, which has implications for the Waikato region. The Council made submissions on these national instruments during the formal consultation phase in 2025, with key matters raised being reflected in the final form of the instruments. A number of final decisions align with the Council's submission points, particularly where regional plan functions have been retained. However, several key matters raised by the Council were not adopted, resulting in ongoing policy and implementation challenges.

4. Overall, no immediate changes to the Waikato Regional Policy Statement (WRPS), Waikato Regional Plan (WRP), Waikato Regional Coastal Plan (WRCP) or the Proposed Waikato Regional Coastal Plan (PWRCP) are required. Potential implications for WRC are primarily related to implementation, alignment, and future plan reviews, including managing identified risks relating to cumulative effects, infrastructure location, and consistency with regional policy approaches.

TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That the report *Update on National Direction - Natural Hazards, Infrastructure, Marine Aquaculture, Commercial Forestry, Papakāinga, Electricity Network Activities and Telecommunication Facilities* (Strategy and Policy Committee, 18 June 2026) be received.

HOROPAKI | BACKGROUND

5. National direction instruments set the policy and regulatory framework that regional and district plans must give effect to and directly influence resource consent decision-making. Recent reforms (details and analysis of which are described in Attachment 5) have involved a co-ordinated update to multiple national policy statements and environmental standards, with some instruments being amended across more than one package. This reflects a shift toward a more centrally directed and integrated approach to managing resource use and environmental effects.
6. **Natural hazards** - The NPS-NH introduces a nationally consistent, risk-based framework for managing natural hazard risk. It broadly aligns with the intent of the WRPS and WRP but differs in scope, hazard coverage, and risk assessment approach. Notably, the final instrument does not reflect WRC submission points seeking broader hazard coverage and recognition of existing local adaptation approaches. These differences do not require immediate plan changes but will need to be managed over time through implementation and future plan reviews.
7. **Infrastructure** - The NPS-I introduces a nationally consistent and enabling framework to support infrastructure. While it reinforces the national significance of infrastructure, its directive approach places greater weighting on infrastructure delivery relative to the management of adverse environmental effects. This creates potential implementation challenges and will require careful management through consenting and policy interpretation.
8. **Marine Aquaculture** - Amendments to the existing NES-MA support greater productivity and innovation in the aquaculture sector by making re-consenting and certain changes to consent conditions easier, and by better enabling research or trial activities. For the NES-MA, the Council will need to apply the amended rules when making decisions on marine aquaculture consents to which the regulations (rules) apply from 4 June 2026. The rules in the NES-MA override the WRCP and PWRCP in regard to aquaculture research and trials. The PWRCP is otherwise in alignment already with the NES-MA regulation gazetted in 2020 and the most recent amendments gazetted on 7 May 2026.
9. **Commercial Forestry** - Amendments to the NES-CF strengthen national consistency and reinforce the role of national standards as the primary regulatory framework for forestry.

The amendments limit the scope for regional variation and reduce the ability to apply more stringent regional rules, except in clearly defined high-risk areas. The implications are primarily for implementation and alignment over time.

10. **Papakāinga** - The NES-P introduces a more enabling national framework for papakāinga development and will come into force on 2 July 2026. Regional plan rules will continue to apply, reducing the risk of conflict with the regional framework. Implementation is expected to occur through existing consenting processes.
11. **Electricity network facilities** - Amendments to the electricity transmission regulations, now renamed the National Environmental Standards for Electricity Network Activities (NES-ENA), expand the scope of the national framework to include electricity distribution networks and electric vehicle charging infrastructure. The final decisions retain the role of regional plans for managing key activities in sensitive environments by withdrawing proposed provisions that would have overridden regional rules. As a result, the WRP will continue to govern activities such as works in the beds of rivers and water takes. The implications are primarily for implementation and alignment with the existing regional framework.
12. **Telecommunication facilities** - Amendments to the existing NES-TF focus primarily on district-level land use controls and have limited interaction with regional council functions. No material implications for the WRPS or WRP have been identified at this stage.

TE TAKE | ISSUE

Natural hazards

13. The NPS-NH is national direction issued under the RMA. It was approved on 15 December 2025 and came into force on 15 January 2026. The objective of the NPS-NH is to ensure natural hazard risk to people and property is managed using a risk-based and proportionate approach. The NPS-NH applies nationally to a defined set of hazards, including flooding, landslips, coastal erosion and inundation, active faults, liquefaction, and tsunami.
14. The NPS-NH provides national direction on how hazard risk is to be assessed and managed in planning and consenting decisions. It requires decision-makers to use the best available information, to proceed where information is uncertain, and to consider climate change over at least a 100-year timeframe. It excludes infrastructure and primary production and provides that the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement prevails where there is conflict. The NPS-NH does not require local authorities to initiate plan changes within a specified timeframe.

Infrastructure

15. The NPS-I was approved on 15 December 2025 and came into force on 15 January 2026. Its objective is to ensure the national, regional, and local benefits of infrastructure are provided for, and to enable infrastructure to support the social, economic, and cultural wellbeing of people and communities. The NPS-I applies to all decisions made under the RMA affecting the operation, maintenance, renewal, upgrade, and development of infrastructure. It excludes renewable electricity generation, electricity transmission and distribution networks, which are managed under other frameworks. Due to the 'plan stop' amendment passed in August 2025, plans and policy statements will generally not be updated to give effect to the NPS-I until the new resource management system takes effect at the end of 2027.

Commercial forestry

16. Amendments to the NES-CF were gazetted on 7 May 2026 and come into force on 4 June 2026. The NES-CF provides a nationally consistent framework for managing the environmental effects of commercial forestry activities. The standards apply directly and generally override regional and district plan rules, except where more stringent local provisions are expressly enabled. These amendments form part of a wider programme of changes to national direction and are intended to improve consistency, reduce regulatory burden, and focus controls on higher-risk activities. Within the Waikato Region, forestry activities are largely regulated through the NES-CF rather than the WRP, which retains targeted provisions in specific areas, including Significant Geothermal Features and the Lake Taupō catchment.
17. The 2026 amendments include changes that narrow the circumstances in which more stringent regional rules can be applied, remove local control over afforestation location, introduce a risk-based approach to slash management, and simplify afforestation and replanting requirements.

Papakāinga

18. The National Environmental Standards for Papakāinga were notified on 4 June 2026. The NES-P provide a nationally consistent framework to enable papakāinga development. The regulations reflect the Minister's final decisions following consultation, with only minor refinements made prior to gazettal, including enabling development on Māori ancestral land and, through a restricted discretionary pathway, on land held by a post-settlement governance entity (PSGE) within its area of interest.

Electricity network and transmission facilities

19. Amendments to the existing NES-TF are proposed as part of a wider national infrastructure package. The NES-TF has not yet been gazetted, and this report reflects the current position based on the recommendations and decisions process.

WHAKAKAPINGA | CONCLUSION

20. Overall, the national direction package presents a mixed outcome with areas of alignment alongside ongoing differences with the regional framework. While several submission points have been reflected in final decisions, key matters remain unresolved, particularly in relation to hazard coverage, infrastructure enablement, and the balance between national standards and regional policy approaches.
21. No immediate changes to the WRPS, WRP, or PWRCP are required. The primary implications are for implementation through consenting, plan interpretation, and ensuring alignment between national and regional provisions over time. In some areas, national standards will override existing regional rules, while in others the role of regional plans has been retained, reinforcing the importance of existing provisions for managing location-specific risks and effects. The package also introduces a number of strategic risks, including increased policy tension between infrastructure delivery and environmental management, reduced flexibility to manage cumulative effects, and the need to reconcile differing approaches to natural hazard risk. These matters will need to be carefully managed in practice and considered in future plan reviews.

NGĀ TOHUTORO | REFERENCES

22. [Resource Management \(National Environmental Standards for Marine Aquaculture\) Amendment Regulations 2026](#)

ĀPITIHINGA | ATTACHMENTS

1. **MfE factsheet - National Policy Statement for Natural Hazards – (Doc # 36078492) [↓](#)**
2. **MfE factsheet - National Policy Statement for Infrastructure – (Doc # 36082196) [↓](#)**
3. **MfE factsheet - National Environmental Standard for Marine Aquaculture – (Doc # 36082500) [↓](#)**
4. **MfE factsheet - National Environmental Standard for Commercial Forestry – (Doc # 36081617) [↓](#)**
5. **Detailed Implications of National Direction Changes to the Waikato Region – (Doc # 36284540) [↓](#)**



Updating National Direction: New National Policy Statement for Natural Hazards

December 2025

Recent changes have been made to national direction under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) to make the resource management system work more effectively.

The Government has introduced national direction on managing natural hazard risk, while the new planning and environmental management system is being developed and implemented.

Context

New Zealand's location and geography make it highly vulnerable to a range of natural hazards, which are being intensified by climate change. The RMA can manage these risks by guiding where and how development occurs.

National reviews and recent severe weather events have shown that the current resource management system is not being used effectively to manage natural hazard risk. Development continues to occur in areas that are exposed to natural hazards and inappropriately risk-averse approaches to natural hazards can prevent much-needed new development.

The National Policy Statement for Natural Hazards (NPS-NH) sets out a balanced way for councils to manage natural hazard risks in new developments, based on the level of risk involved. Making new development safer helps to reduce future costs and make communities more resilient.

What the National Policy Statement for Natural Hazards includes

The NPS-NH requires local authorities and decision-makers to assess and manage natural hazard risks in a consistent, risk-based and proportionate manner. It has a strong emphasis on avoiding very high risks, using the best available information. It also considers long-term natural hazard risk, and requires decision-makers to consider mitigations. It sets a national baseline but allows for more conservative local provisions.

Policies

- **Risk assessment.** Natural hazard risks must be assessed using a specified risk matrix, taking into account mitigation.
- **Proportionate management.** Risk management must be proportionate to the assessed level of risk.
- **Avoidance of very high risk.** Subdivision, use or development with very high risk must be avoided.
- **Avoiding or mitigating increased risk on other sites.** Any activity that increases significant risk on other sites must avoid or mitigate that risk proportionately.
- **Best available information.** Decisions must use the best available information, even if that information is uncertain or incomplete.
- **Climate change.** Consider impacts of climate change at least 100 years into the future.

Implementation provisions

- **Risk-based assessment** uses likelihood and consequence tables to determine risk as low, medium, high or very high, and considers mitigation measures and residual risk.
- **Proportionate management** applies to the scale and detail of information necessary to assess the risk; and the cost-effectiveness of mitigation measures relative to the size of the risk.
- **No delay for uncertainty.** Decisions must proceed even if information is incomplete.

The risk reduction measures within the NPS-NH aim to ensure new development is more resilient, which will lower the social, economic, cultural and environmental costs of future natural hazard events. They also ensure that new development (except for infrastructure and primary production) occurs only where risks are managed, making communities safer and more resilient.

The only hazards that the NPS-NH applies to are flooding, landslips, coastal erosion, coastal inundation, active faults, liquefaction and tsunami.

Other hazards are not covered by the NPS-NH policies either because they are already managed effectively under existing laws like the Building Act 2004, or because there isn't enough guidance or data for them to be managed effectively using the NPS-NH methodology.

The NPS-NH does not apply to infrastructure. Managing natural hazard risks for infrastructure – such as roads, rail and utilities – requires a more flexible approach than the NPS-NH provides. It is often impractical to avoid all hazards when developing or maintaining essential services. Infrastructure owners already have strong incentives to manage and mitigate risks to protect assets and maintain service continuity. The NPS-NH also does not apply to primary production activities.

Policies

The policies in the NPS-NH require natural hazard risk for new developments (except for infrastructure and primary production) to be assessed using a standard method. This method considers likelihood and consequences, taking into account mitigations and climate change scenarios at least 100 years into the future.

The policies require the response to be proportionate: very high risks must be avoided, while medium or high risks need to be either avoided or reduced through mitigations. If a development creates or increases significant risk on neighbouring sites, that increased risk must also be managed proportionately.

The policies also recognise the need for decisions to proceed even when data and information are incomplete.

Implementation provisions

Part 3 of the NPS-NH (Implementation) explains how the policies should be put into practice. It requires risks from natural hazards for new developments to be assessed using a standard method that looks at both how likely a hazard is and how serious the consequences of the hazard could be for that development.

Decision-makers must consider not just the risk itself, but also any existing or planned measures to reduce that risk, and what happens if any mitigation measures fail. The potential impacts of climate change at least 100 years into the future need to be considered in determining the risk levels.

Part 3 also makes it clear what it means to manage natural hazard risks from subdivision, use and development proportionately. It clarifies that decision-making must continue, even if the information it is based on isn't perfect or complete, so that action isn't delayed by uncertainty.

Implementation considerations

Immediate steps

Once the NPS-NH is in force, local authorities must have regard to the NPS-NH when making consent decisions.

The new NPS-NH does not require councils to make plan changes within a specific timeframe; however, if plan changes related to natural hazards are developed, they are expected to incorporate the approach used by the NPS-NH.¹

The NPS-NH does not preclude decision-makers from managing natural hazard risk from other natural hazards and activities not otherwise covered by the policies. It also does not prevent local authorities from applying a more conservative approach to managing natural hazard risks.

Connection with the National Adaptation Framework

The NPS-NH is intended to complement the National Adaptation Framework, which focuses on adapting existing communities and assets by limiting future exposure to hazards. Together, the NPS-NH and the National Adaptation Framework will work together to strengthen resilience and minimise long-term costs from climate change and natural hazards.

Implications for landowners and developers

The NPS-NH may affect landowners and developers planning new projects. If the project needs a resource consent, the council might ask for information about natural hazard risks and how the developers plan to manage them.

¹ Plan changes related to natural hazards are exempt from the 'Plan Stop' requirements in the Resource Management (Consenting and Other System Changes) Amendment Act 2025.

Landowners and developers undertaking development activities in low and moderate natural hazard risk areas may see only marginal increases in costs. In some cases, those in high-risk areas may face increased expenses for risk assessment and design features to reduce risk to acceptable levels.

Councils will need to use their discretion about when further information is required, taking into account the best available information and proportionate management policies of the NPS-NH.

Transition to the new planning system

All existing national direction under the RMA will be reassessed and restructured to ensure it aligns with the goals and framework of the new planning system that will be established by the Planning and Natural Environment Bills.

The policy intent of the changes to national direction under the existing RMA will be transferred to the new system as appropriate.

For further information

For more information on the NPS-NH, see [this website](#).

Ministry for the Environment. [National Direction for Natural Hazards](#).





Updating National Direction: New National Policy Statement for Infrastructure

December 2025

Recent changes have been made to national direction under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) to make the resource management system work more effectively.

This document explains how the new National Policy Statement for Infrastructure (NPS-I) will guide the efficient development and management of infrastructure in New Zealand.

Context

Currently, the benefits of infrastructure and its essential role in supporting the wellbeing, health and safety of communities are not well recognised through the resource management system. As a result, decision-making often undervalues the strategic importance of infrastructure and consents are declined based on local environmental impacts. There is also inconsistency in infrastructure-related decisions across the country, with long-term planning for infrastructure networks poorly coordinated with local land use planning. The resulting consent process is uncertain, variable, costly and complex, leading to delays and increased expenses for infrastructure projects.

Changes are required to better recognise the vital role of infrastructure in supporting community wellbeing, health and safety and to enable its development or maintenance. Infrastructure also needs to be considered as an interconnected network serving the public good, rather than as isolated assets.

The NPS-I requires decision-makers to recognise infrastructure as a matter of national significance under the RMA and provides policy to support its development, maintenance and upgrades while still addressing adverse impacts. Over time, it will support more consistent, coordinated planning and development of infrastructure that meets community needs and supports long-term planning and resilience from climate change.

Key policies of the National Policy Statement for Infrastructure

The 11 policies provide the following framework:

- Policy 1: Providing for the benefits of infrastructure
- Policy 2: Operational need or functional need of infrastructure to be in particular locations and environments
- Policy 3: Considering spatial planning
- Policy 4: Enabling the efficient and timely operation and delivery of infrastructure activities
- Policy 5: Recognising and providing for infrastructure supporting activities
- Policy 6: Recognising and providing for Māori interests
- Policy 7: Assessing and managing the effects of proposed infrastructure activities
- Policy 8: Operation, maintenance and minor upgrade of existing infrastructure
- Policy 9: Managing the effects of new infrastructure and major upgrades
- Policy 10: Planning for and managing the interface and compatibility of infrastructure with other activities
- Policy 11: Assessing and managing the interface between infrastructure and other activities.

The NPS-I applies to all decisions made under the RMA affecting the operation, maintenance, renewal and upgrade of existing infrastructure, as well as to the development of new infrastructure.

It does not apply to:

- renewable electricity generation activities and assets managed under the National Policy Statement for Renewable Electricity Generation 2011 (as amended 2025)
- the electricity transmission network and electricity distribution network activities and assets managed under the National Policy Statement for Electricity Networks (formerly National Policy Statement on Electricity Transmission 2008, as amended in 2025)
- the allocation and prioritisation of freshwater, because these are matters for regional councils to address in a catchment or regional context.

Policy 1: Providing for the benefits of infrastructure

Decision-makers must ensure the national, regional or local benefits of infrastructure, relative to localised adverse effects, are recognised and provided for. Decision-makers must also recognise the risks to wellbeing and public safety that arise if infrastructure services are compromised.

Infrastructure benefits include supporting social, cultural and economic wellbeing; urban and rural development; providing essential services; protecting the environment; mitigating the effects of climate change; and improving resilience to natural hazards and climate change.

Policy 2: Operational need or functional need of infrastructure to be in particular locations and environments

The NPS-I directs decision-makers to recognise that infrastructure may have a functional or operational need to be in a particular location, including so that it can provide services, function efficiently, maintain connectivity and manage risks from natural hazards.

Policy 3: Considering spatial planning

The NPS-I requires decision-makers to have regard to strategic plans prepared by local authorities and transport authorities, and to consider spatial plans and master plans prepared by infrastructure providers.

Policy 4: Enabling the efficient and timely operation and delivery of infrastructure activities

Decision-makers are required to enable the efficient and timely delivery of infrastructure, including by providing flexibility for infrastructure providers to use new technology for better results. The NPS-I also encourages making the most of existing infrastructure and of opportunities to improve services, and preparing for future needs and environmental challenges.

The NPS-I also requires decision-makers to recognise it is the role of infrastructure providers to identify the preferred location for infrastructure.

Policy 5: Recognising and providing for infrastructure supporting activities

Infrastructure supporting activities are those activities that are needed to directly support infrastructure but are not part of the infrastructure activity itself. Decision-makers must recognise and provide for these supporting activities.

Policy 6: Recognising and providing for Māori interests

Decision-makers must recognise and provide for Māori interests. Requirements include taking into account the outcomes of engagement with iwi/Māori, recognising opportunities for Māori to develop and operate infrastructure, and recognising opportunities for Māori involvement where infrastructure may affect a site of significance or issue of cultural significance to Māori.

Local authorities must remain aware of their responsibilities under other legislation, including the Local Government Act 2002, Te Ture Whenua Māori Act 1993, Treaty settlement legislation and iwi participation legislation, and under the Treaty of Waitangi. Obligations under Mana Whakahono ā Rohe agreements with relevant hapū and iwi should also be observed.

Policy 7: Assessing and managing the effects of proposed infrastructure activities

The NPS-I includes a list of requirements that decision-makers must have regard to when assessing and managing the effects of an infrastructure proposal. The requirements include site selection, operational requirements, the extent to which effects are different from those of existing infrastructure and taking into account recognised standards and best practices in New Zealand.

Policy 8: Operation, maintenance and minor upgrade of existing infrastructure

Decision-makers are directed to further enable the efficient operation and maintenance and minor upgrade of existing infrastructure, provided that, where practicable, adverse effects are avoided, remedied or mitigated.

Policy 9: Managing the effects of new infrastructure and major upgrades

The NPS-I requires decision-makers to enable new infrastructure or major upgrades to existing infrastructure in all environments. If these activities are planned for locations, or could impact places and values, that are protected under section 6 of the RMA, this policy should be considered together with other relevant national direction, as well as regional and local plans. Otherwise, the adverse effects of these activities must, where practicable, be avoided, remedied or mitigated as required by the RMA.

Policy 10: Planning for and managing the interface and compatibility of infrastructure with other activities

Planning rules need to make sure that existing and future infrastructure – like roads, pipes and power lines – can work well alongside other activities in the area. Decision-makers are required to manage the interface between infrastructure and other activities to ensure:

- infrastructure and other activities are as compatible as practicable
- the operation, maintenance and upgrading of infrastructure is not compromised by the adverse effects of other activities, with the result that infrastructure can keep running safely and efficiently, whether it's being maintained or upgraded, without being negatively affected by other nearby activities
- the co-location of compatible infrastructure, while recognising that some types of infrastructure are not compatible.

Decision-makers also need to:

- engage with infrastructure providers to understand what infrastructure is already there and what their long-term plans are
- identify appropriate methods to protect infrastructure from the adverse effects of new or more intense activities or incompatible activities
- apply a range of methods to manage the interface and compatibility between activities.

Policy 11: Assessing and managing the interface between infrastructure and other activities

The NPS-I requires that, when planning new infrastructure or changes to existing infrastructure, decision-makers recognise:

- noise, vibration, dust and visual impacts are all typical effects with infrastructure projects, and should be managed appropriately
- amenity values can change, and changes can be necessary to achieve well-functioning urban and rural environments
- it is the responsibility of the new activity (including new infrastructure) to manage adverse effects, while allowing flexibility for specific circumstances.

Alignment with other national direction

The NPS-I aligns with other national policy statements (eg, for electricity networks and renewable electricity generation) but will not override protections for values of national importance under the RMA. No national policy statement overrides another; all relevant statements must be considered in the decision-making process.

Implementation considerations

Immediate steps

Once the NPS-I comes into force, decision-makers must apply it when making decisions under the RMA.

This policy statement is applicable to all individuals and entities exercising powers and functions under the RMA. The objectives and policies are intended to guide decision-makers on resource consent applications, designations, heritage orders, water conservation orders and other relevant powers under the RMA. They also offer guidance for local authorities in plan-making.

Due to the RMA 'Plan Stop' amendments passed in August 2025, plans and policy statements will not be updated to give effect to the NPS-I until the new planning system is in effect (unless a relevant exemption applies).

Transition to the new planning system

All existing national direction under the RMA will be reassessed and restructured to ensure it aligns with the goals and framework of the new planning system that will be established by the Planning and Natural Environment Bills.

The policy intent of the changes to national direction under the existing RMA will be transferred to the new system as appropriate.

For further information

For more information, see the Ministry for the Environment website.

Ministry for the Environment. [National Policy Statement for Infrastructure](#).





Ministry for Primary Industries
Manatū Ahu Matua



Updating National Direction: Changes to the National Environmental Standards for Marine Aquaculture

April 2026

Recent changes have been made to national direction under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) to help the resource management system work more effectively.

Amendments to the National Environmental Standards for Marine Aquaculture (NES-MA) support greater productivity and innovation in the aquaculture sector by making consenting and certain changes to consent conditions easier, and by better enabling research or trial activities.

Context

The NES-MA sets nationally consistent environmental rules for marine aquaculture, enabling appropriate development while protecting sensitive coastal and marine environments and supporting sustainable management under the RMA.

Aquaculture consenting processes under the previous NES-MA were often costly, complex and disproportionate – especially for minor changes within existing operations. This created uncertainty and reduced flexibility for marine farmers to improve management, adopt new technology and respond to changing environmental and market conditions. Previous reviews of the NES-MA and stakeholder engagement identified technical issues and unintended barriers to small-scale, short-term research and trials, which have been addressed in these amendments.

In addition, the NES-MA has been amended to set more enabling activity status for certain changes to consent conditions and enable new regulatory pathways for research and trial activities on existing farms and in new spaces. These changes will streamline consenting (activity status, notification, and matters for councils to consider) while maintaining environmental safeguards and upholding Treaty settlements.

Key changes

Key changes to the NES-MA

- Define ‘research or trial activity’ – new definition.
- Expand where the NES-MA applies – to include replacement consents, certain applications to change or cancel consent conditions, and research and trial applications (Regulation 11).
- New controlled activity conditions for aquaculture-related research and trials in new locations (Regulations R17, R18 and R19).
- Allow broader changes to or cancellation of monitoring conditions – via a new restricted discretionary pathway (Regulations R34 and R35).
- Enable additional structure types through a controlled activity pathway (Regulation R32).
- Adjust finfish species-change provisions – adding matters of control for effects on water quality and information, monitoring and reporting when adding finfish to an existing finfish farm (Regulation R31 for applications under Regulation R30).
- Better management of *Undaria* within existing consents (Regulation R30 amended to carve out *Undaria*; and a new Regulation R31 for *Undaria* decision matters).
- Technical and clarification amendments (including clearer notification wording, removing redundant cross-references, and alignment tweaks) (Regulations 22, 24, 44; plus Schedule 6 consequential changes).

Defining ‘research or trial activity’

A new definition of ‘research or trial activity’ has been added to the NES-MA. This makes it clearer what kinds of activities can be done within the research/trial rules, and to reduce the chance the pathway is used for activities that are not genuinely short-term research or testing.

Expanding where the NES-MA applies

The amendments mean the NES-MA applies in more situations. The NES-MA will now apply to certain applications to change or cancel consent conditions, and research and trial applications. This will make sure these applications are dealt with under a consistent national approach, and fix gaps that were causing uncertainty or unnecessary hurdles.

New controlled activity pathway for aquaculture-related research or trials in new locations

The amendments add a new consent pathway for research or trial activities in new locations that involve only structures or equipment, and that meet set conditions. These proposals will be treated as controlled activities. This is to make it easier to run trials and support innovation, while still allowing councils to set conditions to manage any effects.

Proposed amendments to make aquaculture research or trial activities in new locations a permitted activity have not been progressed. This is because activities in new areas can have different effects depending on the site. Keeping a consent requirement helps make sure councils can check likely effects (including on sensitive environments and other users) before the activity starts.

Allowing broader changes to or cancellation of monitoring conditions

The amendments make it easier for consent holders to apply to change or remove monitoring conditions. Applications to change monitoring conditions now sit under a restricted discretionary pathway, so councils can consider the relevant issues and set updated conditions. The aim is to let monitoring keep up with new science, technology and good practice, while making sure it still suits the local environment.

Enabling additional structure types through a controlled activity pathway

The amendments let existing marine farm consent holders apply to add two more types of structures by changing their consent conditions, using a controlled activity pathway, enabling farms to transfer and adapt to innovative methods of farming. This will reduce time and cost for changes that stay within an existing operation, while still allowing councils to set conditions to manage any effects.

Adjusting finfish species-change provisions

The amendments will provide for consent holders to apply to add finfish to an existing farm, provided they meet council conditions including strengthened requirements for information, monitoring, and reporting. These amendments will improve environmental safeguards and ensure decisions are based on enough information about water quality effects and how those effects will be checked and managed.

Better management of *Undaria* within existing consents

The amendments allow the invasive species *Undaria pinnatifida* to be added to an existing consent through a restricted discretionary approach, with new decision matters specifically for *Undaria*. This will maintain council discretion (including for biosecurity risks) while giving clearer guidance on what needs to be considered for proposals involving this species.

Technical and clarification amendments

Technical changes have also been made to make the NES-MA easier to use. This includes clearer wording for notification, removing repeat or unnecessary cross-references, and small alignment changes across definitions, regulations and schedules.

Implementation considerations

For local government

Once the NES-MA comes into effect (28 days after amendments are gazetted), decision-makers must apply the amendments when making decisions on resource consents. This includes applying any revised activity statuses, notification settings, and the matters councils may consider (such as for controlled/restricted discretionary pathways).

National environmental standards apply directly to a relevant activity, so the RMA 'plan stop' requirements do not apply to the NES-MA amendments (see the Ministry for the Environment website's page on [Understanding Plan Stop](#)).

Councils, however, will be required to incorporate the NES-MA amendments into their plans over time where plan rules duplicate or conflict with NES provisions. Until plans are amended, the NES-MA takes precedence and applies directly to relevant activities.

For industry

Consent applicants and holders of existing consent for marine aquaculture activities should check what the NES-MA requires for their activity (for example, the activity status, notification rules and what councils can consider). They will also need to check their regional coastal plan to make sure their consent meets all requirements. Some applicants may have small one-off costs to update their application, if updates are needed to comply with the amended regulations.

If an activity is now allowed through a more enabling pathway (for example, controlled, restricted discretionary, or permitted in some cases), marine aquaculture consent holders will still need to meet any conditions and requirements. Ongoing compliance, monitoring and enforcement obligations still remain.

Transition to the new planning system

All existing national direction under the RMA will be reassessed and restructured to ensure it aligns with the goals and framework of the new planning system that will be established by the Planning and Natural Environment Bills.

The policy intent of the changes to national direction under the existing RMA will be transferred to the new system as appropriate. For more information about the transition into the new planning system see the Ministry for the Environment fact sheet [The New Planning System: Transitioning into the new planning system](#)

For further information

For more information, see:

[National Environmental Standards for Marine Aquaculture | Ministry for the Environment](#)

[National environmental standards for marine aquaculture | Ministry for Primary Industries](#)





Ministry for Primary Industries
Manatū Ahu Matua



Updating National Direction: Changes to the National Environmental Standards for Commercial Forestry

May 2026

Changes have been made to national direction under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) to help the resource management system work more effectively.

The changes to the National Environmental Standards for Commercial Forestry (NES-CF) are designed to make requirements clearer and more consistent across New Zealand, reduce unnecessary cost and uncertainty for forestry owners and operators, and focus efforts on higher-risk situations to manage environmental risk.

Context

The NES-CF sets nationally consistent regulations for commercial forestry activities on areas of one hectare or more to manage the effects of commercial forestry across the country.

Some parts of the previous NES-CF were increasing costs and uncertainty for forestry owners and operators, with some requirements being out of proportion with the environmental risks they were intended to manage. Concerns were also raised regarding variable interpretation of the regulations, and that some recent additions (such as slash removal standards and additional planning requirements) were difficult and expensive to apply in practice.

The Government has amended the NES-CF to improve national consistency, reduce compliance costs, remove duplication of regulations, and provide greater certainty for operators. This is intended to boost productivity and ensure environmental risks are appropriately managed.

Key changes

Key changes to the NES-CF

- Clarify when councils can have more stringent rules than the NES-CF.
 - Amend regulation 6(1)(a) to be more specific about when councils can have stricter rules (focused on severe erosion risk, mapped and evidence-based).
 - Repeal regulation 6(4A) so that it can no longer be used by councils to control aspects of afforestation (including location).
- Replace prescriptive slash regulations with a risk-based approach.
 - Move from a 'one-size-fits-all' slash size/volume limit (which is costly and hard to measure and enforce, and captures low-risk harvest areas).
 - Require a Slash Mobilisation Risk Assessment (SMRA) for higher-risk land, so effort is concentrated where the risk and consequences are highest.
- Remove duplication in afforestation/replanting planning requirements.
 - Remove the requirement for a replanting plan, and keep streamlined afforestation plans (with reduced content) where they add compliance value (such as mapping/setbacks).
- Fix minor wording issues that created confusion.
 - Remove the undefined term, 'woody debris' from plan requirements.
 - Clarify wilding conifer documentation requirements.
 - Correct a wording error in regulation 71A ('not' was included in error).
- Updated documents incorporated by reference.

Clarify when councils can have more stringent rules than the NES-CF

The amendments narrow when councils can have rules that are more stringent than the national standards. This is intended to increase national consistency, while still enabling councils to make plan changes to manage high-risk situations, matters of national importance and unique and sensitive environments.

Regulation 6(1)(a) has been changed so councils can only have stricter rules in specific, high-risk circumstances. These include managing the risk of severe erosion in a defined area that would have significant adverse effects on downstream infrastructure, property, or receiving environments, including the coastal environment. The change also requires the area to be clearly mapped (at 1:10,000 scale or using a 1m digital elevation model) and supported by evidence through the plan change process. These requirements will make it clearer when and why stricter local rules are justified.

Regulation 6(4A) has been repealed. This regulation enabled councils to control aspects of afforestation, including where new forests can be planted. The potential for regional variation of afforestation rules had previously created uncertainty for landowners, undermining the purpose of a national standard.

These changes are intended to increase certainty and reduce costs for forestry operators to engage in plan change processes. At the same time, councils will still be able to respond where severe erosion risk is clearly identified and supported by evidence.

Replace prescriptive slash regulations with a risk-based approach

The changes (to regulations 69(5)–(7)) replace the current ‘one-size-fits-all’ slash¹ removal requirements with a risk-based approach. Instead of requiring slash removal based on set sizes, the regulations now require a Slash Mobilisation Risk Assessment (SMRA) of the harvest area (the ‘cutover’) for higher-risk land (orange and permitted red zone). [Guidelines for the SMRA](#) will be incorporated by reference to the NES-CF. The assessment must be completed at the time of forest harvest as part of the existing harvesting management plan requirement.

The SMRA will set out what is needed at an individual site. If the assessment shows low risk of slash moving off the harvest area, slash would be managed through the harvesting plan and the permitted activity conditions for slash management. (See regulations 69(1–4) and Schedule 6(4)(4).)

If the SMRA determines a higher risk of slash moving off the harvest area, a resource consent will be required to tailor mitigations to the site and likely downstream impacts. The consenting process will determine what controls are required (for example, changing harvest practices or removing slash).

This risk-based approach will reduce cost and consenting for low-risk sites, while enabling tailored resource consent conditions where there is a higher risk of downstream harm.

Reducing duplicative requirements for afforestation and replanting plans

The amendments remove the requirement for replanting plans. Existing permitted activity conditions remain to manage the environmental risks associated with replanting a harvested forest. This can include establishing setbacks from water bodies and significant natural areas, and carrying out a wilding tree risk assessment.

The regulations will retain a requirement for afforestation plans, but less information is required than previously. Foresters will no longer need to provide information on the long-term predicted effects, which are based on assumptions that may not be valid at a future harvest. Requirements to demonstrate the forester is complying with afforestation requirements, such as property details and mapping requirements for setbacks, still apply.

The changes will reduce unnecessary paperwork and compliance costs, while keeping a requirement for an afforestation plan as a practical compliance check for key matters, reducing compliance efforts and costs.

Fix minor wording issues

A small number of drafting issues have been corrected to remove confusion, without changing the overall policy settings. They include:

- Removing references to ‘woody debris’ from schedules 3, 4, 5 and 6. The term is not defined in the NES-CF and is not needed. The regulations already define and use ‘slash’.

¹ Slash is defined under the NES-CF as ‘woody debris generated by forestry harvesting and associated activities, including branches, tree tops, off-cuts, and pieces of logs, that are not removed from the site after harvest’

- Clarifying the wilding conifer documentation requirements in regulations 11(4)(b) and 79(5)(b) to make it clear what information must be supplied to councils (the wilding tree risk calculator score, calculations, and supporting evidence) and when it must be provided (at the same time as the relevant notice).
- Correcting a drafting error in regulation 71A(b) by removing the word 'not'. This fixes unintended wording that made the permitted activity rules for low-intensity harvesting unclear.

Updated documents incorporated by reference

The amendments also updates the following documents incorporated by reference in the NES-CF:

- The [Land Use Capability Survey Handbook, 3rd Edition](#) is updated, as the NES-CF refers to erosion types defined in this document.
- The [Slash Mobilisation Risk Assessment](#) is added. This document outlines the process required under section 69(5) of the NES-CF to screen proposed harvesting activities for the risk of slash mobilising from the forest cutover for certain land with higher susceptibility to erosion.
- The electronic reference to the [Regional Flood Estimation Tool for New Zealand Part 2](#) is updated.

Implementation considerations

For local government

When the NES-CF amendments come into effect (28 days after amendments are gazetted), councils will need to amend district plans if a rule duplicates or conflicts with a provision in the NES-CF as soon as practicable without using the process in Schedule 1. This will need to be done for rules no longer enabled through regulations 6(1)(a) and 6(4A) of the NES-CF.

National environmental standards apply directly to activities. This means the RMA 'plan stop' requirements do not apply to the NES-CF amendments (see the Ministry for the Environment website's page on [Understanding Plan Stop](#)).

Councils will also need to consider and apply the amended NES-CF when processing resource consent applications for commercial forestry activities.

For industry

Forestry operators should check what the amended NES-CF means for their activities. Existing compliance, monitoring and enforcement obligations remain. These changes to the NES-CF are expected to reduce cost and uncertainty for forestry businesses while retaining controls to manage any adverse effects of commercial forestry activities.

In practice, forestry operators can apply the updated permitted activity and consenting rules from the commencement date. Any operator that is harvesting in orange zone and permitted red zone will need to complete an SMRA as part of harvest planning, so they manage identified risks and apply for a resource consent where required.

They can also update their processes for the streamlined afforestation plan requirements and remove replanting plans. If, at the date the amendments come into effect, notice has been given of a planned harvesting operation, transitional provisions are set out in Schedule 1 of the NES-CF.

Transition to the new planning system

All existing national direction under the RMA will be assessed and restructured to ensure it aligns with the goals and framework of the new planning system that will be established by the Planning and Natural Environment Bills. The policy intent of the changes to national direction under the existing RMA will transfer to the new system as appropriate.

For more information about the transition into the new planning system see the Ministry for the Environment fact sheet [The New Planning System: Transitioning into the new planning system](#).

For further information

For more information, see:

[National Environmental Standards for Commercial Forestry | Ministry for the Environment](#)

[National Environmental Standards for Commercial Forestry | Ministry for Primary Industries](#)



Attachment 5: Detailed Implications of National Direction Changes to the Waikato Region**National Policy Statement for Natural Hazards 2025**

1. The NPS-NH generally aligns with the direction of the WRPS and WRP in applying a risk-based approach to managing natural hazards, but introduces several areas of difference with implications for the Waikato Region. A key difference is scope. The NPS-NH excludes infrastructure, whereas the WRPS and WRP address risks both to and from infrastructure. While natural hazard risk to infrastructure is addressed within the NPS-I, this direction is framed within a highly enabling and less prescriptive framework. This results in a dual framework operating concurrently depending on the activity type. In practice, a single mixed proposal will face increased complexity requiring integrated judgement; for example, a subdivision in a hazard-prone area will be assessed under the NPS-NH (where very high risk must be avoided), while its associated infrastructure will be assessed under regional policy to manage location and resilience outcomes.
2. The NPS-NH introduces a standardised national risk assessment framework that differs from the approach taken in the WRPS. It applies a matrix-based system (ranging from low to very high risk) with a defined “avoid” threshold for higher-risk areas, whereas the WRPS uses acceptable, tolerable, and intolerable thresholds that enable risk to be managed over time.
3. The NPS-NH also directs decision-makers to proceed using the best available information, including where uncertainty exists, whereas the WRPS supports a more precautionary approach. These differences will require careful interpretation in practice, particularly where proposals involve both development and infrastructure and different risk thresholds must be reconciled.
4. In the submission process WRC advocated for a broader definition of natural hazards, including volcanic, geothermal, wildfire, and chronic hazards such as drought. These have not been included in the final NPS-NH. WRC also sought explicit recognition of existing local adaptation planning, which is not reflected in the final instrument. As a result, the WRPS will continue to provide a broader hazard framework than the NPS-NH, creating an ongoing need to manage differences between national and regional approaches.

National Policy Statement for Infrastructure 2025

5. The NPS-I places strong weighting on the timely delivery of infrastructure relative to the management of adverse effects. Certain policies require adverse effects to be managed “where practicable”, which sets a comparatively lower threshold for environmental management than is typically applied under section 5 of the RMA and may influence the extent to which conditions can be imposed.
6. Recent national direction changes have broadened the gateway tests for activities associated with infrastructure by recognising both functional need and operational need in a number of instruments. While the NPS-I provides stronger national direction to recognise and provide for infrastructure and infrastructure-supporting activities (including quarrying), the emergence of the “functional or operational need” test in

coastal planning processes is more closely linked to the application of Policy 6 of the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement than to the NPS-I itself.

7. Staff have identified a strategic risk that the introduction of an operational need pathway, alongside functional need, may lower the threshold for establishing activities in sensitive environments. Consenting experience indicates that this issue most commonly arises in relation to quarrying activities, which are often located in proximity to rivers, wetlands, or coastal margins. Under existing instruments such as the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management and the National Environmental Standard for Freshwater, these activities have typically been required to demonstrate a functional need and then apply the effects management hierarchy. The introduction of an operational need alternative provides an additional pathway that may enable such activities to establish in locations where a genuine locational dependency cannot be demonstrated.
8. There is a corresponding risk that this more permissive approach may result in activities being established in locations that constrain the development, operation, or upgrading of regionally significant infrastructure with a genuine functional need to locate in those environments. This risk was identified in WRC's submission and remains unresolved in the final instruments. It is particularly relevant in the coastal marine area and certain land-based environments, where recent Environment Court mediation on the PWRCP has begun to incorporate a "functional or operational need" test, reflecting the direction of recent national changes.
9. While infrastructure is excluded from the NPS-NH, natural hazard risk to infrastructure is addressed within the NPS-I. This results in greater reliance on regional instruments, including the WRPS and WRP, to manage the location and resilience of infrastructure. For the Waikato Region, this reinforces the importance of existing regional provisions to ensure that critical infrastructure is not inappropriately located in areas subject to high natural hazard risk or climate change effects.
10. The NPS-I requires provision for tangata whenua involvement "in appropriate circumstances". This phrasing provides relatively limited direction and may affect how Māori interests, including culturally significant sites, are recognised in practice. There is also a strategic risk arising from the lack of explicit recognition of Te Ture Whaimana o Te Awa o Waikato, which is a key direction-setting document for the Waikato and Waipā river catchments, particularly in relation to infrastructure affecting water quality.
11. A number of national direction instruments within these packages were finalised in late 2025 and came into force from early 2026, with further amendments continuing through 2026. Once gazetted, national direction has immediate legal effect and must be applied in resource consent decision-making, even where regional plans have not yet been updated. This reinforces that the primary short-term implications for the Waikato Region arise through implementation rather than immediate plan change.

National Environmental Standard for Marine Aquaculture 2020 (Amended 2026)

12. These amendments sit within the 'primary sector' national direction package, which focuses on improving the operation of existing instruments, reducing regulatory

burden, and enabling primary sector development. The package includes co-ordinated changes across forestry, aquaculture, freshwater, and related instruments, meaning implications are not isolated to a single sector or activity. The NES-MA has been updated to make it easier for operators to improve how they farm, adopt new technology and carry out research or trials while maintaining environmental safeguards. The key changes to the NES-MA are:

- Define “research or trial activity”.
 - Expand where the NES-MA applies.
 - Create a controlled activity pathway for certain research or trials in new locations.
 - Allow more changes to monitoring conditions.
 - Enable changes to structures through a controlled activity pathway.
 - Better enable finfish farming, within environmental limits.
 - Provide more opportunity for *Undaria* (an edible kelp that is also a widespread unwanted organism) farming, subject to existing consent conditions and separate biosecurity approvals.
 - Technical amendments.
13. Councils will need to apply the amended rules when making decisions on marine aquaculture consents, or assessing permitted activity applications, from 4 June 2026.
 14. Councils are required to incorporate the NES-MA amendments into their plans over time where plan rules duplicate or conflict with NES provisions. Until plans are amended, the NES-MA takes precedence and applies directly to relevant activities.
 15. Section 43B and 44A of the RMA set out the circumstances governing the relationship between plan rules and an NES. A plan rule conflicts with an NES if it is more stringent than an NES provision and the NES does not expressly say it may be more stringent. There are plan rules (or parts thereof) in the operative and/or proposed Waikato regional coastal plans which are more stringent than the amendments to the NES-MA and the NES-MA amendments do not expressly say that they may be more stringent. To the extent of any inconsistency, those rules do not apply. However, section 44A of the RMA requires councils to remove or amend rules that duplicate or conflict with an NES, and provides that this can occur without using a full Schedule 1 process. There is no immediate need to amend either plan, however noting that the PWRCP is currently subject to Environment Court appeals, which constrains the timing and efficiency of further plan changes
 16. In accordance with section 44A of the RMA, a plan rule also conflicts with an NES if it is more lenient than an NES provision and the NES does not expressly say that it may be more lenient. The NES-MA amendments say that a rule in a plan or proposed may be more lenient for an activity under regulations 56, 62, or 65 (research and trial activities for fed aquaculture in existing farms not consented for fed aquaculture, and research and trial activities in new locations (fed and unfed aquaculture)). There are no plan rules (or parts thereof) in the operative and/or proposed coastal plans which are more lenient than the amendments to the NES-MA.
 17. The Council’s submission raised concerns regarding enabling aquaculture research and trial activities without public notification, particularly for fed aquaculture, as this could

conflict with the region's prohibited rules for further discharges into already degraded waterbodies (such as the Firth of Thames). The amendments enable research and trial activities through controlled and restricted discretionary pathways, which may reduce opportunities for broader input. This creates a potential policy tension where new aquaculture activities may be enabled in environments that are currently subject to stricter regional controls, including areas with degraded water quality.

Implementation will therefore require careful management to ensure consistency with regional objectives, particularly in sensitive receiving environments such as the Firth of Thames.

18. The activity status in the PWRC for non-fed aquaculture research and trials is restricted discretionary (rule AQA-R1), with the operative coastal plan discretionary (rule 16.5.2). The NES-MA will override both plans, but separates research and trials into different regulations (rules) based on different parameters and standards to be met. The NES-MA new regulations would make the activity either a controlled or restricted discretionary activity. The Minister's decision on the proposed amendments removes the proposal to enable aquaculture-related research or trials in new locations to be a permitted activity (under certain circumstances).

National Environmental Standard for Commercial Forestry 2023 (Amended 2026)

19. The NES-CF provides nationally consistent regulations to manage the environmental effects of commercial forestry, covering both plantation and exotic continuous-cover forests.
20. The NES-CF came into effect on 3 November 2023, replacing the earlier NES-PF (National Environmental Standards for Plantation Forestry) and expanding its scope to include exotic continuous-cover forests (carbon forests) deliberately established for commercial purposes. The NES-CF applies to forestry blocks of 1 hectare or more and regulates core forestry activities to ensure environmental protection while providing foresters with regulatory certainty.
21. The NES-CF amendments strengthen national consistency and reinforce the role of national standards as the primary framework for managing forestry activities. A key change is the reduced ability for councils to apply more stringent regional rules. Amendments narrow the circumstances in which stricter provisions can be imposed, requiring clearly defined and evidence-based severe risk areas. This limits the use of broader or effects-based regional provisions and reduces flexibility outside mapped areas. This represents a departure from WRC's preferred effects-based management approach and may reduce the ability to manage cumulative effects, such as sediment runoff, across wider landscapes.
22. The removal of provisions enabling control over afforestation location further reduces regional discretion and reinforces a nationally standardised approach. This may limit the ability to manage forestry expansion in sensitive environments or areas with cumulative effects.
23. Changes to slash management introduce a shift to a risk-based approach, supported by site-specific assessment. While this enables more targeted management, it also introduces greater variability in how effects are assessed and managed. Simplified

afforestation and replanting requirements may reduce the information available to councils on long-term and cumulative effects.

24. As a result, greater reliance is placed on the NES-CF, with the remaining WRP provisions such as those relating to Significant Geothermal Features and the Lake Taupō catchment becoming more important in managing region-specific risks and effects. Effective implementation will require review of plan provisions to address any duplication or conflict. While no full plan change is required immediately, there is an increasing need to manage divergence between national standards and regional policy objectives through consenting practice and future plan development.

National Environmental Standards for Papakāinga 2026

25. The NES-P provides a nationally consistent framework enabling papakāinga development on Māori ancestral land, including a permitted activity pathway for up to 10 homes, and a restricted discretionary pathway for development of up to 30 residential units on land held by a post-settlement governance entity (PSGE) within its area of interest.
26. The NES-P is designed to standardise rules for papakāinga development, addressing inconsistencies in district plans that currently restrict Māori landowners from development on Māori ancestral land and Treaty settlement land, including land held by PSGEs. The NES-P defines papakāinga as housing and ancillary activities that enable owners to live in accordance with their culture, in perpetuity. Its primary goal is to support communal and intergenerational living, while maintaining environmental protection and public health standards.
27. The NES-P is generally consistent with the direction of the WRPS in enabling Māori to live on and use ancestral land. This position is now explicitly confirmed in Regulation 16 of the NES-P, which requires that a papakāinga development must comply with any applicable rules in a regional plan. This aligns with WRC's submission and represents a positive outcome for maintaining the integrity of regional environmental controls (e.g. natural hazards and water management). This reduces the risk of overlapping or conflicting requirements and provides greater certainty for implementation.
28. The NES-P will operate alongside existing regional provisions, with environmental effects continuing to be managed through the WRP. Implementation will occur through established consenting pathways under district plans, with the NES-P coming into force on 2 July 2026.

National Environmental Standards for Electricity Network Activities 2009 (Amended 2026)

29. The final decisions confirm the renaming of the instrument to the National Environmental Standards for Electricity Network Activities (NES-ENA), reflecting a significant expansion in scope to include electricity distribution networks and electric vehicle charging infrastructure alongside the transmission network. The NES-ENA establishes a nationally consistent and enabling framework for managing routine network activities and infrastructure development. This reflects an expansion of the National Environmental Standard for Electricity Transmission and Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Activities (NES-ETA) discussed in the earlier Strategy and Policy

Committee paper¹, where the scope and structure of the amended NES were still subject to consultation, to a more defined position following consideration of submissions and Cabinet decisions. The legal effect of these changes arises once the regulations are made and come into force.

30. For the Waikato Region, the expanded scope introduces new permitted and controlled activity frameworks for activities such as earthworks and vegetation clearance associated with distribution networks. The NES-ENA restricts the ability of regional plans to impose more stringent controls than the national standard, except where expressly provided for in the NES. This reduces regional discretion and requires careful management of the interface between the NES-ENA and existing WRP provisions during consenting processes. Compared with the earlier paper on the NES-ETA, this provides greater clarity on the intended operation of the NES, including the circumstances in which it may in some cases operate as an effective regulatory ceiling, depending on how stringency is provided for in the NES once in force, based on the final policy decisions and drafting approach.
31. The Minister's decisions also withdraw proposed provisions that would have overridden regional rules for activities including river crossings, groundwater takes, dewatering, stormwater discharges, and works in riverbeds and the coastal marine area. This reflects WRC's submission seeking to retain regional plan controls in sensitive environments and avoids undermining established region-specific protections. This retains the role of the WRP in managing activities within natural environments and avoids undermining established region-specific controls for water bodies and discharges. This represents a material change from the position outlined in the previous paper, where there was potential for these provisions to override regional controls; the revised approach aligns more closely with WRC's submission position, while still delivering a more enabling national framework overall.
32. Overall, the NES-ENA aligns with the direction of the WRPS in providing for the development, operation, maintenance, and upgrading of electricity infrastructure to support regional and national needs. While no immediate changes to the WRPS or WRP are required, at this stage, there are implementation implications for consenting practice and future plan alignment, noting that plan amendments would be required where any conflict with the NES is identified. With the benefit of Cabinet decisions and MfE recommendations, the current position is clearer that the primary implications are operational and relate to plan implementation and consenting interface, refining the earlier, more preliminary assessment.

National Environmental Standards for Telecommunication Facilities 2016 (Amended 2026)

33. The NES-TF provides consistent national rules for the installation, operation, and maintenance of telecommunications infrastructure across New Zealand. The NES-TF 2016 replaced the 2008 version to address technological advances, urban development, and environmental management needs. Its primary goal is to allow network operators to deploy low-impact facilities efficiently while ensuring

¹ Strategy and Policy Committee Paper 6th of May 2026, 'Update on National Direction – Stock Exclusion Regulations and Electric Vehicle charging infrastructure'.

environmental effects are appropriately managed. The current national direction changes also sit within a broader transition toward replacement resource management legislation (Phase 3 reform). While these changes are being implemented under the existing RMA framework, further alignment is anticipated as the new system is developed. This creates an ongoing need to manage potential misalignment between national direction, regional plans, and future legislative settings.

34. The NES-TF has limited interaction with regional council functions and does not create material conflict with the WRPS or WRP. Its focus on land use controls for telecommunications infrastructure means it is primarily relevant to territorial authorities. Regional provisions will continue to apply where activities give rise to environmental effects, as the NES-TF requires compliance with any applicable regional rules.
35. National alignment issues between infrastructure-related standards are currently being addressed through proposed amendments. More broadly, there is an ongoing implementation risk associated with progressing national direction ahead of wider system reform, which may require further alignment once the new planning framework is in place.

6.8 STRATEGY AND POLICY COMMITTEE - COST OF ACTIVITIES

Rā | Date: 28 May 2026

Kaituhi | Author: Tracey May, Director, Science, Policy and Information

Kaituku | Authoriser: Tracey May, Director, Science, Policy and Information

TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. This report meets a council requirement to provide each of the council's standing committees with an overview of current activities, their purpose and cost of delivery to help inform 2027-2037 Long Term Plan discussions.

KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. One of the Chief Executive's key performance indicators (KPIs) includes the requirement to provide information to councillors to help inform the 2027-2037 Long Term Plan (LTP) decisions by reporting an overview of current activities, their purpose and cost of delivery to all council standing committees within their terms of reference. The intention is to ensure committees understand the investment or disinvestment decisions they wish to pursue as they develop the LTP.
3. The Strategy and Policy Committee has key responsibilities for:
 - i. Identifying regional issues that require intervention and setting the organisation policy responses
 - ii. Setting council's advocacy position on regional issues and responding to external agencies statutory planning processes
4. The Committee is a 'committee of the whole', reflecting the nature of the work of the Committee. Other than the work of the Regional Transport Connections Directorate (that is reported through to the Regional Transport Committee and the Waikato Regional Council Transport Committee) strategy and policy matters that span the organisation report into this Committee.
5. This report will focus in the majority on the business of the Science, Policy and Information Directorate (SPI). The policy work of other parts of our business, will be addressed in reports provided to their overseeing committees.
6. The report highlights budgeted labour and direct costs against these three areas. Councillors are asked to note the following:
 - costs associated with policy development in the Biosecurity space will be reported through to the Integrated Catchment Management Committee
 - costs associated with policy development in the transport space will be reported through to the Waikato Regional Council Transport Committee
 - the cost of servicing committees will be reported separately to the Finance and Performance Committee.

TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That the report *Strategy and Policy Committee - cost of activities* (Strategy and Policy Committee, 18 June 2026) be received.

HOROPAKI | BACKGROUND

7. One of the Chief Executive's key performance indicators (KPIs) includes the requirement to provide information to councillors to help inform the 2027-2037 Long Term Plan (LTP) decisions by reporting an overview of current activities, their purpose and cost of delivery to all council standing committees within their terms of reference. The intention is to ensure committees understand the work before them, and can provide an early signal to the Director of areas of interest for investment or disinvestment as part of upcoming LTP discussions.
8. This report provides detail and commentary on the work programme of the Science, Policy and Information Directorate (SPI), which has the primary responsibility for delivering Council's environmental monitoring, science (social, environmental and economic), spatial information, and resource management policy and advocacy functions.

TE TAKE | ISSUE

9. As noted above, the Science, Policy and Information Directorate leads the delivery of Council's work programme as it relates to five groups of activity (GOAs).
10. The following sets out the work of each of each 'activity' within the directorate. The approach taken is to present:
 - Overview of work undertaken by the section
 - Key projects of note (this is not an exhaustive list of all the work undertaken by the sections, rather highlights key aspect of the section's work)
 - Staffing numbers, cost of activities and funding source (based on Annual Plan 25/26)

Environmental Monitoring

11. This activity focuses on the collection, storage, management and analysis of quality-assured data on the current state of air, water, land, coastal resources, and ecosystems in the Waikato region to inform effective and defensible decision making. These complex data sets are then translated into key measures of the state of the environment that are accessible via the web and shared with other council and public.
12. Data is collected to inform considerations for flood protection including operation of flood warning systems, use and allocation of surface and ground freshwater resources, setting water quality limits, identifying changes in water quantity and quality, soil, freshwater ecology, coastal ecology, terrestrial biodiversity, and air quality. Data is used to support the setting of policies and rules for the management and allocation of resources, including reviews of how effective the policies are in meeting their intended objectives. The information

gathered is also used to inform resource consent decisions and is relied on by the public and large consent holders to be timely and accurate.

13. Key projects include:

- Increasing resilience in our flood warning rain gauge and river level network
- Increase in coastal monitoring programme
- Improve efficiency in field data capture
- Completion of river low flow (Q5) tool for consent applications
- Implement innovations in data capture and reporting (autonomous boat trial, streamlined report production process)

	Staff	Labour (\$m)	Direct Costs (\$m)	Total allocated costs (\$m)
Environmental Monitoring	42.5	2,125	1,684	3,280
% of total SPI budget	31%	20%	15%	22%

Environmental Science

14. The environmental science activity provides the community with science-based information and advice to assess and predict how natural resources respond to past, present and future pressures, and inform the management or mitigation of existing and potential impacts. Gaining a better understanding of natural processes is integral to strategy and policy development and monitoring, consent processes, restoration work and co-management programmes. The information tells the community if there is any improvement, or decline, in the state of the region's natural and physical resources, why this is happening, and how we should respond.
15. The provision of robust, independent and defensible environmental information enables Council to make decision on a number of resource management matters, including:
- development, implementation and review of regional policies and plans
 - assessment of resource consents
 - analysis of current state and trends in the environment
 - ecological restoration and remediation initiatives
 - tracking progress towards the council's strategic direction
 - meeting council's legislated responsibilities.

Key projects include:

- Whangamarino Action Plan and Water Security Action Plan
- State of the environment monitoring, including a increase in coastal and marine environmental monitoring
- Biodiversity priority habitats and establishing the Tier one and Tier two monitoring programmes

- Sustainable peatlands programme, and sedimentation mapping of the region
- Management of ongoing monitoring programme related to key regional environmental issues, such as fisheries and fish passage, Lake Taupo, and key ICM projects such as riparian planting effectiveness.
- Substantial programme of ‘business as usual’ science and monitoring related to the region’s coastal and marine, geothermal, air, land, ecology and contaminated land, soil and land, water quality and ecology, and hydrology and groundwater resource.
- Providing input and guidance into the activities of the ICM directorate, and ongoing input into the consenting processes for the RUD directorate – including assisting with technical advice to Incident Response and Environmental Compliance teams.
- Providing expert evidence to support policy programmes including Environment Court mediation and appeal processes

	Staff	Labour (\$m)	Direct Costs (\$m)	Total allocated costs (\$m)
Environmental Science	35.5	3,546	5,170	5,621
% of total SPI budget	26%	33%	47%	37%

Social and Economic Science

16. This activity supports evidence based planning and decision making by gathering, analysing and reporting on social and economic information, and linking this to environmental knowledge. The activity provides scientific socio-economic data and information, evaluation and survey design and analysis, and assists in developing economic models and scenarios to help Council gain a better understanding of our communities and achieve community aspirations. The section provides a better understanding of the social and economic qualities and opinions of our communities, which contributes to decision making about resources – both in regard to decisions on allocation and on policy settings. The section also undertakes research and advises on best practice for engagement and consultation processes with communities, and monitors people’s understanding, awareness and attitudes in regard to the work that the Council does.

Key projects include:

- Facilitating the infrastructure funding project
- Environmental Perceptions Survey
- Managing the economic analysis to underpin the Freshwater Policy Review
- Developing surveys and engagement tools to assist the organisation
- Supporting organisational projects by providing economic analysis and support

	Staff	Labour (\$m)	Direct Costs (\$m)	Total allocated costs (\$m)
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Social and Economic Science	7.6	610	439	906
% of total SPI budget	6%	6%	4%	6%

Spatial Information

17. This service enables the delivery of spatial information such as maps, data and interactive maps on the intranet and internet as well as spatial analysis and the development of decision-making models. Spatial modelling and interpretation bring together complex layers of data to bring together meaningful information for the organisation and the community. Spatial activities also involve working regionally and nationally to develop datasets (such as tracks and aerial photography) that are not constrained by council boundaries. Council staff across the organisation can use the data and models to make decisions and undertake their business such as support for land use development, regional resilience, infrastructure planning and tsunami modelling.
18. Key projects include:
- Waikato Regional Aerial Photography programme, and LiDAR programme and derivatives
 - Data catalogue replacement
 - Self-service solution for big-data
 - Emerging technology proof of concepts for satellite subscriptions, and organisational efficiency gains
 - Rates scenario visualisation dashboard
 - Supporting a wide range of organisational projects by providing all base GIS services and spatial analysis and modelling services

	Staff	Labour (\$m)	Direct Costs (\$m)	Total allocated costs (\$m)
Spatial Information	18	1,266	605	20
% of total SPI budget	13%	12%	5%	0%

Resource Management Policy

19. Waikato Regional Council has a statutory responsibility to develop a regional policy statement and resource management plans under the Resource Management Act (RMA) 1991 that ensure natural resources are sustainably managed. Council's primary resource management documents include the regional policy statement and region plans covering the coast (the Waikato Regional Coastal Plan), and land, water and air (Waikato Regional Plan). These three documents seek to achieve a balance between the management of resources while enabling economic development, growth and communities to thrive.
20. Council's resource management plans are based on our science and environmental monitoring activities, informed by the work of the strategic development activity, by conversations and feedback with the community and resource users, and must give effect to

any national direction and the Regional Policy Statement. The regional resource management plans inform the development of RMA District Plans held by territorial authorities.

21. The resource management policy activity maintains and updates the regional policy statement and regional plans, as well as providing future focused, effective, resource management policy and planning information, advice, analysis and solutions under other relevant legislation.
22. Key projects include:
- Plan Change 1, Waikato and Waipa Catchment
 - Proposed Regional Coastal Plan
 - Freshwater Policy Review
 - Private Plan Changes

	Staff	Labour (\$m)	Direct Costs (\$m)	Total allocated costs (\$m)
Resource Management Policy	13.8	1,770	1,287	2,757
% of total SPI budget	10%	16%	12%	18%

Strategic Policy Implementation

23. This section provides support for and synthesising thinking on emerging issues, advocating WRC's position, this is done by facilitating organizational responses to national, regional, and local issues. This spans advocacy and submissions on national direction through to lodging submissions on district plans. The submissions facilitated by this section are representative of input from all directorates of WRC. The section is a main conduit to our territorial authority partners, regularly convening regional planning forums. Also, the section supports and informs growth management and infrastructure planning throughout the region and has responsibility for maintaining the alignment of the Regional Policy Statement with growth management strategies.
24. Key projects include:
- Development, and facilitating implementation, of the Regional Energy Strategy and Regional Biodiversity Strategy
 - Leading the WRC approach to regional spatial planning
 - Support, assistance and input into submissions at national, regional and the local scale. This spans the process from pre-notification policy discussions, formal submissions, expert evidence at hearings, recommendations on appeals where matters are of regional importance, and subsequent management of appeal processes.
 - Technical input into Fast Track Application process
 - Lead the development and delivery of statutory responsibilities for urban growth management

- Supporting a wide range of organisational projects through use of collaboration networks and resource management expertise within the section

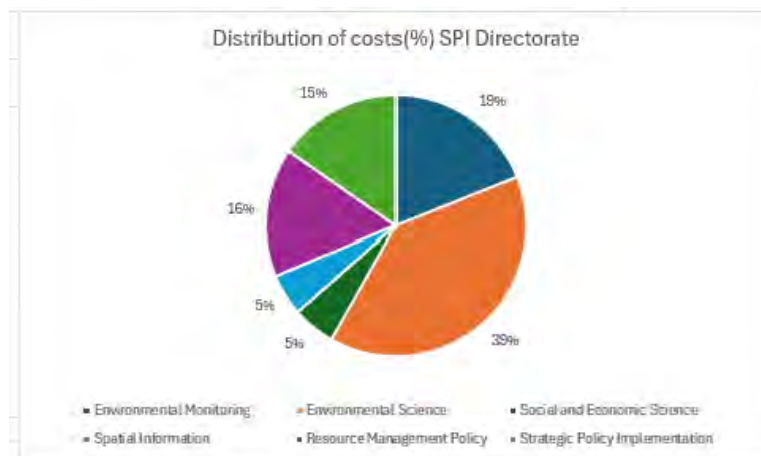
	Staff	Labour (\$m)	Direct Costs (\$m)	Total allocated costs (\$m)
Strategic Policy Implementation	20.1	1,475	1,819	2,425
% of total SPI budget	15%	14%	17%	16%

Summary

25. Most of the services provided by the directorate are required by legislation, or are required to enable legislative drivers to be met. Staffing resources, reflected as budgeted Full Time Equivalents (FTEs) across each work area in the 2026/27 Annual Plan, are aggregated below:

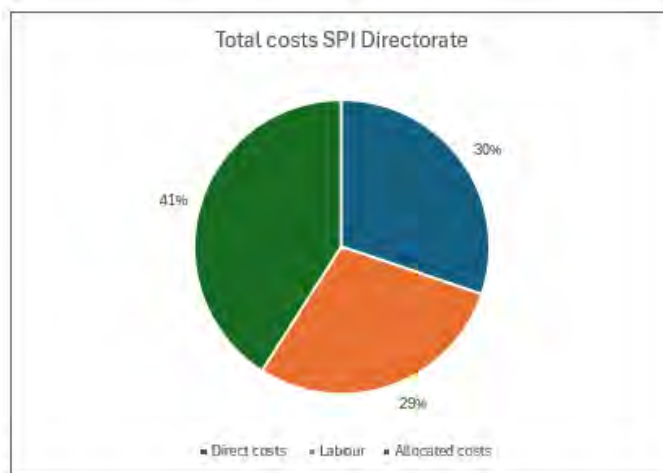
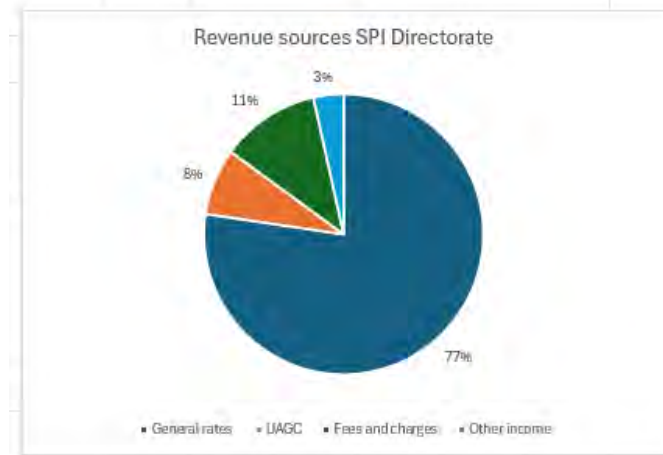
Environmental Monitoring	42.5
Environmental Science	35.5
Social and Economic Science	7.6
Spatial Information	18.0
Resource Management Policy	13.8
Strategic Policy Implementation	20.1
Director	4.0
TOTAL FTE	137.5

26. The Total FTEs that service the work of the Directorate are supported by Fixed Term Employees, contractors and employees who are on casual contracts. The directorate makes use of a Summer Student contingent who provide a skilled, and cost effective staff cohort, to ensure our peak Summer field work programme is completed annually. A directorate view of the current cost of service (based on the approved 2025/26 annual plan) and associated funding sources for each activity is provided in the following graphs.



Funding sources

27. The majority of the work undertaken by the Directorate is funding through General Rates or through the Uniform Annual General Charge (UAGC). Fees and charges contribute 11% of the directorate’s revenue source. The fees and charges revenue funds specific programmes within the Environmental Monitoring and Environmental Science sections.



WHAKAKAPINGA | CONCLUSION

28. This report presents an overview of current activities, their purpose and cost of delivery for work undertaken by the Science, Policy and Information directorate. Much of the work undertaken by the Directorate is to ensure compliance with statute. Discretionary work commonly links to strategic partnerships and advocacy. The emergence of a new resource management system will require a revision of work programmes to ensure that the information and science gathered to inform policy development, and the other activities of council, is focussed on the issues of importance to the region. The council will be discussing where to maintain, increase, or disinvest in council activities through the development the 2027–2037 Long Term Plan. This paper provides opportunity for the Strategy and Policy Committee to provide direction as to the areas of the Directorate’s business that it would like to examine more closely.

ĀPITIHANGA | ATTACHMENTS

Nil

6.9 RESOURCE MANAGEMENT POLICY WORK PROGRAMME REFOCUS 2026/27

Rā Date:	5 June 2026
Kaituhi Author:	Jo Bromley, Principal Advisor - Science, Policy and Information
Kaituku Authoriser:	Tracey May, Director, Science, Policy and Information
Mana whakatau Delegation Status:	Committee has delegated authority to make the recommended decision

TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. Waikato Regional Council (the council) is prioritising essential work that will remain relevant under reform, while avoiding investment in policy likely to require rework. This report outlines how the council is positioning the Policy Work Programme (the policy programme) within the SPI directorate to balance current obligations with future reforms, ensuring the council invest in what will stand the test of time.
2. It highlights the areas where the council is continuing to invest effort, where it is deliberately pausing to avoid unnecessary cost or duplication, and how this approach will ensure the region and the organisation remain well-placed to respond to future national direction while continuing to meet current obligations.

KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

3. The council is responding to significant uncertainty in national reform by focusing its policy programme on work that delivers lasting value while maintaining flexibility. New resource management legislation, including the proposed Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill, introduces a fundamentally different system that is more nationally directed, more standardised, and more reliant on environmental limits and evidence-based decision-making.
4. In this context, the policy programme has been reshaped to prioritise activities that remain valuable regardless of final national settings. This includes strengthening the regional evidence base, maintaining statutory obligations, and ensuring readiness for future planning requirements. Detailed policy development has been paused where there is a high risk of rework under the new system.
5. Staff believe that this approach avoids investing in work that may be duplicated or become obsolete, while ensuring council continues to meet its legal obligations, maintain credibility with stakeholders and iwi, and retain the ability to influence and respond to national policy decisions.
6. The programme is balancing three core imperatives:
 - meeting current statutory and reputational obligations under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA)
 - preparing for new planning instruments and governance arrangements
 - positioning Waikato to respond to emerging national direction

TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

1. That the report *Resource management policy Work Programme refocus 2026/27* (Strategy and Policy Committee, 18 June 2026) be received.
2. That the 'pause but be ready' approach to policy development within the context of resource management reform is supported.
3. That the Committee acknowledges the prioritised 6-month work programme is focused on work that retain value and contribution to future legislative direction.

TE TAKE | ISSUE

7. The policy programme sits within a broader national reform programme that will replace the RMA with a new planning framework built around strengthened national direction, environmental limits, and integrated regional planning instruments.
8. A defining feature of the new system is its sequencing. Regional Spatial Plans must be prepared first, establishing long-term strategic direction for the region, followed by Natural Environment Plans that implement environmental limits and regulatory settings. Additionally, there is Local Government Reform and new governance structures. This creates a compressed and interdependent planning process, with statutory timeframes that require early action despite uncertainty around national direction.
9. At the same time, existing plans remain operative and legally binding until the new system takes effect. This means Council must continue to meet current statutory obligations while preparing for the new system, effectively operating across two frameworks simultaneously for the next three to four years.
10. Alongside resource management reform, the Government's Simplifying Local Government programme, including the Head Start pathway, signals potential changes to how local government functions are structured and delivered across New Zealand.
11. A first-principles assessment of core local government functions has been undertaken to understand the scale at which key activities are best delivered. The findings indicate that many core functions currently delivered by regional councils, including policy development, are appropriately undertaken on a regional scale. This reflects the interconnected nature of environmental and economic systems, the need for consistent and high-quality evidence, and the efficiencies gained from operating on a scale.
12. There is a need to maintain strong regional capability in science, evidence, and policy to support decision-making, while remaining adaptable to potential changes in governance and institutional arrangements arising from reform.
13. This creates a complex operating environment due to:
 - Uncertainty around final national direction
 - Compressed statutory timeframes once direction is confirmed
 - Increasing centralisation of policy settings
 - Ongoing obligations to iwi, stakeholders, and communities.

14. In response to the present operating climate a deliberate, and practical, position has been implemented - to focus effort on work that retains value regardless of reform outcomes, while avoiding unnecessary expenditure on work that is likely to be reworked.

Programme approach – a focus on value

15. The resource management policy programme is being delivered through a deliberate and disciplined approach that prioritises value, risk management, and long-term outcomes. The work programme is based on a “pause but be ready”/partial continuation approach which pauses high-risk policy drafting likely to be reworked, continues statutory, reputational and evidence work and accelerates reform-critical workstreams.
16. This approach recognises that progressing detailed policy ahead of national direction introduces a high risk of duplication and wasted effort. As a result, project teams have chosen not to invest in new detailed rule development or limit-setting at this stage. Instead, effort is being focused on strengthening the underlying evidence base, clarifying regional priorities, and ensuring that Council is ready to act once national direction is confirmed.
17. At the same time ensuring existing statutory obligations are met, including maintaining operative plans, progressing appeals, and upholding Treaty settlement commitments.
18. This approach ensures that:
 - Ratepayer funding is directed to work that will endure.
 - Risk of rework and duplication is minimised.
 - Retaining flexibility to respond to national changes.
 - Regional interests continue to be represented and advanced.

BACKGROUND

19. The policy programme is structured around several core interconnected workstreams that together support both current delivery and future readiness. These can be broadly grouped into the two categories of ‘shaping the future’ and ‘maintain’.

Shaping the Future	Maintain
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National direction response • Freshwater Policy Review (transition) • Regional Spatial Plan • Natural Environment Plan • Implementation and transition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing mandated national direction response • Legacy plan maintenance • Appeals • Fulfilling Treaty Settlement obligations

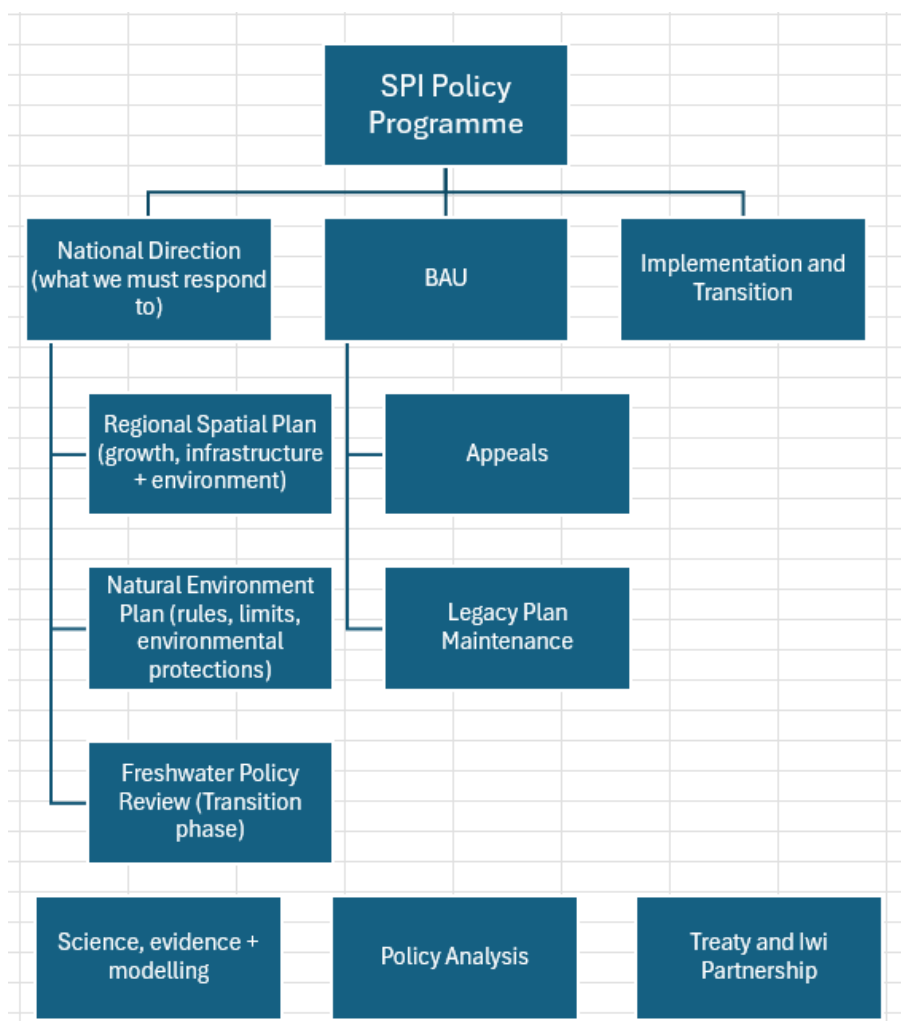


Diagram 1: Overview of the SPI Policy Programme

20. **Diagram 1: Overview of the Policy Programme** overviews how this work connects. At the top is national direction. This work is important because national direction will increasingly determine what can and cannot be done at regional scale/level.
21. **The Regional Spatial Plan (RSP)** is the primary strategic focus of the future programme. The spatial plan will be where decisions are made about how the region grows (future development patterns), where infrastructure goes, and how we balance development with environmental challenges. This is where long-term regional outcomes, ensuring that economic development, infrastructure investment and environmental protection are aligned within a single framework, is to be presented. This plan is also critical because it determines the foundation on which future regulatory plans will be built.
22. **The Natural Environment Plan (NEP)** will replace existing regional and district plans with a single integrated plan. This is where there are rules on freshwater, biodiversity, coastal integration, land management requirements, limits-based framework and transition of existing plan provisions will exist. While detailed development is dependent on national direction, early work is focused on ensuring council is prepared to respond quickly once requirements are confirmed. This includes strengthening evidence, understanding trade-offs, and preparing for the increased justification requirements associated with limits-based planning.
23. **The Freshwater Policy Review (FPR) Transition Phase** approach temporarily pauses detailed policy development and engagement, while continuing work that will remain valuable under

the future system. It recognises Joint Management Agreement responsibilities and represents a prudent use of partner time and resources. It is not a cessation of work, but a realignment that maintains momentum and positions the Council and iwi partners to recommence the FPR in a timely and informed manner once greater certainty on the new resource management system is achieved.

24. This realignment of effort focuses on:

- Maintaining statutory obligations under the current framework
- Continue to build the scientific, economic and technical evidence base focussing on priority pieces of work – those not likely to be impacted significantly through the system reforms
- Policy readiness through monitoring emerging national direction
- Preserve momentum while avoiding rework and inefficient use of resources.

25. Detailed policy and rule drafting, setting environmental limits and formal stakeholder and community engagement on policy options have been paused as these are most exposed to change under the new system. The transition reflects significant uncertainty and risk across the emerging planning system. The future framework is expected to be nationally directed, but key components such as methods for setting environmental limits, are not yet available, creating a risk that work undertaken now could be misaligned or require rework. At the same time, Council must continue to meet its existing statutory obligations, requiring progress to be maintained within a constrained and evolving environment. The FRP will recommence in a revised form once there is sufficient certainty in the new legislative framework. This is expected to occur following the enactment of the Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill and clearer direction on national policy instruments.

26. Running across all of this are the **enabling functions, particularly science, evidence, and modelling**. This is a core priority because it provides the foundation for all future decision-making and provides enduring, defensible evidence to support future limits and planning.

27. The councils' **obligations under treaty settlements** remain unchanged and continue to be a central consideration in policy development.

28. Sitting alongside the system is the **legacy plan maintenance workstream** – the work we must continue to do under current legislation, maintaining existing plans, including progressing appeals and meeting legal obligations. This work is critical for maintaining legal compliance and credibility during the transition period. This includes all appeal processes including Plan Change 1, Proposed Regional Coastal Plan, Regional Policy Statement Changes, and participation in district plan change processes, and also includes mandated section 55 plan updates.

29. The **implementation and transition workstream** focus on the support the policy programme will need to provide (internal and external) decision-makers and stakeholders. Key areas will be to provide interpretation guidance on existing and new frameworks.

Current work continuing

30. Resource management project teams are deliberating focusing on work that will retain value regardless of how national direction evolves. Without anticipating standards or methodologies the following activities are considered low risk and high value regardless of reform outcomes.

- Spatial and data readiness
 - Regional Spatial Strategy Inventory (updating)
 - Ongoing investigation into regional data integration
 - Prioritised baseline technical work and monitoring
- Evidence and Science
 - State of Environment updates
 - Water quality trends and modelling
 - Identification of data gaps
 - Completing economic modelling
- Iwi and stakeholder relationships
 - Maintain engagement and trust
 - Prepare for co-design under new system
- Policy readiness (not drafting)
 - Preparing to engage with national direction once further detail is available.
 - Identifying implications of proposed RMA amendments for current plans and processes (e.g. s104)
 - Staying connected to emerging inputs for future limit-setting, including social science etc.

31. The following has been refocused to avoid rework as there is a high likelihood of duplication or misalignment with future national direction:

- Freshwater policy drafting and limit setting,
- regional policy statement and regional plan reviews; and,
- detailed rule development tied to the current system.

NGĀ WHAIWHAKAARO KAUPAPAHERE | POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

32. To the best of the writer's knowledge, this decision is not significantly inconsistent with, nor is anticipated to have consequences that will be significantly inconsistent with any policy adopted by council or any plan required by the LGA or any other enactment.

WHAKAKAPINGA | CONCLUSION

33. Project teams responsible for resource management policy are taking a deliberate and disciplined approach to managing policy work during this period of significant reform. The scope for local discretion is likely to reduce as national standards and limits become more prescriptive and bespoke approaches require strong justification. This increases the importance of strong evidence-based and well-justified regional positions.
34. Effort is being directed towards activities that deliver enduring value, reduce risk, and maintain readiness for future requirements, while avoiding unnecessary cost and duplication. This approach ensures the region remains well positioned to respond to change, meet its obligations, and deliver long-term outcomes.

ĀPITI HANGA | ATTACHMENTS

Nil

6.10 SUBMISSIONS SUMMARY REPORT - JUNE 2026

Rā | Date: 27 May 2026

Kaituhi | Author: Miffy Foley, Team Leader - Strategic And Spatial Planning

Kaituku | Authoriser: Tracey May, Director, Science, Policy and Information

TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. This report provides an update on the submissions that the Waikato Regional Council (the Council) has lodged and identifies upcoming advocacy opportunities.

KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. The Council receives notice of legislative and national policy proposals at various stages of development. Some of these have the potential to impact significantly on the Council and its customers. A number of plan changes and reviews also continue throughout the region's territorial authorities. This is a regular report that summarises the consultation opportunities and the submissions that the council has prepared.

TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That the *Submissions Summary Report - June 2026* (Strategy and Policy Committee, 18 June 2026) be received.

HOROPAKI | BACKGROUND

3. Staff provide the Strategy and Policy Committee this report at each meeting, identifying current and upcoming opportunities for submissions by the Council and outcomes of previous submissions, including those signed out under delegated authority.
4. Key partners communicate consultation opportunities in different ways, with some not writing directly to the Council. Staff are on various distribution lists and monitor the webpages of key partners once a week to identify consultation opportunities. This includes parliamentary websites, central government department websites, and the consultation webpages of district and regional councils relevant to our region.
 - A spatial map of active local planning processes is provided at **Attachment 1**.
 - A table of district planning processes by territorial authority, and central government legislative and policy updates, is provided at **Attachment 2**.
 - A summary of Fast Track locations and details is provided at **Attachment 3**.

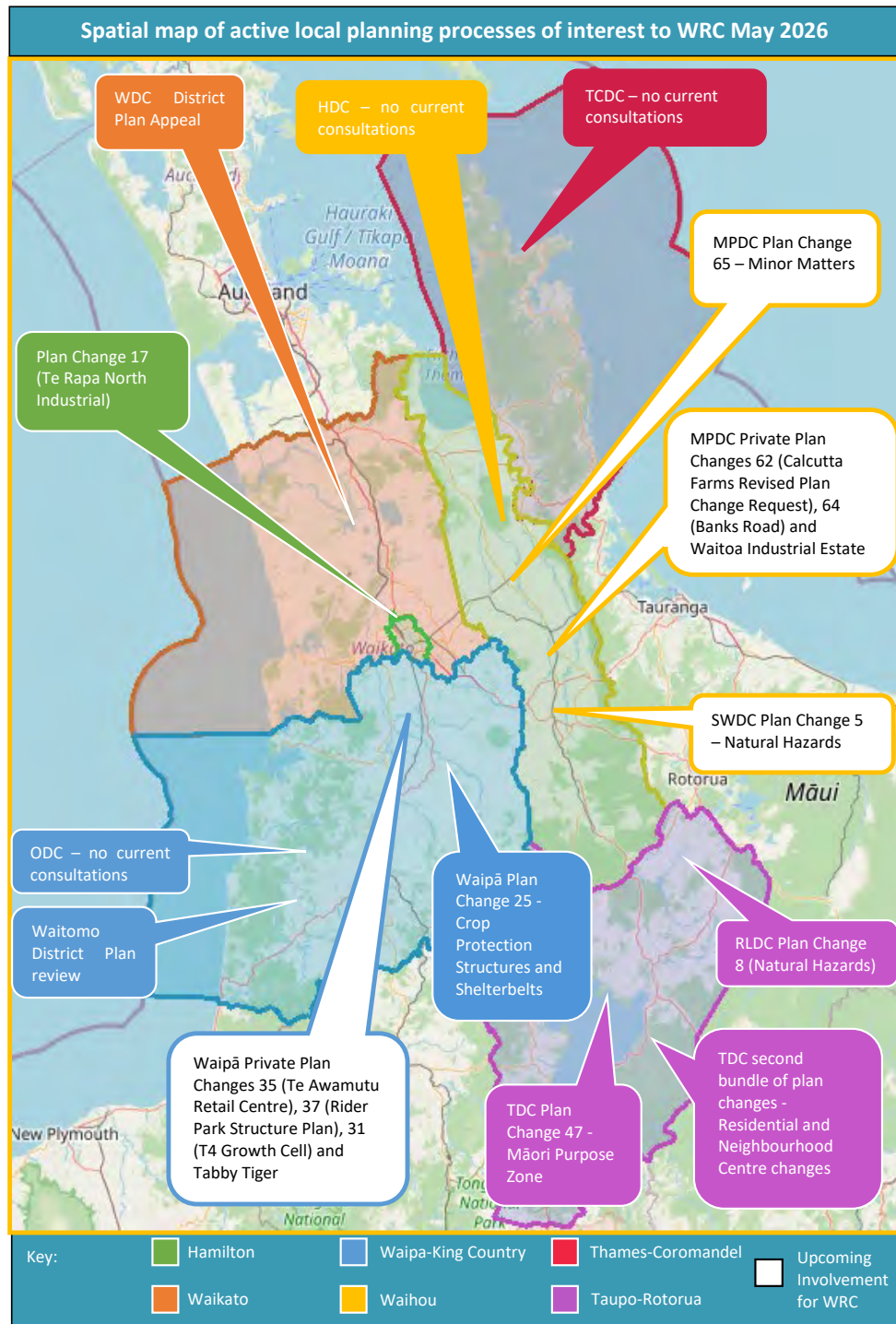
WHAKAKAPINGA | CONCLUSION

5. This report provides an update on submission opportunities from central government, plus upcoming changes as well as updates on district plan process in which the Council are involved. These reports are provided regularly to the committee.

ĀPITIHANGA | ATTACHMENTS

1. **Spatial map of active local planning processes – (Doc # 36127162)** [↓](#)
2. **District Planning and Central Government Processes – (Doc # 36127773)** [↓](#)
3. **Map of Fast Track Applications – (Doc # 36142157)** [↓](#)

Attachment 1



District Planning processes by territorial authority**Hamilton City Council**

Process	Plan change stage (where relevant)	What is it?	Current status
Private Plan Change 17: Te Rapa North Industrial	Decision	A private plan change request by Fonterra to "live zone" 91ha of land in the Te Rapa North Industrial Zone by removing the 'Deferred Industrial Zone' overlay.	Appeals have been lodged by Fonterra and Empire Corporation/Porter Group. Staff have reviewed and determined there is no need to join the appeals.

Matamata Piako District Council

Process	Plan change stage (where relevant)	What is it?	Current status
Plan Change 65 – Minor Matters (PC65).	Pre-notification	This plan change aims to fix a range of issues in the District Plan that have caused inefficiencies, unintended outcomes, or implementation challenges. Some of these issues were originally included in PC61.	Plan Change 65 has been approved to move to the next stage which is for MPDC to formally approve the plan change for formal notification.
Calcutta Farms - Revised Plan Change Request - Plan Change 62	Pre-notification	The revised plan change proposes to rezone approximately 20 hectares of rural land at the eastern edge of Matamata (south of Tauranga Road/SH24) to General Industrial Zone.	Pre-notification engagement. Staff are assessing the proposal.
Private Plan Change 64 - Banks Road	Pre-notification	The PC is seeking to rezone approximately 26.3 hectares of land near the southeastern edge of Matamata from Rural Zone to Residential Zone. PC64 is consistent with the Future Residential Policy Area and the Banks Road to Mangawhero Road Structure Plan. The proposal "live-zones" approximately 26.3 hectares as Residential Zone, updates the Structure Plan to reflect master planning and	Pre-notification stage - staff have lodged pre-notification feedback on the draft plan change proposal

Process	Plan change stage (where relevant)	What is it?	Current status
		introduces a 400m ² minimum net lot size with a Restricted Discretionary pathway for 325-399 m ² lots (Comprehensive Residential Development).	

Rotorua Lakes District Council

Process	Plan change stage (where relevant)	What is it?	Current status
Plan Change 8 (Natural Hazards)	Hearing	This reviews the objectives and policies for natural hazards and changes the rules relating to how the District Plan manages specific natural hazards – flooding, wildfire, fault rupture, land stability (slope stability, liquefaction and soft soils) and geothermal hazards –for the whole district, including in the Lakes A Zone.	Staff submitted a letter to the hearing panel rather than appearing at the hearing.

South Waikato District Council

Process	Plan change stage (where relevant)	What is it?	Current status
Plan Change 5 - Natural Hazards	Pre-notification	This will consolidate provisions relating to natural hazards into one chapter, as per the National Planning Standards. The plan change will map urban flood hazard risks as per the WRPS.	SWDC indicated they will progress this plan change as this topic will be automatically exempt from the plan stop direction from central government.

Waikato DC

Process	Plan change stage (where relevant)	What is it?	Current status
WDC District Plan Review	Appeal	WDC undertook a full review of the Waikato District Plan. WRC submitted on a number of aspects and participated in the hearing process.	WRC interest on the topics relates to rural subdivision remains. Staff anticipate that these appeals will be resolved in the next few weeks.

Waipa District Council

Process	Plan change stage (where relevant)	What is it?	Current status
Draft Plan Change 25 - Crop Protection Structures and Shelterbelts	Submission	Waipa DC has resolved to remove the crop protection structures and shelterbelt topic from PC30 and progress it as a separate plan change. This is because of intense interest and lobbying from landowner and industry groups and recent Environment Court proceedings.	WRC did not submit on the plan change. Summary of submissions was notified on 14 May – staff determined there was also no need to prepare a further submission.
Proposed Private Plan Change 37- Rider Park Structure Plan	Submission	Private plan change proposal to rezone 94ha of land on the eastern fringe of Cambridge/Leamington for residential and commercial development. Proposal brings forward C5 Cambridge growth cell from post-2035 for development now.	Submission was endorsed at the council meeting on 30 April, subject to minor changes.
Proposed Private Plan Change 31 - Te Awamutu T4 Growth Cell	Pre-notification	This proposes to rezone the T4 growth cell on the western side of Te Awamutu from Deferred Residential to Residential Zone. The T4 growth cell is 29ha and is currently identified in the Waipa District Plan for residential development beyond 2035.	Plan change was lodged in September 2023. Waipā DC has requested further information from the applicant. As this is a private plan change, the 'Plan Stop' requirements do not apply.

Process	Plan change stage (where relevant)	What is it?	Current status
Draft Private Plan Change 32 - Tabby Tiger	Pre-notification	Private plan change to rezone 33 hectares of land between Raynes and Lochiel Roads from Rural to Airport Business Zone (Agri-Tech Precinct).	Plan change application lodged in September 2024. Waipā DC has requested further information from the applicant. As this is a private plan change, the 'Plan Stop' requirements do not apply.
Proposed Private Plan Change 35 - Te Awamutu Retail Centre	Pre-hearing	The plan change seeks to amend the provisions of the Waipā District Plan for the Te Awamutu Large Format Retail Centre at 670 Cambridge Road, Te Awamutu. It also proposes to rezone the nearby land at 638 Cambridge Road from Medium Density Residential to Commercial Zone and to include this land as part of the centre.	Submission lodged, focusing on the flood hazard assessment for the plan change. Staff determined there was no need to prepare a further submission. Awaiting hearing date.

Waitomo DC

Process	Plan change stage (where relevant)	What is it?	Current status
Waitomo DC Plan Review	Appeal	Waitomo DC are undertaking a full review of their district plan.	WRC's appeal relating to future urban zoning in areas of natural hazard risk has been resolved through direct negotiations. WRC joined aspects of Forest and Bird's appeal relating to the removal of indigenous vegetation in areas of natural features and landscapes. Direct negotiations are ongoing between Waitomo DC and Forest and Bird.

Central Government Proposals - Current processes

Process	What is it?	Current status
Natural Environment Bill and Planning Bill	The government has introduced two new acts to replace the RMA - a Planning Act and Natural Environment Act. The new resource management legislation will be based on the enjoyment of property rights.	Submission lodged. WRC presented to the Select Committee on 18 March. The Select Committee report is due on 26 June, outcomes will be presented at the August meeting of the committee.
Proposed Time of Use Charging Regulations	Proposed regulations are to support the design of time of use charging schemes under the Land Transport Management (Time of Use Charging) Amendment Act 2025. Time of use charging is proposed to be implemented which would charge people during busy times of use on particular roads. Costs will differ based on vehicle size.	A draft Waikato Regional Transport Committee submission was presented to the Regional Transport Committee at the 8 June meeting.
Conservation Amendment Bill	The Bill amends the Conservation Act 1987 to streamline the management of conservation land, better enable appropriate use, and support more effective administration overall. A new National Conservation Policy Statement is proposed to replace overlapping plans and provide clearer national direction and consistency.	Staff are preparing a submission which is the subject of a separate report on this agenda
Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Amendment Bill	Amends the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Act 1996 to streamline and improve application processes and pathways, support risk-proportionate decision-making and public participation, and enhance compliance, monitoring, and enforcement under the Act.	Staff are preparing a submission which is the subject of a separate report on this agenda.
FNZ review of measures for shore-based harvesting in the Auckland Coromandel area	The consultation responds to ongoing concerns about the sustainability of intertidal shellfish and other fisheries resources in the Auckland Coromandel area and aligns with key management actions from the Hauraki Gulf Fisheries Plan. It proposes intertidal closures (from the high-tide mark to 200 m offshore along the coastline of the Auckland Coromandel mainland and around Waiheke Island) and changes to the recreational daily limits for shellfish in the Auckland Coromandel area. Covers intertidal habitats as well as some subtidal habitats.	Staff are preparing a submission which is the subject of a separate report on this agenda

Process	What is it?	Current status
Agricultural Compounds and Veterinary Medicines Amendment Bill	<p>Amendments to Agricultural Compounds and Veterinary Medicines Act 1997</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intends to reduce barriers and improve efficiency and transparency around approval of agricultural and horticultural products. - A review was undertaken of the existing legislation which made 16 recommendations, the bill gives effect to those recommendations. 	Staff have reviewed and determined that a submission is not required.
Proposed regulations for road user charges	<p>Reform of current RUC system:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - RUC collector will be NZTA but providers will be approved public or private entities. - Transition from fuel excise duty to road user charges (all vehicles will be subject to RUCs instead of just diesel and EVs). 	Staff have reviewed and determined that a submission is not required.

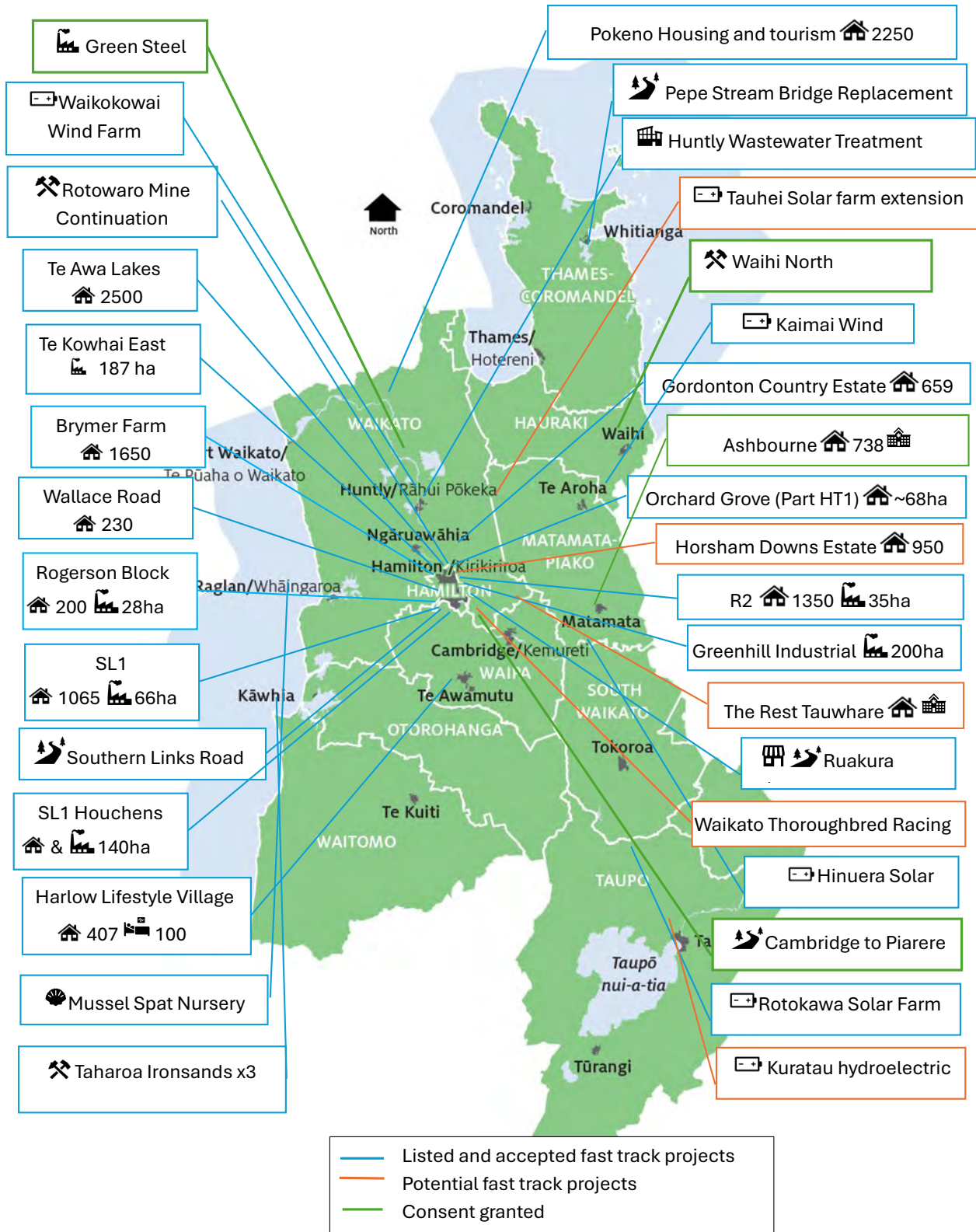
Central government proposals - upcoming processes

Process	What is it?	Current status
Climate Change Response Act (Efficiency and Effectiveness) Amendment Bill	Bill sets the legal framework for powers and responsibilities with respect to climate adaptation.	Expected in 2026.
Biosecurity Amendment Bill	Bill to give effect to any policy decisions to modernise this legislation. Previously submitted on a discussion document in December 2024.	Expected in 2026.
Local Government Legislation Amendment Bill (title TBC)	Bill to give effect to policy decisions around rate-capping, simplifying LG and potentially other items from the 'forward work programme'.	Policy announcements on 1 December. Legislation not expected until the third quarter of 2026.

Other relevant processes - upcoming

Process	What is it?	Current status
Review of Te Ture Whaimana o te Awa o Waikato	<p>Te Ture Whaimana is the primary direction setting document for the Waikato River and activities within its catchment and was reviewed in 2011 with no amendments made.</p> <p>Under the Waikato-Tainui Raupatu Claims (Waikato River) Settlement Act 2010, clause 19, the review of Te Ture Whaimana is to be initiated no later than 10 years from the previous review. Therefore, this is the first major review of Te Ture Whaimana since it was established more than 10 years ago as a key part of the River Settlement.</p>	Workshops have been held with WRA, Councillors and WRC staff to provide initial feedback. It is likely that formal comment will be sought first half next year.

Waikato Region current and proposed Fast Track projects June 2026



7 PUBLIC EXCLUDED ITEMS

RESOLUTION TO EXCLUDE THE PUBLIC

HE TŪTOHUNGA | RECOMMENDATION:

That in accordance with section 48(1) of the *Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987* (Act) and the interests protected by section 6 or 7 of that Act, the public is excluded from the following parts of this meeting. The general subject of the matters to be considered while the public is excluded, the reason for passing this resolution in relation to each matter, and the specific grounds for excluding the public are set out below:

Meeting item no. and subject	Grounds for excluding the public	Reason for excluding the public
7.1 - Update on Proposed Waikato Regional Coastal Plan Appeals	s7(2)(g) of the Act - To maintain legal professional privilege	section 48(1)(a)(i) of the Act - the public conduct of the relevant part of the proceedings of the meeting would be likely to result in the disclosure of information for which good reason for withholding would exist under section 6 or section 7

8 KARAKIA WHAKAMUTUNGA

Unuhia, unuhia

Unuhia mai te uru tapu nui

kia wātea, kia māmā,

te ngākau, te tinana, te hinengaro,

i te ara takatū

Koia rā e Rongo

e whakairia ake ki runga

kia tina! TINA!

Haumi ē, hui ē, TĀIKI ē!

Draw on, draw on,

Draw on to the supreme sacredness

To clear, to free

our heart, body and soul

Our pathway prepared

Lo, there is peace

suspended high above

manifest!

draw together!

Affirm!