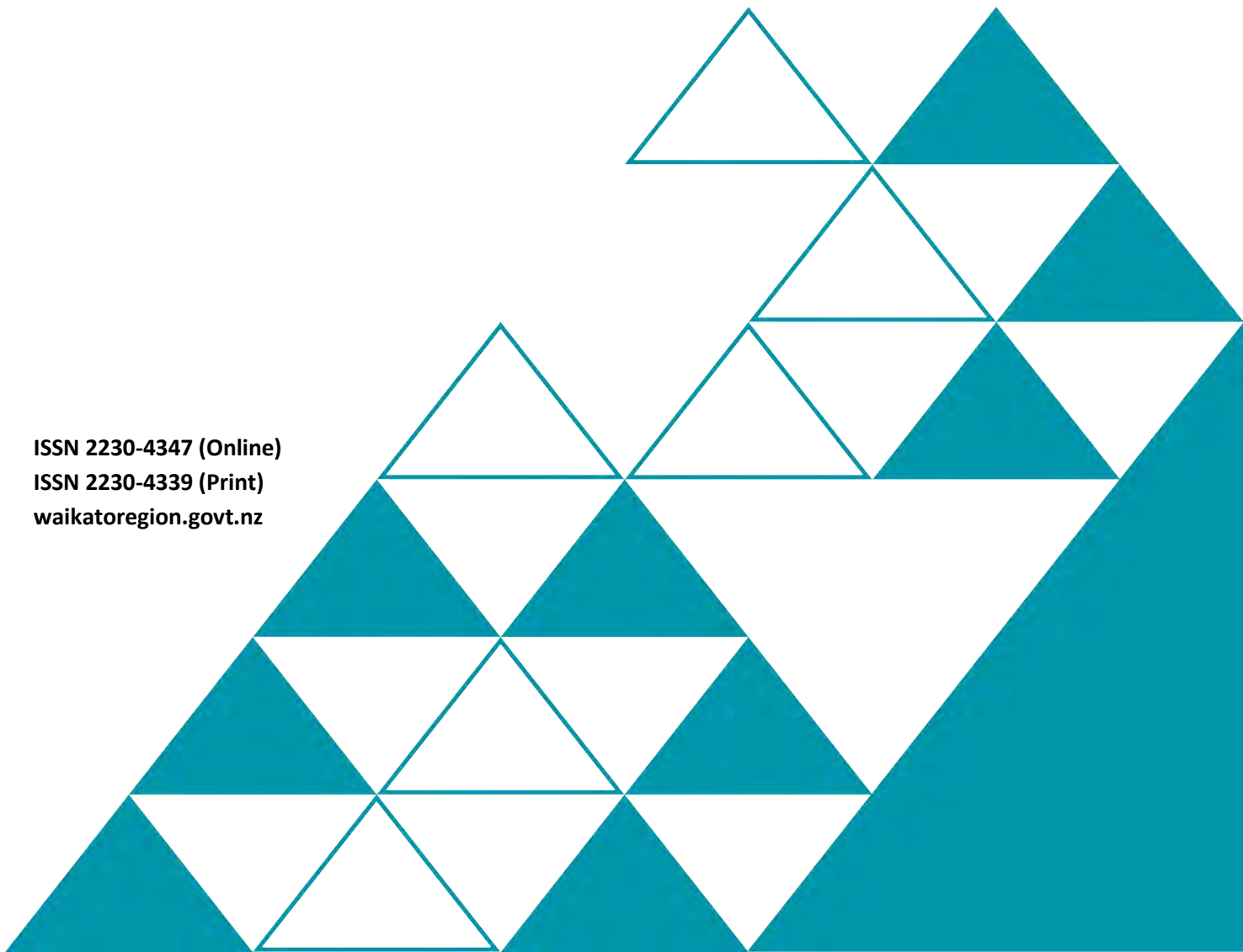


Regional Spatial Strategy – Framework Report

ISSN 2230-4347 (Online)
ISSN 2230-4339 (Print)
waikatoregion.govt.nz



| Version | Author | Date |
|----------------------------------|--------------|------------|
| First draft for review | Project Team | 19/05/2025 |
| Second draft for peer review | Project Team | 29/05/2025 |
| Third draft for council workshop | Project Team | 3/06/2025 |
| Final | Project Team | 4/06/2025 |

| | Name | Date |
|-------------------|-------------|--------------|
| Approving Manager | Miffy Foley | October 2025 |

s

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Prepared by | Nichola Lennard, Lana Gooderham (GMD Consultants) and Jo Bromley (Waikato Regional Council) |
| For | Waikato Regional Council Private Bag 3038 Waikato Mail Centre HAMILTON 3240 |
| Publication date | October 2025 |
| Document ID | 32941273 |

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Executive summary | 1 |
| 1 Introduction | 8 |
| 1.1 Purpose of Report..... | 8 |
| 1.2 Background | 8 |
| 1.2.1 The region at a glance | 8 |
| 1.2.2 RSS Project Phases..... | 11 |
| 1.3 Format of the Report | 12 |
| 2 What is a regional spatial strategy? | 13 |
| 2.1 Spatial strategies..... | 13 |
| 2.2 What is the benefit of an RSS for the region? | 13 |
| 2.3 Spatial Planning in the Region | 14 |
| 2.4 Statutory Context..... | 15 |
| 2.4.1 Overview | 15 |
| 2.4.2 Resource Management Reform | 15 |
| 3 Draft Regional Spatial Strategy Framework | 18 |
| 3.1 Project Purpose | 18 |
| 3.2 Proposed Approach | 18 |
| 3.3 RSS Scope..... | 19 |
| 3.4 RSS Framework Foundation Principles | 21 |
| 3.5 RSS Project Pathway | 22 |
| 3.6 Governance Structure..... | 31 |
| 3.6.1 Existing governance arrangements and structures | 31 |
| 3.6.2 Managing the spatial extent of the region | 32 |
| 4 RSS structure and contents | 33 |
| 4.1 RSS structure..... | 33 |
| 4.2 Integration | 35 |
| 4.2.1 Integrated planning | 35 |
| 4.2.2 Aligned implementation..... | 35 |
| 5 Communications & engagement approach | 36 |
| 5.1 Key stakeholders for the Waikato RSS | 36 |
| 5.2 Engagement approach..... | 37 |
| 5.2.1 Engagement on the draft RSS Framework..... | 37 |
| 5.2.2 Engagement on the draft RSS..... | 38 |
| 6 Conclusion and next steps | 39 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Appendix A: EAG Blueprint – Spatial Plans | 40 |
| Appendix B: Governance Structures | 42 |
| Appendix C: Record of Engagement..... | 43 |
| Appendix D: References | 44 |

Executive summary

Regional Spatial Strategy Project

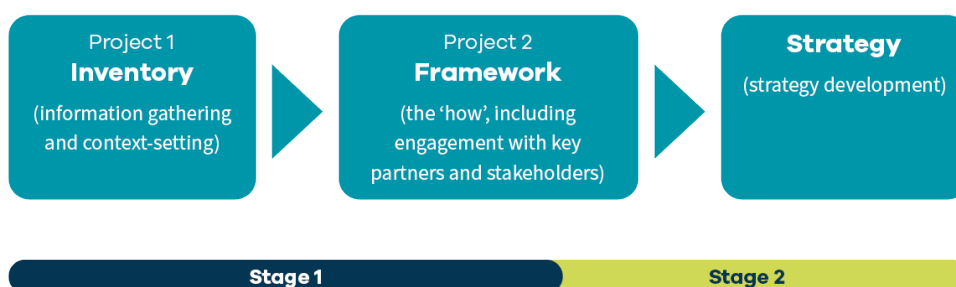
This report forms part of the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) Project. The RSS Project is set to occur in two phases. The first phase of the development of an RSS includes two projects, being:

1. The preparation of an RSS inventory.
2. The development of the draft framework for an RSS.

The first project, the RSS Inventory¹, has been completed. The RSS Inventory provides the evidence base for the development of the RSS. The RSS Inventory is a key document in the preparation of this framework and should be read in conjunction with this report.

The second project in Phase 1 is the development of the draft RSS framework. **That is this report.** Phase 2 of the project will comprise the development of a draft RSS for consultation. . The diagram below illustrates the phases of the RSS project:

Project Stages



Report Purpose

The purpose of the RSS Framework project is to **provide a draft framework or roadmap for the development of the Regional Spatial Strategy for the Waikato Region**. The report will:

- Reflect the aspirations of the region.
- Take into account what we currently know about resource management system reform.
- Indicate the potential structure, content, format and technical arrangements for the RSS.
- Discuss potential governance structures for the development of the RSS.
- Set out a high-level engagement approach for the RSS.
- Identify next steps in the development of the RSS.

The target audience of this report is central government, local government partners, Iwi/Māori and infrastructure providers. This report has been informed by input from key partners and stakeholders.

¹

PS24-16 - Waikato Regional Spatial Inventory

What is a Spatial Strategy?

The terms 'spatial plan' and 'spatial strategy' tend to be used interchangeably across literature, although spatial plan is more commonly used. This report uses the term 'Regional Spatial Strategy' or 'RSS', as is used in the WRC LTP 2024-2034. It is noted that this terminology may change in the future to align with resource management system reform terminology.

There are many definitions for spatial planning, and it is practiced in a range of ways corresponding to the particular local context, issues, values and desired outcomes of the place and its people. In a broad sense, spatial planning is an instrument used to manage sustainable development of a town, city, region or country. It is about shaping positive economic, social, cultural and ecological outcomes through 'place making'.

What are the benefits of an RSS?

There are several benefits in developing an RSS. These include:

- Integrated and aligned planning.
- Stronger regional voice and influence.
- Support for economic growth and resilience.
- Efficient infrastructure investment.
- Certainty.
- Improved community outcomes.
- Environmental stewardship.
- Future-proofing and scenario planning.

Where does the RSS fit in the resource management system reform?

The government is progressing reform of New Zealand's resource management system at pace.

Cabinet has agreed that the RMA should be replaced by two Acts, being:

1. A *Planning Act* focused on regulating the use, development and enjoyment of land.
2. A *Natural Environment Act* (NEA) focused on the use, protection and enhancement of the natural environment.

Each Act will require one mandatory national policy direction (NPD). Cabinet has also agreed that each region will develop a spatial plan under the future Planning Act. In addition, each region will prepare a single regulatory plan to replace all current regulatory plans.

While there is no legislation yet, it is possible to extrapolate key information from the relevant 'Blueprint' report prepared by an Expert Advisory Group commissioned for the reform, and the relevant Cabinet paper. This key information includes:

- Regional policy statements (RPSs) will be eliminated and partially replaced by spatial plans made under the Planning Act.
- These plans will be required to give effect to national policy direction.
- Spatial plans include the coastal marine area (CMA).
- Spatial plans will have regulatory weight in the planning process.
- Spatial plans will enable development and focus on mapping major constraints, identifying existing and future infrastructure (including future infrastructure corridors), future urban areas, and growth and development opportunities.
- There is a strong spatial focus – it is envisioned that Spatial Plans will be largely map-based.
- Spatial plan governance structures will be flexible and will be up to regional and territorial authorities to set up and agree upon.
- Spatial plans will cover:
 - Environmental constraints
 - Existing and future key infrastructure and other infrastructure services

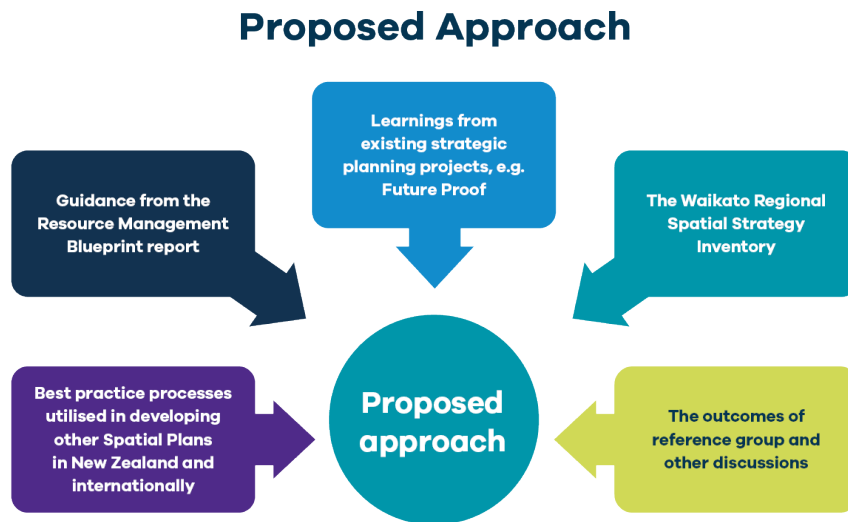
- More than sufficient sequenced future urban growth development areas
- The gross pattern of urban, rural, industrial and other development types
- Statutory acknowledgements.

Proposed Approach

The resource management system reform presents a significant change in resource management in Aotearoa, and the details of the reform are not yet confirmed. Notwithstanding this, there are several advantages to undertaking work in this space ahead of legislation change. This includes influencing legislative and policy outcomes, developing a detailed understanding of environmental constraints and opportunities, efficient use of staff time and resources, and reducing risk.

While the benefits of a proactive approach are clear, the RSS Framework recognises that a degree of flexibility is required as the project moves forward into the development of the RSS itself. As such, the RSS Framework focuses largely on setting out best practice principles and consideration of options.

The proposed approach is shown in the diagram below:



Project Principles

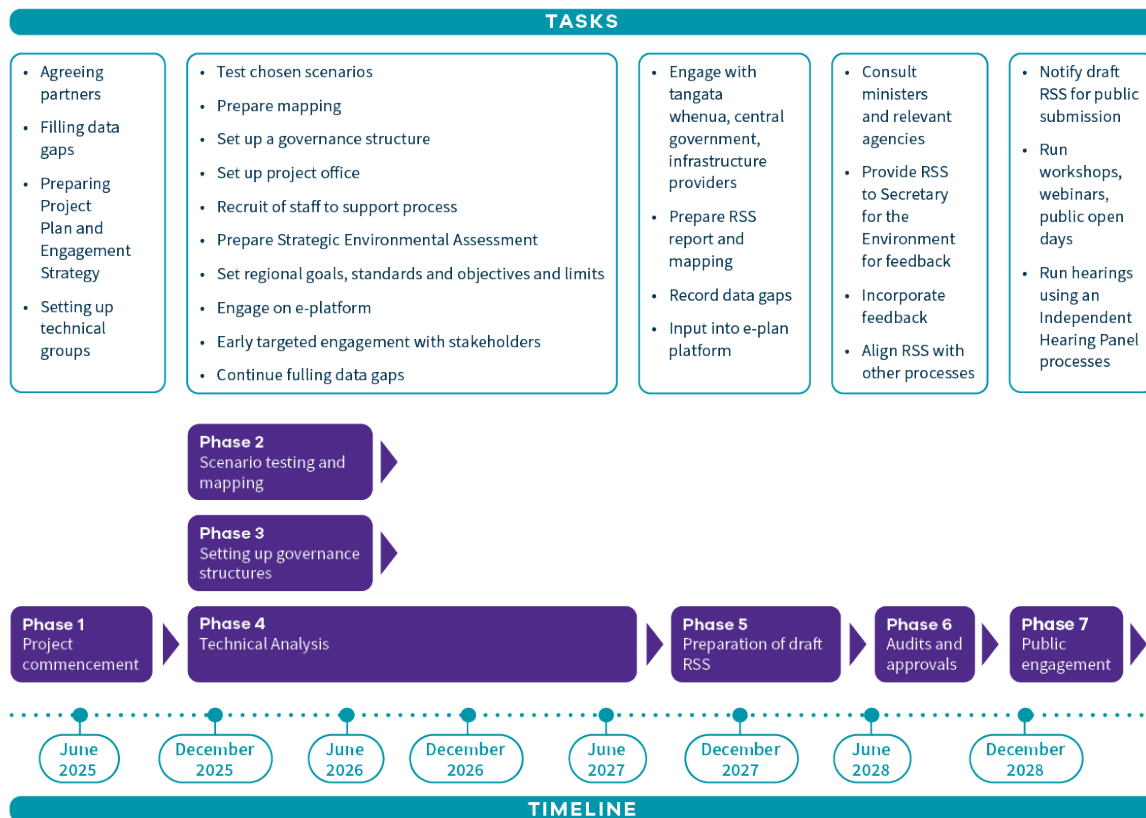
To ensure that all partners and stakeholders have a common understanding of what the RSS will achieve, a set of principles were developed by the project team with input/feedback from partner organisations. These principles underpin the development of the framework.

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Adaptable | The resource management space is in a state of flux. The RSS Framework should be flexible and able to respond to new government direction, legislative requirements and changes in evidence base. |
| A strong partnership | The Waikato region is a diverse region with different socio-economic, environmental and cultural realities. The development of the RSS should be built on trust and open communication, with a clear governance structure. Strong collaborative partnerships between district and regional councils, iwi & Māori communities and central government are essential. |
| Place-based | The Waikato region is made up of many distinct places—each with its own identity, opportunities, challenges, and aspirations. A one-size-fits-all approach will not deliver meaningful outcomes across such a diverse landscape. The RSS will seek to ensure that all planning and investment decisions are shaped by the priorities, needs and strengths of local communities. This principle reinforces the importance of local voice, spatial equity, and tailored solutions within a coherent regional framework.. |
| Evidence-based, but flexible | The RSS should be built on a strong evidence base (as set out in the RSS Inventory report). Where there are data gaps or an emerging understanding of trends, the RSS should use best available information with the intention of filling data gaps over time. |
| Recognising connections | The RSS should be developed in a manner that recognises the connections between the natural environment, cultural and social wellbeing, different communities, infrastructure provision, funding/ financing and the economy, and seeks to integrate decisions around these matters. It must also have a future-focused approach that acknowledges that connections can change over time. |
| Easy to use | The RSS will contain a significant amount of spatial information. It is critical that the end product is easy to use and accessible. There should also be a focus on simplification and streamlining where possible. |

Project Pathway & Timeline

It is proposed that the RSS be developed in eight phases; some of which will overlap in timing. The first phase will commence in June 2025. The timing of these phases is based on the timeline produced by the Ministry for the Environment on how the resource management reform is expected to occur². These timings are indicative and subject to change pending any delays and/or further direction from government:

² Refer Figure 6



Governance Structure

The delivery of the RSS will require several decisions and approvals by territorial authorities and key partners. Setting up a governance structure at the start of the process will be key. It is acknowledged that there may be legislative change to enable other types of governance arrangements in the resource management system. Given the uncertainty, this framework report does not seek to determine a governance structure for the RSS.

The governance structure options available to the Waikato Region for developing and signing off the RSS include:

- Joint Committees under the Local Government Act 2002 (either one set up for the whole region – or 3 or 4 set up sub-regionally).
- Regional Council sign-off with recommendations from local authorities. With this option there would need to be further consideration as to how the RSS is developed with others. A sub-option could be to have joint committees that recommend to the regional council.
- A structure that emerges through the new legislation.

To ensure the governance structure is fit-for-purpose, this report considers that the following design principles should guide its development:

- Simplified
- Representative
- Mandated representation
- Legally recognised
- Transparent and accountable
- Adaptable.

Managing the Spatial Extent of the region

The geographical extent, urban and rural profile and varying communities of interest of the Waikato Region raises the question of whether the region should be divided or grouped as part of the RSS development. The benefits of this approach include simplification of the governance structures, promotion of local buy-in and participation, and an efficient use of staff time and resources. There are also risks to this approach, such as a lack of regional vision and coordination, or undue influence over the process from groups with more resources.

Groupings can be based on territorial boundaries, or can be 'boundaryless' and instead focus on economic spheres of influence, blue-green networks, environmental matters, rural, urban, coastal or infrastructure such as transport. These groupings would recognise that territorial boundary lines are often not reflective of the operational environment.

It is proposed that further work be undertaken which considers potential subregional groupings.

RSS Structure

The spatial nature of the RSS means that it will be map- and data-intensive. The final format and content of the RSS will not be known until further guidance/legislation is released regarding spatial plans. This report sets out a draft structure that could serve as a starting point. The structure includes the following sections:

- Overview
- National Direction
- Regional Direction
- Development and Infrastructure
- Economic Connections
- Natural Environment
- Resilience (Climate Change & Natural Hazards)
- Community Connections
- Coastal Marine Area
- Monitoring, Review and Implementation
- Definitions/Terms.

It is likely that a significant amount of technical information will be contained in a separate, supporting document. This includes information on assumptions and data gaps, mapping details, governance structures, background and further detail on the development of the preferred scenario.

Engagement on the draft RSS Framework

Engagement on the development of this draft RSS Framework occurred prior and during the writing of this report. The purpose of consultation and engagement during the development of the draft RSS Framework was to test and socialise concepts in the framework prior to more comprehensive consultation and engagement occurring as part of drafting the RSS. Engagement in this phase focussed on engaging with parties that have a statutory role in implementing the resource management framework, namely:

- Territorial Local Authorities via a reference group
- Central Government
- Neighbouring regions.

Iwi/Maori, in addition to those noted above have been identified in the Regional Spatial Inventory as key partners and stakeholders who should be involved in developing and implementing an RSS for the Waikato region.

The outcomes of these discussions have influenced the content of this report.

Engagement on the RSS

Engagement in the next phase of the development of the RSS will be a key factor in its success through the process. It is recommended that a Communications and Engagement (C&E) Strategy and Plan for the RSS be developed as soon as is practicable. Ideally a communications and engagement advisor will be in place who can lead this work and oversee all elements throughout the process. The C&E Strategy should be guided by best practice principles that focus on compliance with legislative requirements, clear information, and strong leadership.

Conclusion & Next Steps

This draft framework, along with the RSS Inventory, complete Stage 1 of the RSS project. Stage 2 involves the consultation of this draft framework with others and the development of the RSS. It is recommended that the following tasks be undertaken as first priority:

- Establishment of governance structures and setting up agreements/MoUs which include funding and resourcing splits
- Technical work to fill in information/data gaps, define work streams and establish sub-regional technical groups
- Preparation of Project Plan and Communications Engagement Plan for the RSS
- Submit on new national direction and adapt process as necessary (expected mid-2025).

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of Report

The draft Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) Framework report has been prepared by Waikato Regional Council to support the development of an RSS. It essentially provides a draft 'roadmap' for the development of the RSS for the Waikato Region.

This project started as an RSS preparation exercise under the previous resource management reforms but has evolved into preparing a framework to set the Waikato region up for success in meeting the government's proposed new requirements for a regional spatial plan for each region across New Zealand.

It is intended that this report be used to engage with key partners/stakeholders on the Regional Spatial Strategy.

Specifically, this report sets out a draft framework that will:

- Reflect the aspirations of the region.
- Take into account what we currently know about resource management reform.
- Indicate the potential structure, content, format and technical arrangements for the RSS.
- Discuss potential governance structures for the development of the RSS.
- Set out a high-level engagement approach for the RSS.
- Identify next steps in the development of the RSS.

The draft Framework is intended to be a working document which will be amended to reflect changes in legislation/national guidance, feedback from key stakeholders and/or shifting priorities. It should be read in conjunction with the [RSS Inventory Report](#).

It should be noted that while the government is progressing legislative reforms that will require the development of spatial plans, it is evident that spatial planning is also becoming a prerequisite for accessing central government funding and investment, particularly through mechanisms such as regional deals. This highlights the dual role of an RSS: not only as a compliance tool under emerging legislation, but also as a strategic instrument to position the region for future investment opportunities. As such, the RSS must be designed to meet both regulatory expectations and broader government investment criteria.

1.2 Background

1.2.1 The region at a glance

The Waikato region is the fourth largest region in New Zealand, covering most of the central North Island. It covers 25,000 square kilometres (2.5 million ha) stretching from the Coromandel Peninsula in the north, to Mount Ruapehu in the south.

Waikato is centrally located in the upper North Island, between the Auckland, Bay of Plenty, Hawkes Bay, Manawatu-Wanganui and Taranaki regions. The region has 11 districts, including one city (Figure 1):

- Hamilton City
- Waikato District
- Waipā District
- Matamata-Piako District
- Thames-Coromandel District
- Hauraki District
- South Waikato District
- Ōtorohanga District
- Waitomo District

- Rotorua-Lakes District³
- Taupō District.⁴

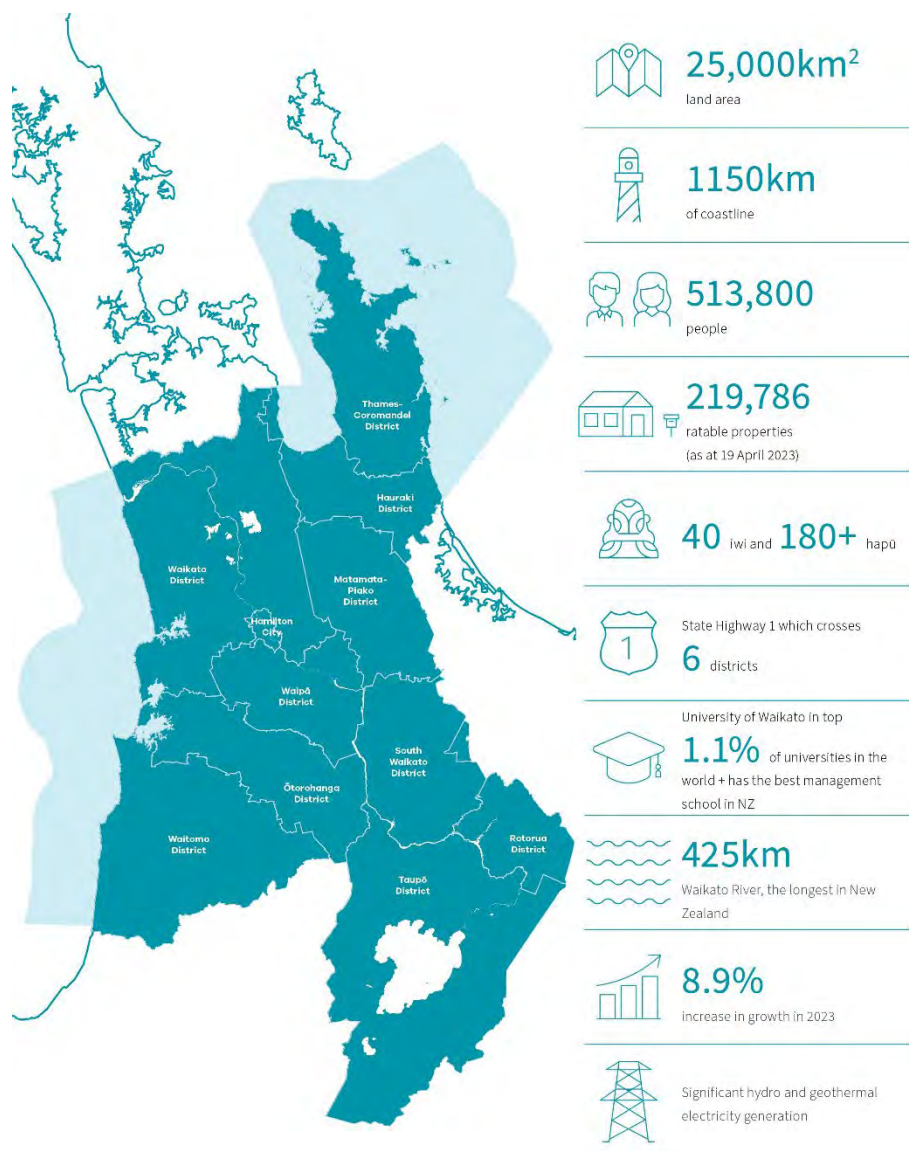


Figure 1 Waikato Region at a Glance

The Waikato region also has over 40 iwi and more than 180 hapū with interests in the region. The principal iwi groups are Waikato, Maniapoto, Raukawa, Hauraki, Te Arawa and Tūwharetoa. There are 134 mapped marae across the region.

³ Rotorua Lakes district is primarily part of the Bay of Plenty region which contains the city of Rotorua. Approximately 38% of the district falls within the Waikato region, this being primarily rural land.

⁴ The majority of Taupō district falls within the Waikato region, although parts are within the Bay of Plenty region, Manawātū-Whanganui region and Hawke's Bay region.

The Waikato region is growing at a faster rate than the national average; the region's population increased by 8.9% between 2018 and 2023.⁵ This growth is primarily concentrated in and around Hamilton as opposed to the smaller districts which are experiencing lower growth rates.

The region's natural environment is nationally significant, with significant waterbodies Lake Taupō and the Waikato River as the country's largest lake and longest river, respectively, 70% of the country's geothermal systems, three Ramsar⁶ wetlands including Whangamarino wetland which is of international importance, a volcanic plateau, 1200km of coastline and the Hauraki Gulf. The Waikato region's coastal and marine environment includes the west coast from Mokau in the south to Port Waikato in the north, and on the east coast, the Firth of Thames and the Coromandel Peninsula. From the high tide mark out to 12 nautical miles offshore, it covers over 10,000 km² in area, includes about 1,150 km of shoreline, and the water depth ranges from 0 to over 500 m.

Waikato's central location in the upper North Island means the region has significant inter-regional links particularly in terms of infrastructure. State Highway 1 is a nationally significant transport corridor and connects Auckland to Manawatū-Whanganui through six of Waikato's districts. Road and rail freight corridors in the region facilitate flow of goods and vehicles across regions, particularly between the ports of Auckland and Tauranga. Water from the Waikato River supplies both Waikato and Auckland.

Almost a quarter of New Zealand's hydroelectricity comes from two major power schemes in the Waikato region⁷ and the Huntly generation site plays a crucial role in the country's energy security. Further, 90%⁸ of the primary geothermal energy extracted in New Zealand is from the Waikato region.

Waikato is part of the Te Manawa Taki (Midland) health region which combines the five District Health Board areas across the middle of the North Island. There are five public hospitals in the region, including Waikato Hospital in Hamilton which is a major hospital and provides tertiary services for the Midland region.

The Waikato region spans four education regions - Auckland (Pōkeno and Tuakau), Waikato, Bay of Plenty Waiariki (Taupō and Rotorua), and Taranaki/Whanganui/Manawatū (Mōkau). There are 286 education organisations in the Waikato region,⁹ not including early childhood education for which there are more than 490 options across the region.¹⁰ The University of Waikato is rated in the top 1.1% of universities in the world according to the QS World University Rankings 2023, with the Management School ranked as the best school in New Zealand for business and economics. Wintec is one of New Zealand's largest Institutes of Technology/Polytechnics and a leading provider of high-quality vocational and professional education in the Waikato region.

Navigating complexity

The sheer scale, diversity, and interconnectedness of the Waikato region significantly amplifies the complexity of developing and governing a single RSS. Spanning 11 districts and encompassing varied landscape, as well as playing a central role in national infrastructure, energy generation and inter-regional connectivity, the region requires a spatial strategy that is comprehensive and place-based. The presence of over 40 iwi and 180 hapū, each with distinct governance arrangements and cultural priorities introduces a critical need for a strong partnership approach.

The RSS must navigate complex local priorities, statutory obligations, and cross-boundary relationships. This requires an approach that is flexible, multi-layered, and capable of integrating diverse voices and interests.

⁵ Waikato Regional Council 2025. [Socio-economic trends](#).

⁶ The Convention on Wetlands, also known as the Ramsar Convention, is an international treaty for the conservation and wise use of wetlands.

⁷ Waikato Regional Council 2023. [Hydroelectricity generation in Waikato](#).

⁸ Waikato Regional Council 2025. [Energy and extraction](#).

⁹ NZQA 2025. [Education Organisations in Waikato](#).

¹⁰ New Zealand Immigration 2025. [Education providers in Waikato](#).

1.2.2 RSS Project Phases

The project is set to occur in two phases. The first phase of the development of an RSS includes two projects, being:

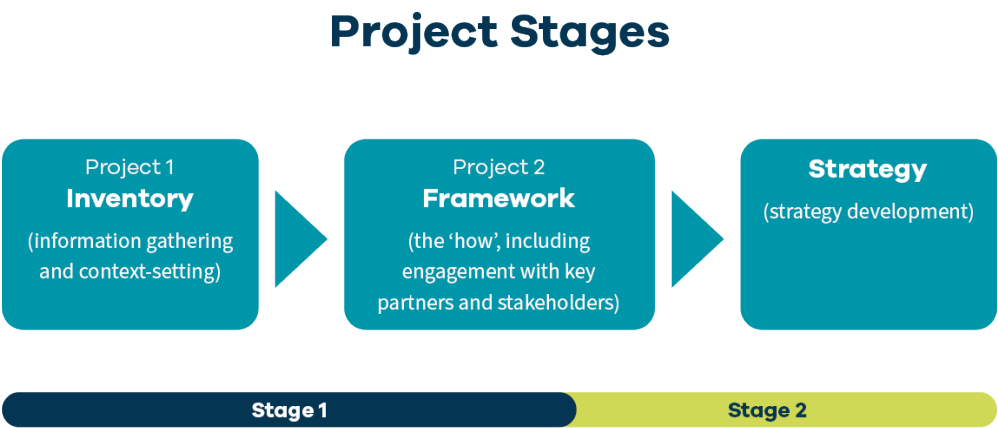
- 1. The preparation of an RSS inventory.
- 2. The development of the draft framework for an RSS for consultation with others.

The first project, the RSS Inventory, has been completed. The RSS Inventory provides the evidence base for the RSS and establishes what a spatial strategy is, what matters it may include, and how it fits into the statutory context of New Zealand. It identifies that the purpose of an RSS is to steward the use of space in a way that is consistent with regional priorities, economic and social strategies, and national strategic goals, shaping positive economic, social, cultural and ecological outcomes through place making.¹¹

Guided by this understanding of spatial planning, the RSS Inventory provides a snapshot of the information currently held by WRC, other local authorities in the Waikato region, and other stakeholders which will be useful in developing an RSS. This includes highlighting the overall context of the Waikato region and the key issues and opportunities identified by policy and community, and also collating existing work and information regarding economy, infrastructure, land-use and environment (covering terrestrial, marine and coastal). This includes analysis of demographic and economic information sources, local authority policy documents and central government agency strategic direction.

The RSS Inventory is a key document in the preparation of this report and is referred to when required. It is recommended that the RSS Inventory be read in conjunction with this report.

The second project in Phase 1 is the development of the draft RSS framework. The draft RSS framework is a roadmap for the development of the RSS; focussing on the pathway, content, structure and engagement approach. **That is this report.** Phase 2 of the project will include confirming the RSS framework and the development of a draft RSS for consultation and engagement. Phase 2 will be guided and informed by this report. The diagram below illustrates the phases of the RSS project:



¹¹ From the literature review of spatial plans and strategies undertaken as part of the Waikato Regional Spatial Inventory.

1.3 Format of the Report

The report is set out in 6 sections as follows:

1. Introduction (this section).
2. What is a Spatial Strategy?
3. Regional Spatial Strategy Framework.
4. Regional Spatial Strategy Contents & Structure.
5. Communication & Engagement Approach.
6. Conclusion & Next Steps.

Section 1 of this report provides a high-level overview of the contents of the report.

Section 2 provides an overview of what an RSS is and how it fits with other spatial work undertaken in the region. It also provides a summary of the resource management system changes that have been signalled by central government.

Section 3 and Section 4 focus specifically on the RSS framework, the project purpose, scope, underpinning principles, proposed pathway and proposed contents. It also considers existing governance structures and the extent to which these can be applied to the RSS project.

Section 5 sets out the high-level engagement approach for both the framework and the development of the RSS itself.

Finally, Section 6 provides a conclusion and a list of next steps for the project.

2 What is a regional spatial strategy?

2.1 Spatial strategies

The terms 'spatial plan' and 'spatial strategy' tend to be used interchangeably across literature, although spatial plan is more commonly used. This report uses the term 'Regional Spatial Strategy' or 'RSS', as is used in the WRC LTP 2024-2034. It is noted that this terminology may change in the future to align with resource management reform terminology.

There are many definitions for spatial planning, and it is practiced in a range of ways corresponding to the particular local context, issues, values and desired outcomes of the place and its people. In a broad sense, spatial planning is an instrument used to manage sustainable development of a town, city, region or country. It is about shaping positive economic, social, cultural and ecological outcomes through 'place making'.

Spatial planning processes are usually collaborative between government (central and local depending on scale) and the community. It assists in providing greater certainty in the strategic direction communities and agencies wish to take over the longer term (30 – 50 year timeframe). Spatial plans can also be utilised to direct funding and investment into specific areas or projects.

2.2 What is the benefit of an RSS for the region?

An RSS for the Waikato region offers several significant benefits, particularly given the region's complexity, diversity, and strategic importance:

1. **Integrated and aligned planning** - An RSS provides a unified framework that aligns land use, infrastructure, environmental management, and economic development across the region's 11 districts. This helps avoid fragmented decision-making and ensures that investments and policies are coordinated to achieve shared regional outcomes.
2. **Stronger regional voice and influence** - By articulating a clear, evidence-based vision for the region, the RSS positions Waikato as a proactive and trusted partner for central government. This enhances the region's ability to influence national policy, secure funding, and shape legislative reforms.
3. **Front-footing legislative change** - There are growing references to spatial plans in legislation, national policy and other documents, highlighting the importance of having a robust spatial strategy or plan in place. This includes the Fast-Track Approvals Act, Regional Deals, Te Waihangā – NZ Infrastructure Commission documents and the recently released proposed provisions for a new National Policy Statement for Infrastructure.
4. **Support for economic growth and resilience** - The RSS enables strategic identification of growth areas, infrastructure corridors, and development opportunities (such as renewable energy zones or industrial hubs) while managing environmental constraints. This supports sustainable economic development and long-term resilience.
5. **Efficient infrastructure investment** - Coordinated spatial planning helps prioritise infrastructure investment where it will have the greatest impact, reducing duplication and ensuring that public and private resources are used effectively.
6. **Certainty** - An RSS provides certainty for central and local government, Iwi-Māori communities and key stakeholders, especially developers and infrastructure providers. It also provides certainty to the community about where development is likely to occur and what areas will be protected. This certainty is important from a strategic investment perspective.

7. **Improved community outcomes** - An RSS can better reflect the diverse needs of Waikato's communities, including urban, rural, coastal, and Māori communities. It supports place-based planning that is responsive to local aspirations and challenges.
8. **Environmental stewardship** - The RSS provides a platform to integrate environmental priorities—such as freshwater protection, climate adaptation, and biodiversity—into spatial decision-making, ensuring that development is sustainable and aligned with Te Ture Whaimana and other environmental commitments.
9. **Future-proofing and scenario planning** - Through scenario testing and long-term visioning, the RSS helps the region prepare for future challenges such as climate change, demographic shifts, and technological change, enabling more adaptive and resilient planning.

2.3 Spatial Planning in the Region

The region currently lacks a comprehensive and integrated strategic spatial strategy that is intended to guide future land use and resource management. The Future Proof Strategy – Future Development Strategy Update¹² is a 30-year growth management and implementation plan, but only covers part of the region, being Hamilton, Waipā, Waikato and Matamata-Piako. Districts in the Waikato region have various strategies and plans ranging from sub-regional growth strategies and district-wide spatial plans to place-based town concept plans community plans. **Figure 2** illustrates the spatial planning work in the region:

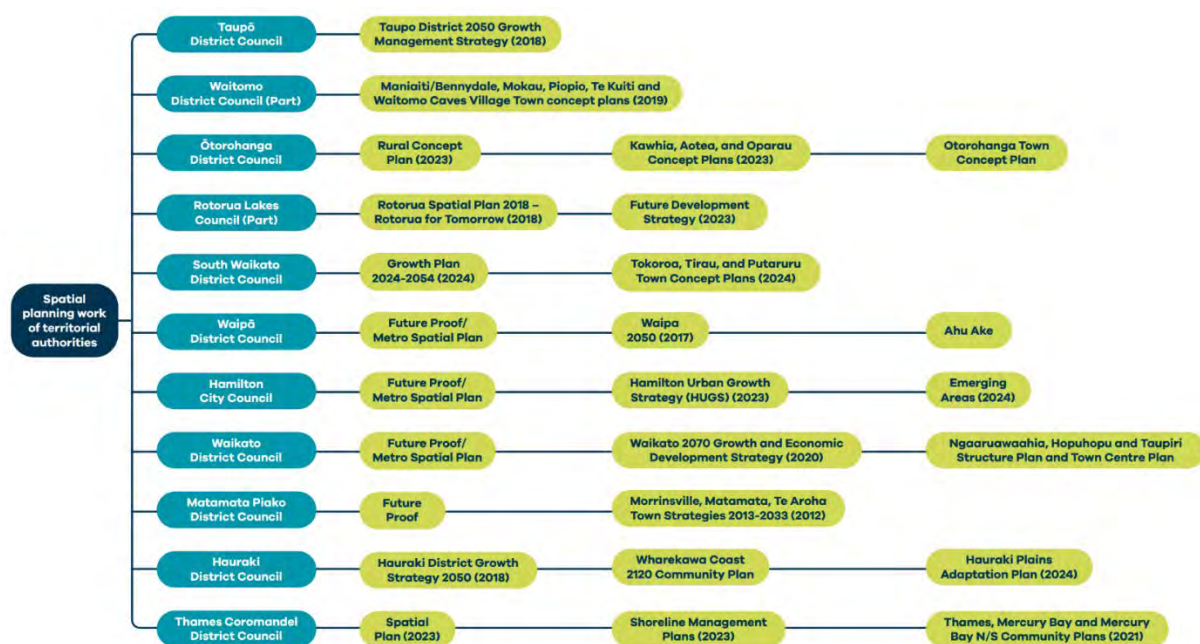


Figure 2 Spatial Planning in the Waikato region

The development of an RSS is being progressed with support and endorsement of the Waikato Mayoral Forum and the region's territorial authority Chief Executives. Waikato Regional Council (WRC), given its regionwide mandate, is leading the facilitation of this work. Provision has been made in WRC's LTP 2024-2034 Long Term Plan to support the initial four years of RSS development.

¹² [Home | Future Proof](#)

Figure 2 illustrates that there has been substantial work undertaken in the spatial planning space across the whole of the Waikato region. Given this, it is not intended that the RSS will start ‘from scratch’. The RSS represents an opportunity to take this work and build upon it to form a regional perspective.

In addition to spatial planning undertaken by territorial authorities, there are also 26 Iwi Management Plans in the Waikato Region. The names of these are contained in the RSS Inventory Report.¹³ These plans contain various levels of spatial information, issues and goals relating to the natural environment, hazards and climate change and infrastructure that will be critical inputs into the RSS.

2.4 Statutory Context

2.4.1 Overview

New Zealand does not currently have any specific legislative requirements for the preparation of spatial plans (except for Auckland¹⁴). Notwithstanding this, recent direction from the Ministry for the Environment outlines that spatial planning will be a key component of the resource management system reform and will have statutory weight. Current government direction is discussed in 2.4.2 below.

Figure 3 below illustrates where an RSS fits within the current planning framework. The RSS Inventory Report that accompanies this report provides further detail on the statutory context for spatial planning in New Zealand.

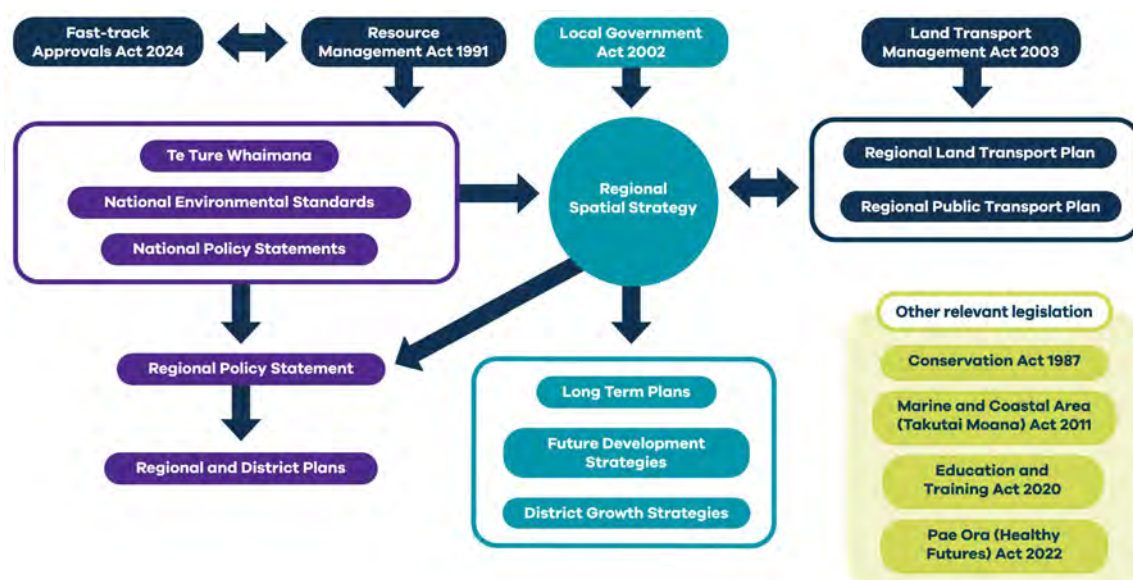


Figure 3 Regional Spatial Strategy context

2.4.2 Resource Management Reform

A brief overview of the current resource management framework is shown in Figure 4 below. This diagram illustrates the hierarchy of plans and standards for the Waikato region:

¹³ Waikato Regional Council 2025. [RSS Inventory Report](#), p. 16

¹⁴ [Local Government \(Auckland Council\) Act 2009 Public Act Part 6 Spatial planning for Auckland](#)



Figure 4 Existing resource management framework

The government is progressing reform of New Zealand’s resource management system at pace. This includes amendments to the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA), and ultimately replacing the Act with laws premised on the enjoyment of property rights as a guiding principle as well as:

- Developing a system to achieve identified environmental goals within environmental limits.
- Decluttering the system:
 - Removing the RPS as a stand-alone document.
 - Nationally set standards, including standardised land use zones.
 - Shift the focus from consenting to strengthening compliance monitoring and enforcement.
- Simplified and streamlined processes.
- Upholding existing Treaty settlements.

An Expert Advisory Group (EAG) was established to support the development of options for legislation to replace the RMA. The EAG undertook an assessment of the current system and made a number of recommendations with respect to the replacement of the RMA and reform of the resource management system. In March 2025, the EAG released its report “*Blueprint for resource management reform: A better planning and environmental management system 2025*”¹⁵. The Blueprint went to Cabinet in March 2025. The Cabinet paper found that the Blueprint Report provided a “broadly workable basis for a new planning and resource management system”¹⁶.

Cabinet agreed that the RMA should be replaced by two Acts, being:

1. A *Planning Act* focused on regulating the use, development and enjoyment of land.
2. A *Natural Environment Act* (NEA) focused on the use, protection and enhancement of the natural environment.

Each Act will require one mandatory national policy direction (NPD). Cabinet has also agreed that each region will develop a Spatial Plan under the future Planning Act. Spatial Plans include the coastal marine area (CMA) and will have weight in the regulatory planning process.

In addition, each region will prepare a single regulatory plan to replace all current regulatory plans. Specifically, regional councils will prepare a natural environment plan chapter under the NEA and district councils will each prepare a chapter of a combined district plan. Regional Policy Statements (RPSs) will be eliminated and partially replaced by spatial plans made under the Planning Act. This differs from the existing resource management framework, which includes the preparation of District Plans, Regional Plans and RPSs. Figure 5 below illustrates where the spatial plan will sit in the new framework and the relationship between each element of the framework:¹⁷

¹⁵ Ministry for the Environment 2025. [Report from the Expert Advisory Group on Resource Management Reform](#)

¹⁶ Ministry for the Environment 2025. [Cabinet Paper](#), p. 3

¹⁷ [Cabinet Paper 2025](#), p. 13

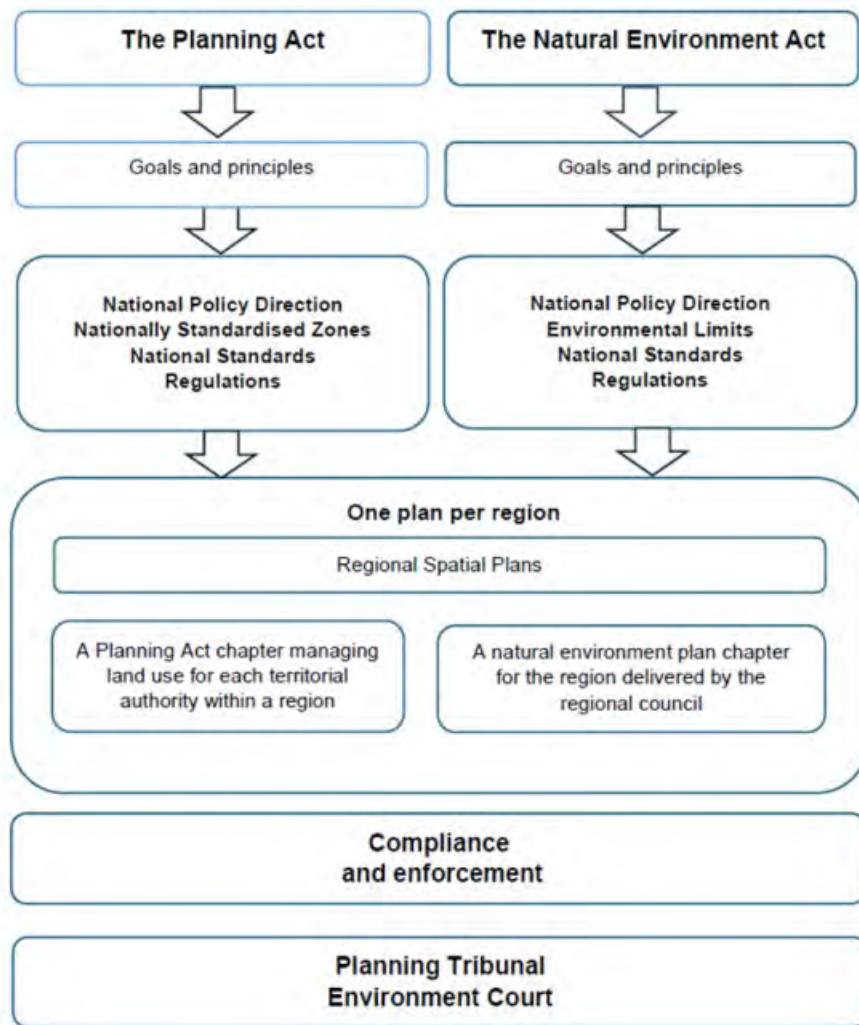


Figure 5 Proposed Resource Management Framework

While there is no legislation yet, it is possible to extrapolate key information from the Blueprint and the Cabinet paper that will assist in developing the RSS framework. This includes:

- RPSs will be eliminated and partially replaced by spatial plans made under the Planning Act.
- These plans will be required to give effect to national policy direction.
- Spatial plans include the coastal marine area (CMA).
- Spatial Plans will have weight in the regulatory planning process.
- Spatial plans will enable development and focus on mapping major constraints, identifying existing and future infrastructure (including future infrastructure corridors), future urban areas, and growth and development opportunities.
- There is a strong spatial focus – it is envisioned that Spatial Plans will be largely map-based.
- Spatial plan governance structures will be flexible and will be up to territorial authorities set up and agree upon.
- Spatial plans will cover:
 - Environmental constraints
 - Existing and future key infrastructure and other infrastructure services
 - More than sufficient sequenced future urban growth development areas
 - The gross pattern of urban, rural, industrial and other development types
 - Statutory acknowledgements.

The Blueprint Report included further detail on what spatial planning will entail as part of the reform, including recommendations on how the governance structures for the development of a spatial plan are to be set up. Key points from this report are contained in Appendix A.

Development of national direction and new legislation will happen between 2025 and 2027. It is anticipated that councils will start developing spatial plans in 2027. Figure 6 below sets out the indicative timeframe for the reform project:



Figure 6 Timeline for Legislation's Development

3 Draft Regional Spatial Strategy Framework

3.1 Project Purpose

The purpose of the draft RSS Framework project is to **provide a framework or roadmap for the development of the RSS for the Waikato Region**; with a focus on the content, structure, governance, engagement and next steps in the development of the RSS. The target audience of this report is central government, local government partners, Iwi/Māori and infrastructure providers. This report has been informed by input from key partners and stakeholders. It is intended that this framework be used as a 'discussion document' to allow further feedback.

3.2 Proposed Approach

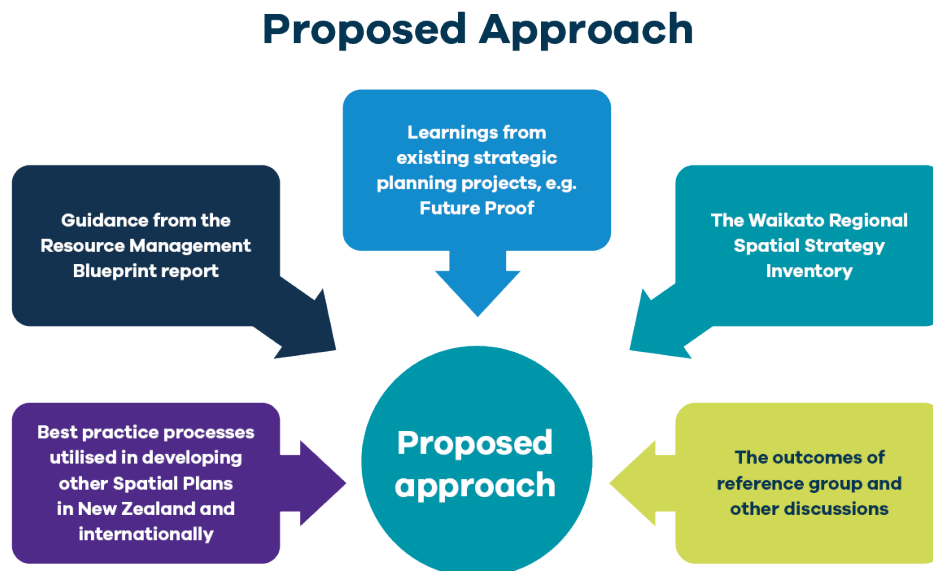
The resource management system reform presents a significant change in resource management in Aotearoa, and the details of the reform are not yet confirmed. Notwithstanding this, there are several advantages to undertaking work in this space ahead of legislation change. This includes:

- Shifting from a reactive to a proactive role enables the Waikato region not only to influence legislative and policy outcomes, but to position itself as a credible and capable partner in delivering on government priorities. By taking early, coordinated action on spatial planning, the region demonstrates leadership, readiness, and alignment with national objectives—strengthening its case for future investment and support. This approach enhances the region's ability to shape outcomes, secure funding and financing opportunities, and be seen by central government as a region that is not just responding to reform, but actively enabling its successful implementation.

- Developing a shared vision for the region enables proactive discussions on local priorities and aspirations that may transcend governmental terms.
- Identifying and filling information and data gaps contributes to a detailed understanding of our environment, and will ensure that the future spatial plan is built on best available information.
- Consideration of different governance structures allows us to design a structure that is fit-for-purpose and balances the local voice with regional priorities.
- Forward-planning promotes an efficient use of staff time and in-house resource which can contribute to cost savings across the span of the project.
- Timeframes for completing an RSS are likely to be constrained – the more upfront planning that is completed the better prepared the region will be.
- The principles guiding the reform are clear, this provides a higher level of certainty and reduces risk.
- Given that there will be mandatory and optional elements of a Regional Plan there is confidence that nothing will be ‘wasted’.

While the benefits of a proactive approach are clear, the RSS Framework recognises that a degree of flexibility is required as the project moves forward into the development of the RSS itself. As such, the RSS Framework project will focus largely on setting out best practice principles and consideration of options.

The following inputs were considered when developing the proposed approach:



3.3 RSS Scope

Geographical Scope

The RSS will cover the whole of the Waikato region (refer Figure 1), including the coastal marine area. It will also carefully consider cross boundary issues with Auckland, Bay of Plenty, Hawke’s Bay, Manawatu-Wanganui and Taranaki.

Given the size of the Waikato Region, it is likely that using subregions will be the most efficient and effective way to develop the RSS. Possible subregional groupings are discussed in further detail in Section 3.2 of this report. The flexibility to work at sub-regional scale is indicated as a component in the emerging national direction.

Content Scope Options

The Blueprint for resource management system reform proposes that each region prepare one plan (this would include a chapter in that plan which would contain the RSS/spatial plan), feeding into the national planning database. With the removal of RPCs, it is anticipated that most policy direction will be set at a national level. It is not clear whether there is opportunity to include regional-level policy direction in the spatial plan.

The Cabinet Paper outlines a relatively narrow scope for regional spatial plans, focused on identifying:

- Development constraints.
- Future urban development areas.
- Major existing and future infrastructure.
- Where separation of incompatible activities may be required.

While this provides a useful foundation, it also presents a risk. If the Waikato region were to limit its planning to only these components, it would miss the opportunity to address broader regional aspirations, particularly those related to economic development, environmental resilience, and community wellbeing.

This is why WRC is advocating for a more comprehensive and future-focused RSS. Such an approach allows the region to go beyond compliance and instead position itself as a strategic partner in delivering national outcomes. It enables the region to articulate a clear vision, test future scenarios, and align investment across multiple sectors and jurisdictions. This is something a Spatial Plan with a narrow scope cannot achieve on its own.

The final form of the RSS cannot be confirmed until further national direction is released. There will need to be flexibility around content given the uncertainties prior to seeing the new legislation.

To assist with setting up the framework, this report considers that there are three potential scenarios for the development of the RSS, pending on further government direction and legislative change:

- **Scenario 1** – Legislation allows for broad scope, enabling the full RSS to be adopted as the statutory spatial plan.
- **Scenario 2** – Legislation distinguishes between mandatory and optional components – requiring a clear delineation within the RSS.
- **Scenario 3** – Legislation mandates a narrow scope – requiring a separate statutory plan (chapter within the one regional plan), with the RSS serving as a broader strategic founding.

The first scenario is that legislation provides a broad scope for Spatial Plans and the future RSS can be deemed a spatial plan with little or no alterations. The entire RSS would have legal weight.

The second scenario sees the new legislation providing for both mandatory and optional components, but only mandatory components will have legal weight. Future legislation could also make certain components mandatory for some regions/subregions, and optional for others. For example, there may be more requirements for high growth parts of the region. In this case, there will need to be consideration of the structure and contents of the RSS to provide a clear delineation between mandatory and non-mandatory components. This could also be managed by taking a subregional approach to all of the components of the RSS.

The third scenario sees the new legislation mandating a narrower focus for spatial plans and not allowing for non-mandatory components. If this is the case, it may be that the RSS *informs* the final statutory spatial plan.

In all these scenarios, a robust and comprehensive analysis is undertaken to ensure that the RSS is fit for purpose. It ensures that the region is not only prepared to meet legislative requirements but is also equipped to lead, coordinate, and deliver on the full spectrum of regional and national priorities.

With this in mind, Section 3.5 sets out the project pathway and milestones and Section 4.1 sets out the proposed RSS structure, which will remain adaptable to future direction.

Principles to guide the scope

Once legislation is in place, it will be important to clearly define what is in scope of the RSS - and what is out of scope. The RSS should be anchored in growth, infrastructure and natural resources as the foundational elements that shape how a region grows, functions and sustains itself over time. It should also consider broader matters such as social, economic, cultural or environmental issues, ensuring the RSS stays practical and targeted. It should be a comprehensive plan that identifies where development should happen, what areas need protection, and how key infrastructure and services (such as transport, energy, and community facilities) can be coordinated. It should also highlight important connections between communities, ecosystems, and economic opportunities, helping to guide key decisions across the region.

The following are some key principles that should guide the scope of the RSS:

1. **Clarity of purpose** - A focused RSS avoids becoming an overly broad or abstract strategy. By concentrating on tangible, spatially relevant elements, like where housing, transport and energy infrastructure should go, it provides clear, actionable direction for decision-makers, investors and communities.
2. **Alignment with legislative intent** - The emerging planning legislation and Cabinet direction emphasise spatial plans as tools for managing development, infrastructure, and environmental constraints. Anchoring the RSS in these areas ensures it aligns with national expectations and will be recognised as a legitimate and useful planning instrument.
3. **Enabling investment and growth** - Infrastructure and land use decisions are central to unlocking economic potential. A well-structured RSS can identify where growth should occur, what infrastructure is needed to support it, and how to prioritise investment—making it easier to attract funding and deliver on regional development goals.
4. **Environmental and cultural stewardship** - Focusing on natural resources ensures that development is balanced with protection of the environment and recognition of culturally significant landscapes.
5. **Integration across agencies and plans** - Land use, infrastructure, and natural resources are common threads across local government plans, central government strategies, and iwi management plans. Focusing the RSS on these areas creates a shared platform for coordination and alignment.
6. **Future-proofing the region** - These focus areas are where the biggest challenges and opportunities lie, being climate resilience, housing supply, energy transition, and transport connectivity. A spatial strategy that addresses these head-on helps the region to prepare for change and manage risk.

By way of mapping, the RSS should identify:

- Those areas or taonga that are precious and should be protected
- Areas we should be retreating from or managing, where development should go and key considerations in this (including natural hazards and adaptation)
- How we can be better connected through transport, community, economic and ecological linkages
- Areas of opportunity for things like renewable energy
- Infrastructure corridors.

This mapping will be supported by a written plan setting out how the region will move towards its shared vision of the future. To ensure the RSS functions as a true strategy, it will include measurable outcomes and targets drawn from existing regional strategies. These outcomes will provide a clear basis for tracking progress and guiding decision-making. These outcomes and targets may sit in a separate implementation plan or coordination document.

Further information on the RSS content is provided in Section 4 of this report.

3.4 RSS Framework Foundation Principles

To ensure that all partners and stakeholders have a common understanding of what the RSS will achieve, a set of principles have been developed with input/feedback from partner organisations via the reference group (refer Section 5). The following six principles have informed and guided the development of this framework document

and should be used as a basis for moving forward and developing the RSS; they are not intended to be included as objectives or principles in the RSS itself. Any objectives and/or principles to be included in the future RSS will be developed as part of future engagement processes.

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Adaptable | The resource management space is in a state of flux. The RSS Framework should be flexible and able to respond to new government direction, legislative requirements and changes in evidence base. |
| A strong partnership | The Waikato region is a diverse region with different socio-economic, environmental and cultural realities. The development of the RSS should be built on trust and open communication, with a clear governance structure. Strong collaborative partnerships between district and regional councils, iwi & Māori communities and central government are essential. |
| Place-based | The Waikato region is made up of many distinct places—each with its own identity, opportunities, challenges, and aspirations. A one-size-fits-all approach will not deliver meaningful outcomes across such a diverse landscape. The RSS will seek to ensure that all planning and investment decisions are shaped by the priorities, needs and strengths of local communities. This principle reinforces the importance of local voice, spatial equity, and tailored solutions within a coherent regional framework.. |
| Evidence-based, but flexible | The RSS should be built on a strong evidence base (as set out in the RSS Inventory report). Where there are data gaps or an emerging understanding of trends, the RSS should use best available information with the intention of filling data gaps over time. |
| Recognising connections | The RSS should be developed in a manner that recognises the connections between the natural environment, cultural and social wellbeing, different communities, infrastructure provision, funding/ financing and the economy, and seeks to integrate decisions around these matters. It must also have a future-focused approach that acknowledges that connections can change over time. |
| Easy to use | The RSS will contain a significant amount of spatial information. It is critical that the end product is easy to use and accessible. There should also be a focus on simplification and streamlining where possible. |

3.5 RSS Project Pathway

Figure 7 sets out a pathway to develop the RSS, including indicative timeframes. It is proposed that the RSS be developed in eight phases; some of which will overlap in timing. The first phase will commence in June 2025. The timing of these phases are based on the timeline produced by the Ministry for the Environment on how the resource management reform is expected to occur.¹⁸ These timings are indicative and subject to change pending any delays and/or further direction from government. The phases are as follows:

Table 1 Project Phase Summary

| Phase | Timing |
|---|-------------------------------|
| Phase 1 – Project commencement | June 2025 to December 2025 |
| Phase 2 – Scenario testing & mapping | December 2025 – June 2026 |
| Phase 3 – Setting up governance structures | December 2025 – December 2026 |
| Phase 4 – Technical analysis | December 2025 – June 2027 |
| Phase 5 – Preparation of draft RSS | June 2027 – June 2028 |
| Phase 6 – Audits & approval for engagement | June 2028 – December 2028 |
| Phase 7 – Public engagement | December 2028 onwards |
| Phase 8 – Coordination document | 2029 onwards |

¹⁸ Refer Figure 6

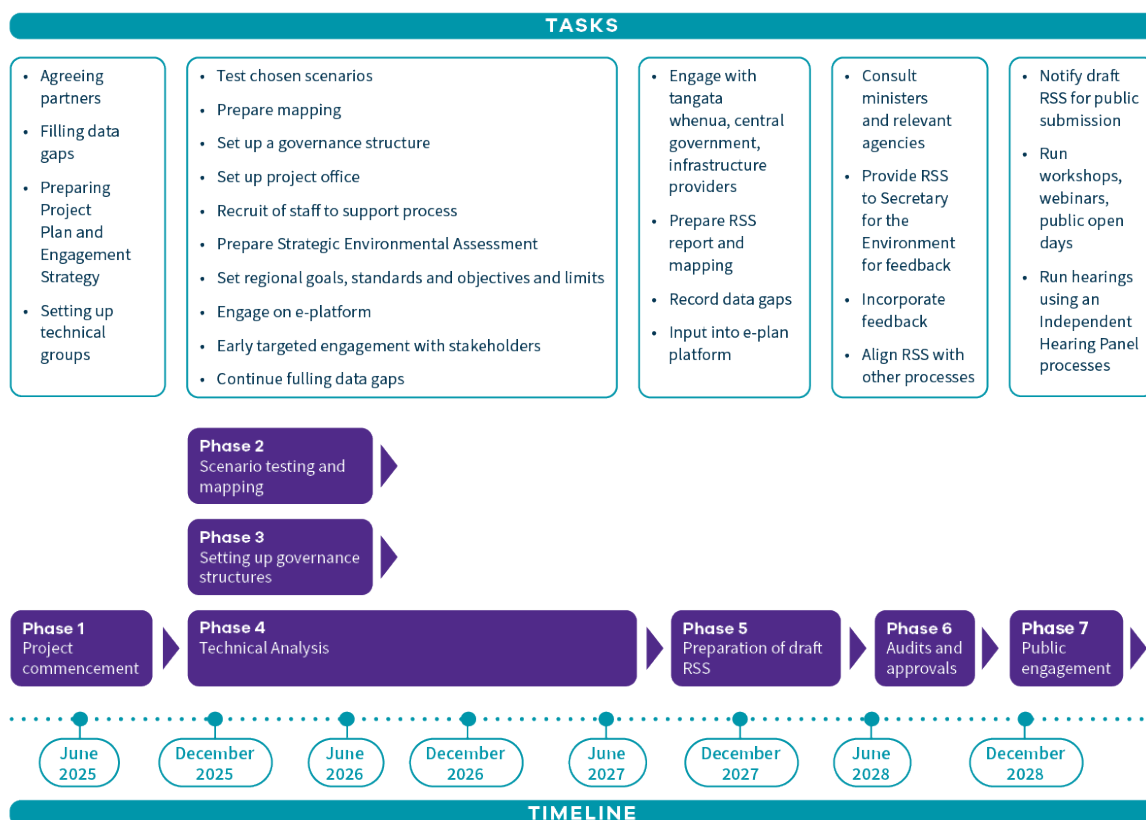


Figure 7 Project Pathway – RSS

The table below provides additional detail on the tasks for each phase, who will be responsible, timeframes and an indicative cost. The costs listed are indicative only, are based on current available information, and do not represent committed LTP or other funding. The costs do not factor in any funding that may have already been committed by WRC or any of the other councils. It is expected that cost split between partners will be agreed upon at a later date. Some costs, such as project management costs, will occur across the whole of the project lifespan. These are noted in the first section of the table.

There are a number of factors that will influence the total cost of the project, including:

- The number of permanent/contract roles established within councils for this project
- The monetary contributions provided by partner organisations
- The costs provided assume there will be some level of resourcing in-kind provided by partner organisations
- Government direction, the extent of legislative change, and timeframes associated with the change
- The extent of modelling and data analysis required by the project
- The complexity of governance and quality assurance processes, including how many levels of approval and advice and decisions must pass through multiple councils and partners
- Reaching agreement across all partners and stakeholders
- Any significant changes to scope.

Table 2 Project Phases & Costs

| Phase | Tasks | Who | Indicative timeframe | Indicative cost |
|--|---|---|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Whole of project tasks | | | | |
| Project Management | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managing project team Create a Project Plan & risk register Manage project budget and tasks Regular reporting against milestones Manage inputs from internal staff and consultants/contractors Liaise with partners Liaise with engagement lead | <p>Lead: WRC, with external support from contractors/consultants</p> <p>Support: Inputs from other territorial authorities, Iwi and Māori communities, and Central Government as necessary</p> | Whole of project – 2025 to 2028 | \$800,000 |
| Technical analysis (e.g. running of growth model) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manage data sourcing and inputs Run technical analysis Produce growth/scenario models Regular reporting Technical advice | <p>Lead: Councils, with external support from contractors/consultants</p> <p>Support: Inputs from other territorial authorities, Iwi and Māori communities, and Central Government as necessary</p> | Whole of project | \$150,000 - \$350,000 |
| Communications and Engagement (including honoraria reimbursement and of expenses) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement communications & engagement plan Production of collateral, including web content Liaise with partner Comms & Engagement teams Regular reporting Deliver a clear, iwi-designed engagement pathway that reflects available methods now and commits to future co-development | <p>Lead: WRC and territorial authorities with external support from contractors/consultants where needed</p> <p>Support: Inputs from Iwi and Māori communities, and Central Government as necessary</p> | Whole of project | \$350,000 - \$450,000 |
| Phase-specific tasks | | | | |

| Phase | Tasks | Who | Indicative timeframe | Indicative cost |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|---------------------------|---|
| Phase 1 – Project Commencement | <p>Governance Structure and Agreement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare discussion document to agree partners and develop options for governance structure, including analysis of subregional groupings (using this report as a base) • Enter into agreement with all local authorities in the region which covers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Key geographical areas and the issues and opportunities that the spatial plan will focus on - The roles of each local authority in the spatial planning process - How the local authorities will work together and with others to prepare the plan - How each local authority will ensure that its arrangements with iwi/hapū and other Māori groups under Treaty settlements and related arrangements are upheld - How the local authorities intend to work with central government - How the local authorities intend to work with others with a strong interest in spatial planning for that region, - How the local authorities will co-operate to engage with communities - Dispute resolution processes <p>Note: For the two bullet points above the lessons learnt, what works and what</p> | <p>Lead: Waikato Regional Council</p> <p>Support: Inputs from other territorial authorities, tāngata whenua and Central Government as necessary</p> | June 2025 – December 2025 | <p>A significant amount of project commencement work can be completed internally, for example the agreement with local authorities and supporting MoU, and submitting on legislative changes</p> <p>Costs will relate to:</p> <p>Work to fill information/data gaps – approximately \$100,000</p> <p>Preparation of a Project Plan – refer to ‘whole of project tasks’ above</p> <p>Communications and Engagement Plan - refer to ‘whole of project tasks’ above</p> |

| Phase | Tasks | Who | Indicative timeframe | Indicative cost |
|-------|--|-----|----------------------|-----------------|
| | <p>doesn't, from other structures and strategies/plans could be used to inform these steps.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare MoU across the councils to agree funding and resourcing splits. <p>Technical Work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commission work to fill in information/data gaps¹⁹ • Prioritise information gathering in accordance with the recommendations of the Regional Spatial Inventory • Consider the role of WISE and whether it will be utilised for scenario testing • Agree consistent growth model assumptions • Define workstreams – this includes any cross-boundary work with other regions • Set up sub-regional project/technical groups for the purposes of filling in information gaps as identified in the RSS inventory and progressing workstreams <p>Project Plan & Communications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare Project Plan and Communications and Engagement Plan for the RSS | | | |

¹⁹ It is not yet clear which areas will need to do a Housing and Business Capacity Assessment under the NPS-UD and what these requirements will be. Once there is national direction on this any requirements for updating or undertaking an HBA will need to be factored into the technical work.

| Phase | Tasks | Who | Indicative timeframe | Indicative cost |
|---|---|--|-------------------------------|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submit on new national direction and adapt process as necessary (expected mid-2025²⁰) | | | |
| Phase 2 – Scenario Testing and Mapping | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update WISE model (if required) Prepare for and undertake scenario development and testing Test chosen scenario(s) with key stakeholders Undertake mapping based on available information | <p>Lead: Waikato Regional Council</p> <p>Support: Inputs from territorial authorities as necessary; partner/stakeholder input for scenarios</p> | December 2025 – June 2026 | <p>Mapping - may be able to be done in-house, pending capacity</p> <p>Scenario testing - <i>refer to 'whole of project tasks' above</i></p> |
| Phase 3 – Setting up structures | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set up the governance structure for the development, notification and implementation of the RSS. This includes any Joint Committee Agreements and Terms of Reference, sign off processes and additional working groups/technical groups required to support the governance structure. Set up project office Recruitment or secondment of staff to support process | <p>Lead: Waikato Regional Council</p> <p>Support: Inputs from TAs, central government and tāngata whenua</p> <p>Requires central government guidance</p> | December 2025 – December 2026 | <p>Setting up governance structures – may be able to be done in-house, pending capacity</p> |
| Phase 4 – Technical analysis | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Start preparation of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) as set out in the Blueprint report once further detail is known. Align this process with relevant Regional Plan review/plan change workstreams. | <p>Lead: project team</p> <p>Support: Inputs from TAs, central government and tāngata whenua</p> | December 2025 – June 2027 | <p>Preparation of SEA - \$200,000 to \$400,000, pending complexity</p> <p>Early engagement - <i>refer to 'whole of project tasks' above</i></p> |

²⁰ Refer Diagram XX

| Phase | Tasks | Who | Indicative timeframe | Indicative cost |
|---|--|--|-----------------------|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Once national level documentation/legislation is released, translate national goals, objectives and environmental limits into regional goals, objectives and environmental limits Engage with central government on the national E-plan platform Continue work on filling data gaps and gathering relevant information/datasets from partners in accordance with RSS Inventory recommendations Early targeted engagement with key stakeholders including Ministry of Education, Waka Kotahi (NZ Transport Agency) etc Test preferred scenario(s) Develop vision for the region based on preferred scenario Give consideration to any inter-regional spatial planning elements (infrastructure, transport, energy, water, economic) | | | Technical analysis (scenario testing) - refer to 'whole of project tasks' above |
| Phase 5 – Preparation of Draft RSS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with Iwi and Māori communities, central government, infrastructure providers, stakeholders and communities on vision, scenarios, objectives and draft mapping Preparation of RSS report and supporting mapping (refer Section 4.1 for proposed structure). | <p>Lead: project team</p> <p>Support: Inputs from TAs, central government and tāngata whenua</p> <p>Requires central government guidance</p> | June 2027 – June 2028 | <p>Engagement - refer to 'whole of project tasks' above</p> <p>Mapping - may be able to be done in-house, pending capacity</p> <p>Report writing – Approximately \$50,000 to</p> |

| Phase | Tasks | Who | Indicative timeframe | Indicative cost |
|--|--|---|---------------------------|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure alignment of draft RSS with LTPs and RLTP (and vice versa) • Regular governance group meetings/workshops on key components of the plan • Continue preparation of SEA in accordance with guidelines • Identify and record data gaps that will not be filled during the preparation of the RSS • Align RSS process with other concurrent processes, including any engagement • Work with central government on inputting draft plan into national E-plan platform • Legal review of draft RSS | | | <p>\$150,000 to support project team staff</p> <p>Legal review: - Approximately \$10,000 to \$15,000</p> |
| Phase 6 – Final audits and approvals for notification | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular governance group meetings/workshops on key components of the plan and the approval process • Consult with ministers and relevant agencies on the draft RSS • Provide draft RSS to Secretary for the Environment for comments/feedback • Incorporate feedback into RSS where relevant • In cases of dispute, follow dispute resolution process as set out in legislation • Once disputes have been resolved, each local authority is to recommend approval for public notification | <p>Lead: Waikato Regional Council, all TAs as sign off will be required</p> <p>Requires central government guidance</p> | June 2028 – December 2028 | <p>Project management - <i>refer to 'whole of project tasks' above</i></p> <p>Liaison with ministers and relevant agencies – may be able to be done in-house, pending capacity</p> |

| Phase | Tasks | Who | Indicative timeframe | Indicative cost |
|---|--|--|-----------------------------|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Align RSS process with other concurrent processes, including any engagement Prepare and confirm engagement collateral for public notification Confirm workshops, webinar, public open days Update websites and national E-plan platform Set up Independent Hearing Panel for next phase | | | |
| Phase 7 Public notification and submission process | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follow legislative requirements for public notification Notify draft RSS for public submission Run workshops, webinars, public open days Run hearings using an Independent Hearing Panel <p><i>Note: The process at this point and beyond will be directed by the requirements of the new planning legislation.</i></p> | <p>Lead: Waikato Regional Council</p> <p>Support: All other TAs will be required to inform with and engage with their local communities via email, phone, webinars, workshops and public open days</p> | December 2028 onwards (TBC) | TBC – depends on consultation process complexity, timeframes and legislative requirements. |
| Phase 8 Coordination Document | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare Coordination document which sets out how the RSS will be implemented | <p>Lead: project team</p> <p>Support: all local authorities, central government agencies, Crown entities, iwi & Māori communities and infrastructure providers.</p> | 2009 | TBC |
| Whole of Project (3 – 4 years) | | | Total | \$1,660,000 - \$2,265,000 |

3.6 Governance Structure

3.6.1 Existing governance arrangements and structures

The delivery of the RSS will require several decisions and approvals by territorial authorities and key partners. Setting up a governance structure at the start of the process will be key. The Blueprint report indicates that governance structures will be determined on a region-by-region basis. For example, legislation would provide core principles or requirements, and a process to establish the governance body. It will then be the responsibility of the partners to set up a governance structure.

It is acknowledged that there may be legislative change to enable other types of governance arrangements in the resource management space. Given the uncertainty, this framework report does not seek to determine a governance structure for the RSS. Notwithstanding this, proactive consideration of governance structures will enable the region to influence and shape future processes to its benefit. As such, this report gives consideration to existing governance arrangements and the extent to which these could be replicated for the RSS.

There are a number of governance arrangements and decision-making structures currently utilised by local authorities in the Waikato region. These arrangements have varying scopes, decision-making abilities and purposes, and include the following:

- Joint committees (such as the Future Proof Implementation Committee)
- Regional Transport Committee
- Mayoral Forum.

A summary of these structures and their advantages and disadvantages is provided in **Appendix B**.

The governance structure options available to the Waikato Region for developing and signing off the RSS include:

- Joint Committees under the Local Government Act 2002 (either one set up for the whole region – or 3 or 4 set up subregionally).
- Regional Council sign-off with recommendations from local authorities. With this option there would need to be further consideration as to how the RSS is developed collaboratively. A sub-option could be to have joint committees that recommend to the Regional Council.
- A structure that emerges through the new legislation.

Where existing structures that are effective exist, such as the Future Proof Implementation Committee, these should be utilised.

There is benefit in having a partnership approach. While the Blueprint did not recommend there be a mandatory requirement to have a central government member at the decision-making table, the report did note that this could be agreed between the local authorities and the minister responsible for the Planning Act. A joint partnership structure involving local authorities, central government and Iwi would be beneficial. There is also the potential to involve other key stakeholders if required.

3.6.1.1 Design principles

Attributes of a potential lead organisation

A lead organisation for the RSS should demonstrate the following attributes:

1. **Regionwide mandate:** The ability to operate across all territorial boundaries within the Waikato region.
2. **Established relationships:** Strong, trusted working relationships with territorial authorities, iwi and hapū, central government, and infrastructure providers.

3. **Technical and planning capability:** Proven experience in spatial planning, data management, and policy integration.
4. **Administrative capacity:** Ability to manage project coordination, procurement, engagement, and reporting functions.
5. **Neutral facilitator:** Seen as a fair and impartial convener of regional interests.

Given these attributes, Waikato Regional Council (WRC) is well-positioned to act as the administrative agent for the RSS, with the support of the Waikato Mayoral Forum and regional Chief Executives.

Design principles for governance

To ensure the governance structure is fit-for-purpose, the following design principles should guide its development:

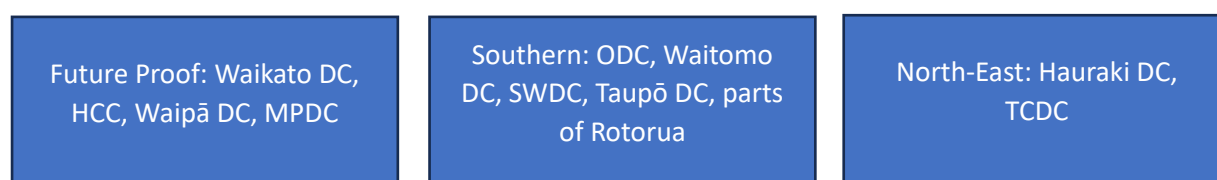
1. **Simplified:** Have as few layers as possible. This minimises bureaucracy and helps to support timely decision-making and reduce churn.
2. **Representative:** All partners should have representation on the governance body.
3. **Mandated representation:** Ensure all representatives have the authority to make decisions on behalf of their organisations.
4. **Legally recognised:** Any governance structure is a legally recognised entity.
5. **Transparent and accountable:** Clear roles, responsibilities, and reporting lines to build trust and maintain momentum.
6. **Adaptable:** Able to evolve in response to legislative changes, project phases, and stakeholder needs.

3.6.2 Managing the spatial extent of the region

The geographical extent, urban and rural profile and varying communities of interest of the Waikato Region raises the question of whether the region should be divided or grouped when considering both the preparation of the strategy itself, as well as governance structures. The benefits of this approach include simplification of the governance structures, promotion of local buy-in and participation, and an efficient use of staff time and resources. Taking a subregional approach would provide clarity in the spatial strategy about the outcomes being sought for each community and the nature of the problems/challenges they are facing which require a spatial response.

However, there are also risks to this approach, such as a lack of regional vision and coordination, or undue influence over the process from groups with more resources.

Groupings can be based on territorial boundaries or can be ‘boundaryless’ and instead focus on communities of interest, activities and/or economic connections. An example of territorial authority groupings is shown below. This is an example only and has not been agreed with the local authorities.



With respect to ‘boundaryless’ groupings, these could focus on economic spheres of influence, blue-green networks, environmental matters, rural, urban, coastal or infrastructure such as transport. These groupings would recognise that territorial boundary lines are often not reflective of the operational environment.

Another way of considering the boundaryless approach is to focus key corridors, for example the Hamilton to Auckland Corridor and the Hamilton to Tauranga Corridor that has emerged through Future Proof and also identified in the Waikato Regional Deal and the Waikato Regional Land Transport Plan.

It is envisaged that with any grouping, subregional or otherwise, there should be an overarching regional group that can act as the coordinating body across the different groups. This will be important when it comes to final sign-off of the RSS. There would also need to be management and technical structures to support the governance group.

It is recommended that a discussion document on potential groupings is drafted as part of Phase 1 of the development of the RSS (refer **Error! Reference source not found.**).

4 RSS structure and contents

4.1 RSS structure

The spatial nature of the RSS means that it will be map- and data-intensive. The Blueprint report sets out that there will be a national E-plan platform available which will house all the spatial plans in the country. As noted in Section 3.2, the RSS may have a wider scope than what is mandated through legislation. For the purposes of this report, the following assumptions are made:

- The RSS will be an online, interactive document and mapping platform.
- The RSS will contain scenarios that have been developed and tested with key stakeholders
- Due to the geographic scale of the required mapping, the mapping component of the RSS will be an online GIS platform rather than printed maps
- Scenarios may sit on the GIS platform given their spatial nature
- The supporting report will be fully integrated with the mapping platform, and is intended to be topic based rather than linear.

The final format and content of the RSS will not be known until further guidance/legislation is released regarding spatial plans.

In the interests of keeping the document simple, it is likely that a significant amount of technical information will be contained in a separate, supporting document. This includes information on assumptions and data gaps, mapping details, governance structures, background and further detail on the development of the preferred scenario.

The table below sets out the proposed structure of the supporting report:

| Section | Topics covered | Comments |
|---------------------------|--|--|
| Overview | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Context• Overview of the region• Iwi/Māori context & history• Overview of each district/sub-region• Plan hierarchy – linkages to legislation, other plans, Long Term Plans (LTPs) and Regional Land Transport Strategies (RLTPs) | The overview section sets out the regional context. This section should set out how the RSS fits into the planning system. |
| National Direction | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Required national direction/goals• Environmental limits• Standards & other regulations• Te Ture Whaimana | <p>This section should provide an overview of national direction.</p> <p>At the time of writing this report, it is not clear whether National Direction will be repeated in each spatial plan or</p> |

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| | | will sit across all of the spatial plans as a link to a national document/website. |
| Regional Direction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future scenario - what we envision for the Waikato region in the future • Vision • Regional objectives • Regional policies • Region-specific environmental limits | <p>This section, and the ones that follow, are likely to sit on the mapping platform as a 'storymap' interactive mapping component</p> <p>The section will set out the chosen scenario as confirmed through early engagement.</p> <p>Pending national direction, this section should contain a streamlined vision, and objectives/policies focussing on matters that require a region-specific approach.</p> <p>Some aspects of this section could be adapted from the RPS and from other spatial plans in the Waikato region.</p> <p>Environmental limits are included in this section but may end up its own section in the plan, pending complexity.</p> |
| Development and Infrastructure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constraints • Future growth areas, including strategic priority areas • Existing and future key infrastructure networks and corridors (transport, three waters, social/community, education, health) • Urban, rural, industrial development types • Statutory acknowledgements from Treaty settlement legislation | This section could be broken up into subregions. |
| Economic Connections | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National, UNI, Inter-regional • Intra-regional connections • Economic corridors • Energy • Tourism | |
| Natural Environment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water • Ecosystems • Biodiversity • Physical and natural resources | |
| Resilience (Climate Change & Natural Hazards) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate change and natural hazards • Areas of climate risk • Emissions | |
| Community Connections | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connecting communities through targeted investment | |

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community facilities • Education, health | |
| Coastal Marine Area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coastal habitats and ecosystems • Coastal hazards • Coastal infrastructure • Sanctuaries | |
| Monitoring, Review and Implementation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination document • Review | This may be a separate implementation / coordination document |
| Definitions / terms | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definitions • References | Glossary of terms used |

Table 3 Proposed Contents of RSS

4.2 Integration

4.2.1 Integrated planning

Integration will be key to the success of the RSS. There is a need to integrate across land use, infrastructure and funding. This will be challenging with different levels of information available across the region. The inventory has identified priority information gaps for development and growth, and infrastructure. These can be addressed as part of the technical work. There may need to be a staged approach for the first RSS where it is acknowledged that some gaps may still exist, but work can continue on closing these as part of implementation.

Infrastructure will be an important feature of the RSS. The intention signalled in the Blueprint is to enable development, not exclude development. Development areas are to be identified as long as environmental constraints can be avoided or appropriately managed and the necessary infrastructure can be funded either publicly or privately. This means that having a good understanding of what areas can be serviced by public infrastructure becomes very important.

Sequencing of development and aligning this with infrastructure staging will also be important.

New funding and financing tools and their impact will need to be factored into the RSS. These will influence what infrastructure can be funded and by when. They can also have an impact on the nature of development, for example some funding tools lend themselves to growth areas of scale.

4.2.2 Aligned implementation

There will need to be integration across different documents and process. It will be important for the RSS to align with:

- Long-Term Plans
- Regional Land Transport Plan and the National Land Transport Plan
- The Waikato – City and Regional Deal
- The work of the Infrastructure Commission – Te Waihanga on the infrastructure priorities programme
- Local Water Done Well.

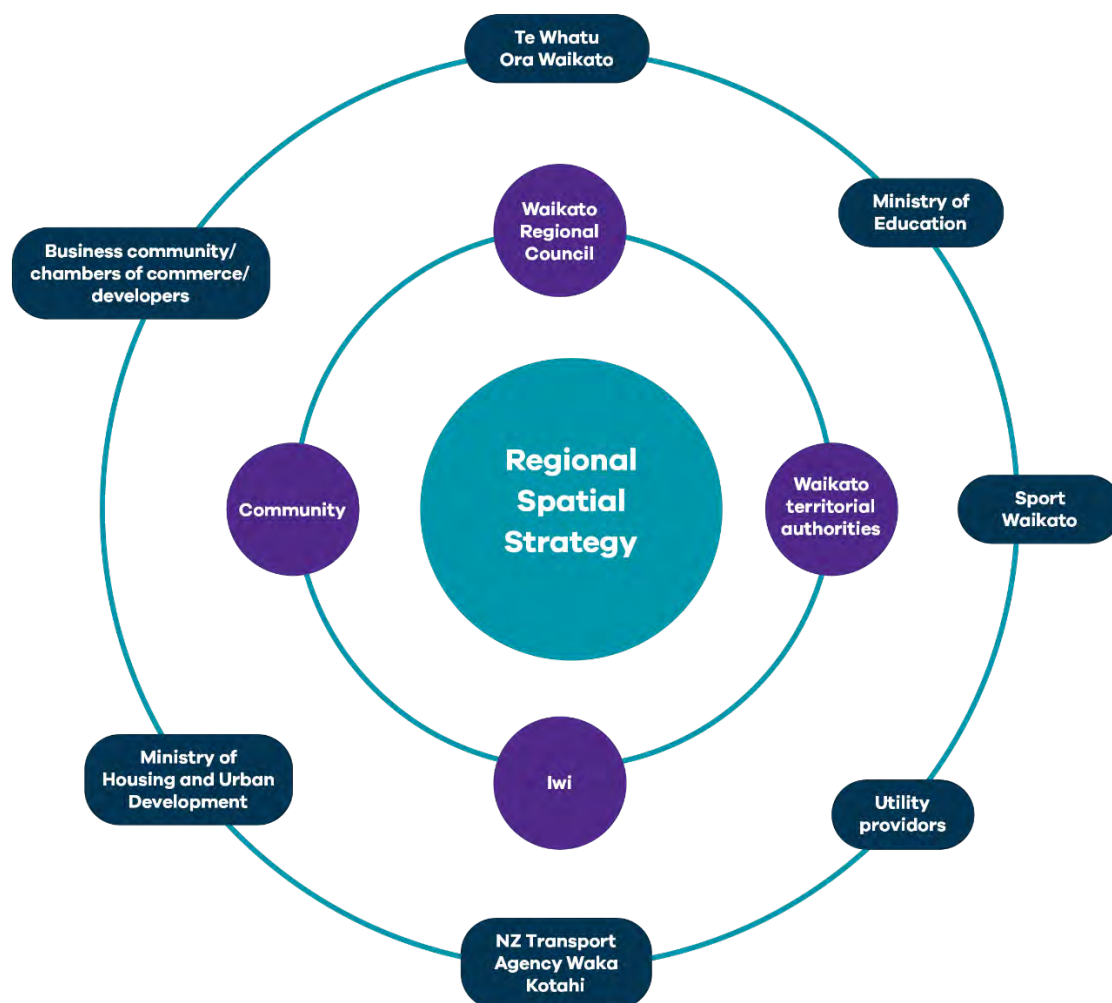
Likewise, these documents and processes will need to align with the RSS. Integration will be an ongoing process for RSS implementation.

5 Communications & engagement approach

5.1 Key stakeholders for the Waikato RSS

Developing an effective RSS relies on engagement with the right stakeholders, at the right time, in a way that is effective and achieves the principles of the project. The diagram below is taken from the RSS Inventory report and illustrates the key stakeholders who will be involved in developing and implementing an RSS for the Waikato region.

The inner circle reflect those with key interest and influence and the outer circle are those that will provide input and help implement it but have less direct resource management and regional development functions and responsibilities:



5.2 Engagement approach

Engagement on the RSS will occur in two stages. The first is engagement on the draft RSS Framework (this report), and the second is engagement on the draft RSS - both during development and once it is notified. The sections below set out the proposed approach to engagement for both stages.

5.2.1 Engagement on the draft RSS Framework

Engagement on the development of this draft RSS Framework occurred prior and during the writing of this report. The purpose of consultation and engagement during the development of the draft RSS Framework was to test and socialise concepts in the framework prior to more comprehensive consultation and engagement occurring as part of drafting the RSS. Engagement in this phase focussed on engaging with parties that have a statutory role in implementing the resource management framework, namely:

- Territorial Local Authorities via a reference group
- Central Government
- Neighbouring regions.

Iwi/Māori, in addition to those noted above have been identified in the Regional Spatial Inventory as key partners and stakeholders who should be involved in developing and implementing an RSS for the Waikato region. The format and outcome of engagement with these parties are discussed briefly below.

A list of organisations engaged with is included in **Appendix C**.

Territorial authorities

Engagement with territorial authorities has occurred via a reference group made up of key staff from each territorial authority. Input was also sought from the Future Proof Partnership. Engagement with these parties were via workshop sessions framed around specific questions. Members of the reference group were also encouraged to contact the project team with further feedback/questions. There is an opportunity to continue utilising the reference group in the next phases of the project.

Iwi and Māori communities

Waikato River Iwi are statutory partners with established governance relationships, Joint Management Agreements and co-management commitments in the Waikato region. The RSS project takes a long-term partnership approach with respect to Iwi and Māori community engagement; with the vision of an iwi-designed approach that reflect iwi aspirations. As a first step, engagement under the draft RSS Framework report has focussed on an initial invitation to engage, with a commitment to enabling Iwi to shape further engagement that will occur as part of drafting the RSS. Engagement under the draft RSS Framework has involved the following with a view to confirm future engagement pathways based on Iwi/Māori direction:

- Sending a letter of engagement to iwi partners
- Inviting written input

Central government

Central Government commits substantial resources to the region as well as being responsible for the legal framework and guidance that will enable regional spatial plans. Engagement with central government involved one-on-one discussions with staff on the scope, content and development of the RSS. It is noted that some governmental organisations were not in a position to provide input into the RSS framework at the time of writing this report.

Neighbouring Regions

The Waikato region has strong connections to its neighbouring regions. As part of developing this framework, the project team engaged with Auckland Council, Bay of Plenty Regional Council and Taranaki Regional Council

on their aspirations and spatial planning work programme moving forward. This engagement helped to identify opportunities for sharing of information and experience moving forward.

The outcomes of these discussions have influenced the contents of this report and is summarised in **Appendix C**.

It is intended that this framework be used as a basis for further discussions with partners and key stakeholders on how the RSS should be developed.

5.2.2 Engagement on the draft RSS

Engagement during the development of the RSS will be a key factor in its success throughout the process. It is recommended that a Communications and Engagement (C&E) Strategy and Plan for the RSS be developed as soon as is practicable. Ideally a communications and engagement advisor will be in place who can lead this work and oversee all elements throughout the process. The preparation of this C&E Strategy is identified as a key action in **Error! Reference source not found.** above.

It is suggested that the C&E Strategy is guided by the following best practice principles:

- Compliant with legislative requirements.
- Provide clear information – be specific about what the RSS does and what it doesn't do.
- Connect with partner communications teams to establish line of contact, especially with their own communities.
- Engagement with Iwi and Māori communities is iwi-designed and conducted early and meaningfully
- Identify opportunities for storytelling that help paint the bigger picture of what the RSS is trying to achieve.
- Provide strong leadership in conversations between partner councils, agencies and the wider community across the Waikato region.
- Communications should be driven by all partners in order to ensure local support and community buy-in
- Being proactive with engagement and communication.
- Identify key areas of interest for stakeholders – this helps to ensure engagement is relevant.
- Consistent messaging; with key messages agreed upon at the start of the process
- Utilisation of a range of engagement methods, technology and social media platforms to maximise engagement reach and inclusion of communities that are typically underrepresented
- Aligning engagement with other concurrent engagement processes where possible/feasible
- Provide people who may be affected by a decision with appropriate information (this is particularly important if the RSS identifies infrastructure corridors and development down to a property level).
- Encourage people to present their views.
- Ensure people have clear information on the purpose of the consultation and the scope of the decisions the partners will have to take.
- Ensure people have a reasonable time and opportunity to present their views in a manner appropriate to their needs.
- The partners should have an open mind to views presented and give them due consideration when making decisions.

It is envisaged that some key steps in the C&E Strategy would be:

- The RSS Story and defining what the RSS is, its strategic importance and implications for stakeholders and the community
- Connect and align with partner comms teams
- Stakeholder mapping.

The C&E Strategy will need to be modified in response to any further government direction.

6 Conclusion and next steps

This Framework is intended to be a working document which will be amended to reflect changes in legislation/national guidance, feedback from key stakeholders and/or shifting priorities. It should be treated as a discussion document to enable conversations with partners and key stakeholders.

This document has been prepared during a time of significant change. While the resource management reforms will require the development of spatial plans, there are many other reasons for the Waikato Region to prepare an RSS. This framework, along with the RSS Inventory, complete Stage 1 of the RSS project. Stage 2 involves the development of the RSS.

It is recommended that the next steps are commencing Phase 1 of the RSS development as summarised in **Error! Reference source not found.** above. This includes the following tasks:

Governance Structure & Agreement

- Prepare discussion document to agree partners and develop options for governance structure, including analysis of subregional groupings (this is recommended to be developed once more guidance is received from Central Government).
- Enter into agreement with all local authorities in the region.
- Prepare MoU across the councils to agree funding and resourcing splits.

Technical Work

- Commission work to fill in information/data gaps.
- Prioritise information gathering in accordance with the recommendations of the Spatial Inventory.
- Consider the role of WISE and whether it will be utilised for scenario testing.
- Agree consistent growth model assumptions.
- Define workstreams – this includes any cross-boundary work with other regions.
- Set up a sub-regional project/technical groups for the purposes of filling in information gaps as identified in the RSS inventory and progressing workstreams.

Project Plan & Communications

- Prepare Project Plan and Communications and Engagement Strategy and Plan for the RSS.
- Submit on new national direction and adapt process as necessary (expected mid-2025).

It is anticipated that the majority of these tasks (except for filling of information/data gaps) can be completed in-house with existing resources. It is recommended that the above tasks are undertaken as soon as possible following discussion with WRC councillors on this draft RSS Framework Report.

Appendix A: EAG Blueprint – Spatial Plans

A Cabinet Paper was released in March 2025²¹ which set out a three-year work programme and process for the next phases of reforming the resource management system. This included the establishment of an Expert Advisory Group (EAG) to support the development of options for legislation to replace the RMA. The EAG was established in September 2024. In March 2025, the EAG released its report “*Blueprint for resource management reform: A better planning and environmental management system 2025*”²² in response to direction from the government.

A summary of the Blueprint’s recommendations in relation to spatial plans is as follows:

- Spatial Plans should identify the spatial implications of environmental constraints such as hazards and Significant Natural Areas
- It should be primarily map based, and should identify:
 - Sufficient future urban development areas
 - Development areas that will be prioritised for public investment
 - Existing and planning infrastructure corridors and sites
 - Other infrastructure services such as schools, open space and community facilities. These do not have to be mapped.
 - Uses that require spatial separation, e.g. ports/heavy industry
 - Statutory acknowledgements
- It will not restrict development in other locations, but these proposals will be subject to environmental constraints and national policy direction
- Infrastructure identified in a spatial plan will have access to a streamlined designation process.
- Spatial plans will not provide detailed timelines for development and infrastructure delivery
- This will be addressed through implementation planning as local authorities and government need flexibility to reprioritise actions if needed.
- It may also be possible to bring some areas forward in timing, such as when infrastructure can be funded privately.
- There will be a separate coordination document to address the mechanics of how actions identified in the spatial plans will be implemented, including timing and responsibilities
- To support a consistent approach to preparing these documents, the Planning Act will set out core requirements:
 - Content of coordination document, including a list of actions, priority, dependencies, critical steps, who is responsible, timing, funding
 - Description of who needs to be involved, including the provision of targeted engagement.

Regional and Subregional Focus

- Each region will be required to have one, but there will be flexibility to focus on subregional issues
- Subregional spatial planning could then be brought together into an integrated regional spatial plan
- Plans will be amalgamated into a national plan; it is not proposed that there be a national planning and engagement process.

Alignment with other legislation/statutory processes

- Long Term Plans (LTPs) and Regional Land Transport Strategies (RLTPs) will be required to align with spatial plans, and if there is misalignment, this will need to be addressed.

²¹ Ministry for the Environment 2025. [Cabinet Paper](#)

²² Ministry for the Environment 2025. [Report from the Expert Advisory Group on Resource Management Reform](#)

- Spatial plans will be enabled to be updated regularly to reflect any changes in National Policy Direction and to maintain alignment with LTPs and RLTPs
- Spatial plans will inform central government funding and budget processes, regional deals, government policy statements and the National Infrastructure Plan (NIP).

Governance

- In some cases, it may be appropriate for an existing committee or governance body such as an urban growth partnership to oversee the development of a spatial plan and make recommendations to local authorities
- However, it is intended that the framework be flexible and that the governance structures will be decided at regional level
- All local authorities in the region will be expected to enter into an agreement to guide the process. This will cover:
 - Key geographic areas issues and opportunities
 - The roles of each local authority
 - The mechanics of when parties will meet and work together, including voting rights
 - How each authority will ensure their iwi/hapū arrangements will be met
 - How the authorities will work together with central government. It is not recommended that there be a mandatory requirement to have a central government member at the decision-making table, but this can be agreed on by parties on a case-by-case basis
 - How the local authorities will work with infrastructure providers
 - How engagement with communities will occur
 - How they will use the dispute resolution process
- It is envisaged that a joint committee of local authorities will be supported by technical experts drawn primarily (but not solely) from local authorities.

Process

- The Act will set a maximum time period for notification of a draft spatial plan and adoption of the final one (excluding the resolution of appeals)
- It is expected to take approximately 12 months to prepare a draft spatial plan for notification.
- Draft spatial plans will be provided to the Secretary for the Environment no less than 3 months prior to notification
- Once feedback is addressed, the draft document will be approved for public notification
- It will receive submissions and further submissions and provide them to the independent hearings panel (IHP) which will be jointly appointed by the local authorities
- The IHP would hear submissions and make recommendations
- The joint committee or other governance body would provide advice to each local authority about whether they should accept or reject the IHPs recommendations.
- Dispute resolution process will be used where two or more local authorities cannot agree
- Appeals would be available as follows:
 - Appeals to the EC on points of law where recommendations have been accepted
 - Appeals to the EC on points of merit where recommendation has been rejected.
- IHPs would provide scrutiny of draft spatial plans and their alignment with national direction.
- The final decisions sit with local authorities
- Progress towards implementing a spatial plan will be reported on annually. The coordination document is to be updated every 3 years, with flexibility for out of cycle updates

Note: this is not meant to be an exhaustive list of all of the recommendations from the Blueprint report. Please refer to the Spatial Planning section of the Blueprint report for further detail.

Appendix B: Governance Structures

| Structure Type | Details | Advantages | Disadvantages |
|--|---|--|--|
| Joint Committee | Under the 7 th Schedule of the Local Government Act 2002 a local authority may establish a joint committee. A Joint Committee is deemed to be both a committee of the local authority and a committee of the other local authorities or public bodies. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can have delegated authority to make certain decisions • Legally recognised entity • Membership can be broad and wider than local authorities • A tried and tested model for various collaborative processes, especially growth management strategies/spatial plans | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cannot usually make funding decisions • May need to refer back to appointing local authority on certain decisions |
| Regional Transport Committee (RTC) | Entity set up under the Land Transport Management Act 2003. RTCs consist of representatives of regional councils, territorial authorities and NZTA and in some cases KiwiRail. They are responsible for preparing regional land transport plans. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Covers the whole region • Legally recognised entity | Is set up with the specific responsibility of preparing regional land transport plans (provides a good example but can't be utilised for a spatial plan) |
| Mayoral Forum | Guided by Triennial Agreements. The purpose of these forums is usually to communicate, coordinate and collaborate on local government matters across a region. | Covers the whole region | No decision-making ability |
| Council-Controlled Organisations (CCO) | CCOs are organisations under the Local Government Act 2002 in which the relevant council has the responsibility to appoint at least 50 per cent of the board of directors or trustees. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could cover the whole region • Legally recognised entity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incurs audit fees and will have to prepare a statement of intent. • Requires public consultation before it can be established which may take some time. • More appropriate for targeted functions or assets such as Waikato Regional Airport Ltd |

Appendix C: Record of Engagement

| Organisation | Date of Discussion |
|--|---|
| Bay of Plenty Regional Council | 30 April 2025 |
| Auckland Council | 12 May 2025 |
| Future Proof | 13 May 2025 |
| Kāinga Ora | 23 April 2025 |
| Waka Kotahi - NZTA | 30 April 2025 |
| HUD | Email exchange only |
| Ministry of Education | 1 May 2025 |
| Te Waihangā – Infrastructure Commission | No reply |
| Department of Internal Affairs | No reply |
| Taranaki Regional Council | 22 May 2025 |
| Councils – Reference Group | |
| Workshop 1 (Waikato DC, Taupō DC, Ōtorohanga DC, Waipā DC, TCDC) | 21 May 2025 |
| Workshop 2 (Hauraki DC, Waitomo DC, SWDC) | 27 May 2025 |
| Rotorua Lakes Council | 27 May 2025 |
| | Contact made to update on progress and confirm that RDC wishes to be part of the spatial plan process |

Key themes/points arising from engagement:

- There was general support for spatial planning, but also a recognition that the resource management framework is in a transitory space
- Any spatial planning work should recognise the significant amount of local spatial planning work that has been undertaken or is being undertaken at district level
- Some stakeholders saw benefit in going wider than just development areas and infrastructure, and others saw advantages in a narrow scope
- Governance structures should enable the ‘local voice’ and not be too complex. General agreement that some form of sub-groupings of territorial authorities will benefit the project, but this should be tested in the next phase of the project
- Meaningful involvement and partnership with Iwi and Māori communities is critical to the success of the project
- Cross boundary connections with other regions are important. The use of corridors to further develop these is key.
- Some partners/stakeholders will have an ‘influencing’ role while others will have a ‘responding’ role.
- Consistent data will be important, as the RSS will influence funding processes such as the LTP and RLTP. There was recognition that achieving alignment in data quality across the whole region will take time
- The administrative regions for some organisations may differ from the territorial boundaries of the Waikato Region.

Note: The above-mentioned themes are not intended to be an exhaustive list of all comments received.

Appendix D: References

- Future Proof. (2024). Future Proof Strategy: Future Development Strategy Update 2024-2054. <https://www.futureproof.org.nz/our-strategic-direction/#gsc.tab=0>
- Local Government (Auckland Council) Act 2009. <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2009/0032/latest/LMS933006.html>
- Ministry for the Environment. (2025). Report from the Expert Advisory Group on Resource Management Reform: Blueprint for resource management reform: A better planning and environmental management system 2025. <https://environment.govt.nz/publications/blueprint-for-resource-management-reform/>
- Ministry for the Environment. (2025). Cabinet Paper: Replacing the Resource Management Act 1991 – Approach to development of new legislation. <https://environment.govt.nz/assets/publications/Replacing-the-RMA-MfE.pdf>
- New Zealand Immigration (2025). Education providers in Waikato. <https://www.live-work.immigration.govt.nz/choose-new-zealand/regions-cities/waikato/education>
- NZ Transport Agency. (2024). 2024–27 National Land Transport Programme. <https://www.nzta.govt.nz/planning-and-investment/national-land-transport-programme/2024-27-nltp/>
- NZQA. (2025). Education Organisations in Waikato. <https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers/results.do?regionCode=30>
- QS Top Universities. (2025). QS World University Rankings 2025: Top global universities. <https://www.topuniversities.com/world-university-rankings>
- Resource Management Act 1991. <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1991/0069/latest/DLM230265.html>
- Waikato Regional Council. (2016). Regional Policy Statement. <https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/council/policy-and-plans/regional-policy-statement/>
- Waikato Regional Council. (2023). Freshwater Policy Review: Hydroelectricity generation in Waikato. <https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/assets/WRC/FreshwaterInfoSheetsHydroelectricity.pdf>
- Waikato Regional Council. (2024). 2024-2034 Mahere Whānui Long Term Plan. <https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/services/publications/ltp20242034/>
- Waikato Regional Council. (2024). Waikato Regional Land Transport Plan (RLTP) 2024-2054. <https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/services/publications/rltp-2024-2054/>
- Waikato Regional Council. (2025). Energy and extraction. <https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/environment/geothermal/energy-and-extraction/>
- Waikato Regional Council. (2025). Regional Spatial Inventory Workshop Report. <https://core.opentext.eu/pdfjs/web/viewer.html?shortLink=a01cb77da33fb6ccbccb0fe9624e4ff74f18968786881050>
- Waikato Regional Council. (2025). Socio-economic trends. <https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/community/about-the-waikato-region/community-and-economy/socio-economic-trends/>
- Waikato River Authority. (2019). Te Ture Whaimana | Vision and Strategy for the Waikato River. <https://waikatoriver.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Vision-and-Strategy-Reprint-2019web.pdf>