

Government announces 'Action for healthy waterways package'

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The Government has today announced the 'Action for healthy waterways package' aimed at maintaining or improving the freshwater quality of New Zealand's rivers, lakes, streams and wetlands.

This announcement follows public consultation on the 2019 Action for healthy waterway proposals. Approximately 17,500 submissions were received which is substantially more submissions than for any other consultation process the Ministry for the Environment (MfE) has run. Hundreds of people also attended public meetings and hui around the country.

The Action for healthy waterways package introduces new rules and regulations to:

"stop further degradation of New Zealand's freshwater resources and improve water quality within five years and reverse past damage and bring New Zealand's freshwater resources, waterways and ecosystems to a healthy state within a generation."

The Action for healthy waterways package consists of:

- A proposed new National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020 (Freshwater NPS) which aims to "put the country on a path to restoring our waterways in a generation". The Freshwater NPS will direct regional councils to amend their regional plans, in consultation with their communities, to implement the directions in the Freshwater NPS (including environmental bottom lines). This national direction will, via regional plans, regulate activities potentially affecting fresh water such as discharges and water takes. It is understood the new Freshwater NPS is currently being drafted and MfE expect the new Freshwater NPS to come into force later this year
- Proposed new National Environmental Standards for Freshwater 2020 (Freshwater NES) to "prevent further loss and degradation of freshwater habitats, introduce controls on high risk activities, and require real-time reporting water takes data". The Freshwater NES will set the standards that must be complied with in undertaking activities that could impact on freshwater and freshwater ecosystems. The Freshwater NES is currently being drafted and MfE expect it will be published later this year
- Proposed amendments to the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) via the Resource Management Amendment Bill 2019 (RM Bill) to provide for a new freshwater planning process to allow the above national direction to be implemented in a streamlined manner compared with the normal planning processes. This bill is currently before Parliament awaiting its second reading
- Proposed RMA Section 360 regulations for stock exclusion
- Proposed amendments to the Resource Management (Measurement and Reporting of Water Takes) Regulation 2010, to require the provision of real-time data on significant water takes
- A freshwater modules of farm plans regime and freshwater planning processes which are to be progressed through the RM Bill.

The package also includes a \$700m commitment from the Government to assist farmers, iwi/Māori, local government, and communities implement the reform measures.

The Action for healthy waterways package does not include the Three Waters Review which is a related by separate work programme being undertaken by the Government.

Cabinet papers, a summary of submissions report, the Independent Advisory Panel's and advisory groups' final reports, and the impact assessment reports are all available on the MfE website. MfE has also published a series of information sheets for iwi/Māori, farmers, horticulturalists, and regional councils which provide a summary of what they need to do, more detail on the requirements, and background on how the Government got to this point and are also available on [MfE's website](#).

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