



RM reform

Operating under a new system

The reform aims to provide greater clarity, reduce regional variation, strengthen national direction and more clearly separate land-use planning from environmental management - creating opportunities for development, infrastructure and improved environmental outcomes.

The new system will not be fully in place until late 2030 at the earliest. Between now and then, we will operate in a transitional environment - existing RMA plans, consents and processes remain relevant while new national instruments, regional spatial plans and land use and natural environment plans are progressively developed. The window for influencing those upstream instruments starts now, and the decisions made in it will shape land-use, resource access, development, infrastructure and communities for a generation.

Understanding what has changed and what remains

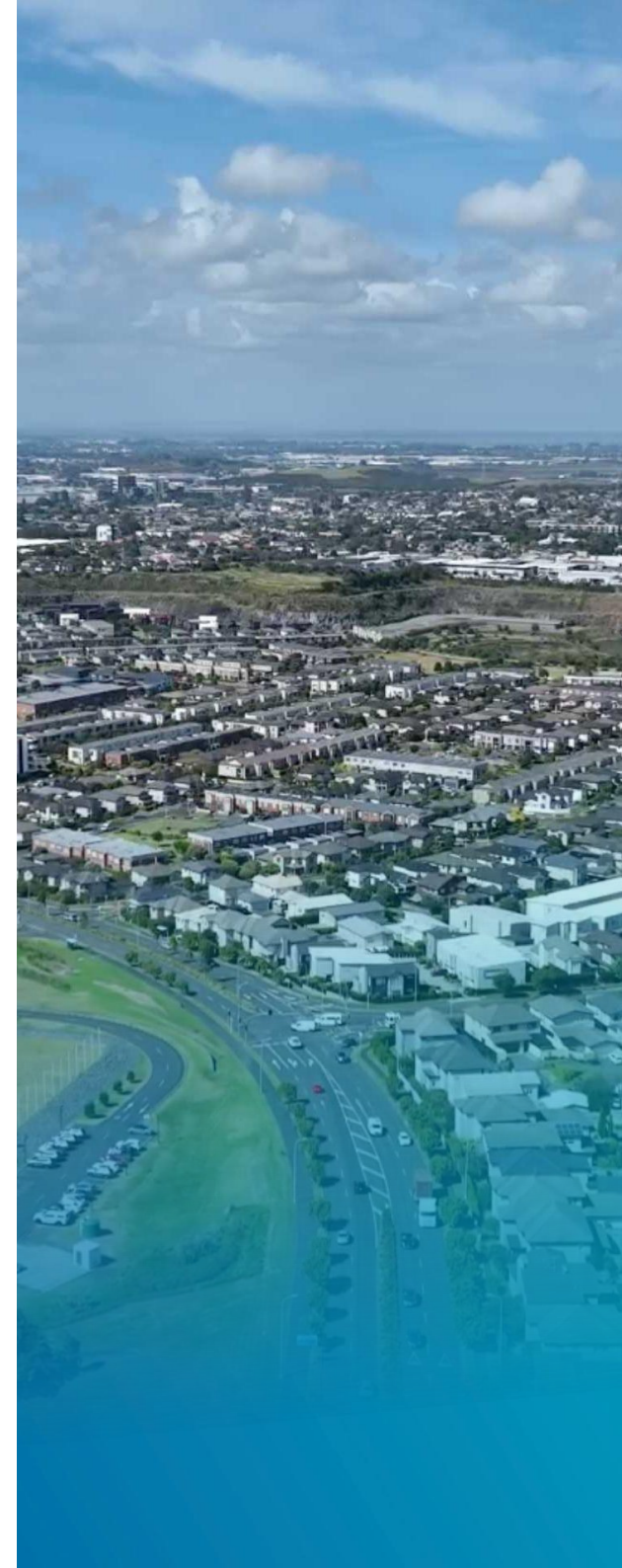
The two new Acts divide what the RMA previously combined:

The Planning Act governs land use. It establishes national direction, implemented through regional spatial plans, land use plans, and a new designation framework. Nationally standardised zones and plan content will reduce regional variation. Regional spatial plans, to be notified mid-2028, will bring together planning for land use, infrastructure investment, environmental capacity, climate resilience, and the interests of mana whenua into a single framework and will provide binding direction to the subsequent land use plans and natural environment plans. These combined plans will shape the development context for many years to come.

The Natural Environment Act establishes a new framework for managing New Zealand's natural environment — the coastal marine area, freshwater, air, land, soil and biodiversity. It introduces science-based environmental limits and targets and provides for the development of natural environment plans that determine how resource use occurs and natural environments are managed.

Both Acts introduce new national planning instruments, including national policy directions and national standards. These instruments sit above and set outcomes and objectives for regional spatial plans, land use plans and natural environment plans, with all ultimately replacing the current mosaic of RMA statutory documents. The intention is to provide for more consistent national direction to the planning decisions made at regional and local levels.

During the transition, the RMA continues to apply, alongside initial national standards as they are developed. Consenting under the old system will continue in parallel with the development of the new. This transitional period is not a holding pattern - it is where the strategic direction is set and forms the basis for decision-making in the long term. Meanwhile, the **Fast Track Approvals Act** will continue to provide opportunity as an alternative pathway for nationally and regionally significant projects.



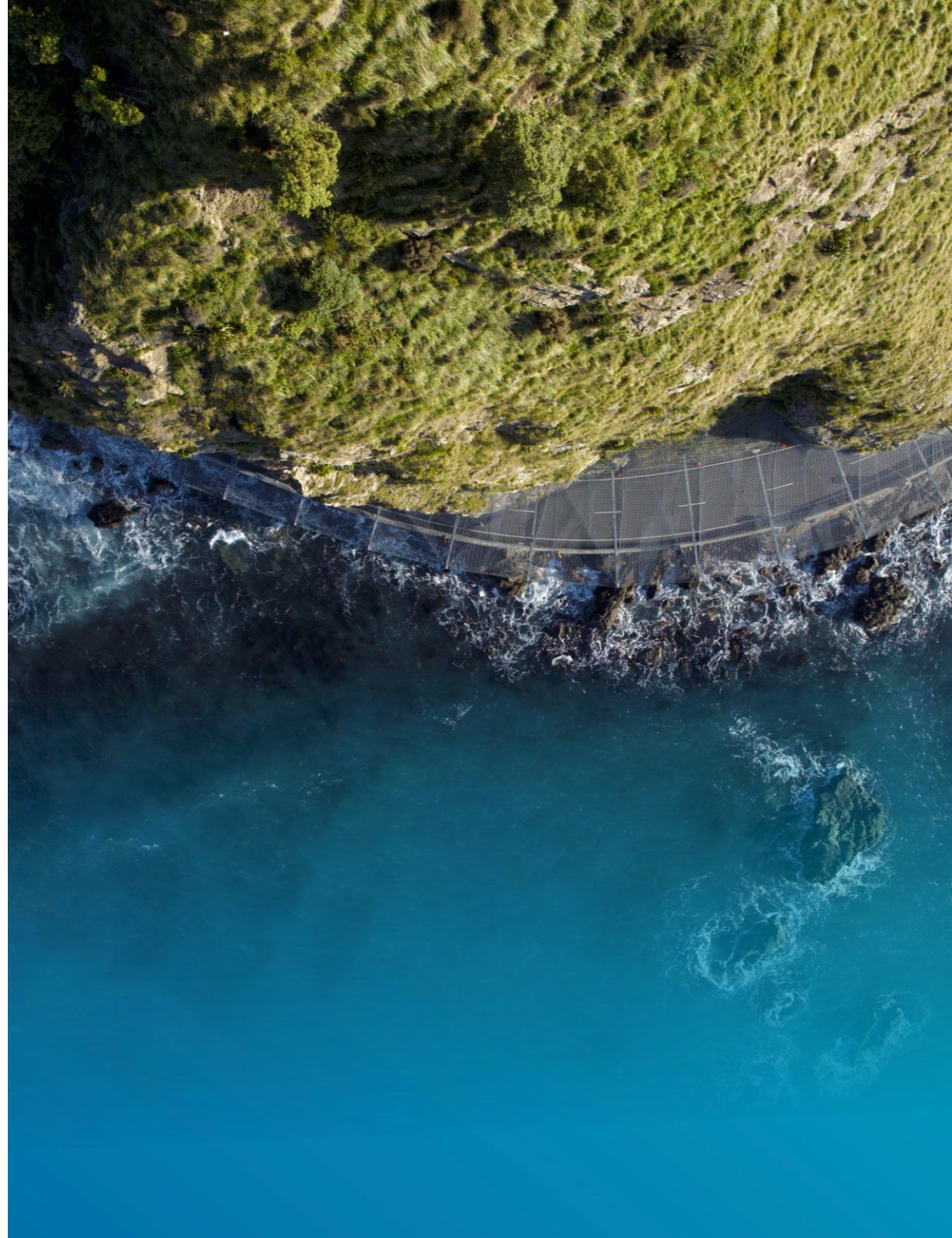
Our expertise

Tonkin + Taylor has been engaged in this reform from the outset - tracking legislative developments and advising clients on the strategic implications as the new system has taken shape.

In these changing times, we offer a combination of planning leadership and deep multidisciplinary technical capability that complex projects in a changing system actually need.

Our planners work alongside T+T's specialists in infrastructure, transport, water science, ecology, hydrogeology, geotechnical and civil engineering, contaminated land, acoustics, natural hazards, climate resilience, air quality, landscape, and Te Ao Māori advisory. Planning expertise, combined with deep engineering and environmental knowledge, allows us to provide strategic advice that positions your business for success in the new planning regime.

This matters in the new system. Regional spatial plans require technical rigour and clear strategic intent. Environmental limits require scientific credibility. Consent applications continue to require robust integrated assessment. And implementation — consent conditions, monitoring, environmental management plans, adaptive responses — requires the same joined-up thinking all the way through delivery.



How we can help

We can assist across the full project and planning cycle.

Navigating transition

Guiding you through the complexity of the transitional provisions to: assess impacts on your assets; develop strategy that secures opportunity and manages risk; and identify approval pathways that work for your projects.

Spatial planning

Whether you are a Council looking for specialist assistance with developing your spatial plan, or somebody wanting to engage with the plan making process, we can help.

Policy and plan development

Supporting Councils with their work responding to national direction and establishing their spatial plans and land use and natural environment plans.

Engaging in policy and plan development - future proofing your assets and interests

Supporting clients engage in the planning process with submissions and engagement on the National Instruments, regional spatial plans and land use and natural environment plans to future proof your assets for years to come.

Consenting and designation applications

Gaining planning consents, natural environment permits and designations for projects under the new framework (and navigating applications during the transition).

Fast Track Approvals Act

Proven experience, expertise and specialist resource to ensure your project navigates the Fast Track Approvals Act.

Project implementation and compliance

Practical and pragmatic experience in complex construction projects to deliver conditions management, monitoring, environmental management plans and adaptive responses.



Contact us



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