

Ministry for the Environment

27 July 2025

Via website portal

Submission to the Ministry for the Environment on National Direction Package 1: Infrastructure and Development

Dear Sir/Madam

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Infrastructure New Zealand (INZ) welcomes the opportunity to submit on the proposed National Direction package under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA). We strongly support the development of these national instruments, which represent an important step toward addressing the inconsistent treatment of infrastructure planning, development, and operations across Aotearoa.
- 1.2 INZ particularly supports the introduction of a new National Policy Statement for Infrastructure. This will help rectify a longstanding weakness in the resource management system—its inconsistent recognition of the critical role infrastructure plays in supporting communities, economic growth, and wellbeing. The proposed NPS should help streamline the planning, delivery, and operation of infrastructure, and we support efforts to reduce unnecessary barriers to growth in the interim.
- 1.3 We welcome this package of new and amended national direction as a pragmatic interim measure to improve consistency and workability within the existing RMA framework. We also acknowledge its intended role as a transitional step toward the Government's Phase 3 resource management reforms, which will form the basis of future legislation.
- 1.4 National direction is essential in supporting councils to prepare coherent and effective local plans and rules. Regional policy statements and regional and district plans must *give effect* to



National Direction, and decision-makers on resource consent applications must *have regard* to it. INZ notes the significant of these proposed changes in future RMA decision-making.

- 1.5 We agree that there is a need to update many existing National Policy Statements (NPSs) and National Environmental Standards (NESs) to ensure they are fit for purpose. Doing so will better enable infrastructure planning and delivery, support development, and unlock growth in a more timely and costly manner. These national instruments are welcomed as an interim step in improving our RM system.
- 1.6 We note the Government's stated commitment to progressing Phase 3 reforms later in this Parliamentary term, with new resource management legislation. INZ continues to advocate for a bipartisan approach to the development of a replacement for the RMA that will provide an enduring regime that results in better environmental outcomes as well as facilitating sustainable development of infrastructure to meet this country's needs. The constant state of change with RM reform reviews and ongoing legislative amendments has created a climate of uncertainty for over a decade. This has created significant uncertainty and significant additional churn for the infrastructure sector.

Infrastructure New Zealand

- 1.7 Infrastructure New Zealand is Aotearoa's peak membership organisation for the infrastructure sector. We promote best practice in national infrastructure development through research, advocacy, and public and private sector collaboration. We promote public and media discussion on issues of importance to the infrastructure sector. Our membership is comprised of around 140 organisations, including government agencies, consultants, contractors, financiers, utilities, and academics. These organisations employ approximately 150,000 people in infrastructure-related roles and are united in their commitment to creating a better New Zealand through outstanding infrastructure.
- 1.8 This submission represents the views of Infrastructure New Zealand as a collective whole and may not necessarily represent the views of individual member organisations. We have also encouraged our members to make their own submissions raising those issues specific to their areas of interest or expertise.

Effects Management Hierarchy

1.9 INZ understands that due to time and resourcing constraints, the previous work on standardised approaches to common infrastructure development activities (such as earthworks) undertaken as part of the formulation of the draft National Planning Framework has not been progress as part of this RMA Phase 2 consultation.

1.10 INZ strongly supports the continued development of standardised effects managements hierarchy and recommends that it progresses as a key component in the Phase 3 RMA replacement legislation and supporting framework. Mandating increased use of infrastructure standards in resource management decision-making will have positive environmental and economic outcomes. Our RM consenting system is currently bespoke, uncertain, time-consuming and costly. Standardising across New Zealand would have a lot of benefit. New Zealand could also learn a lot from other jurisdictions such as Australia. INZ notes that the Telecommunications sector and Transpower both experienced significant benefits when National Environmental Standards were introduced for consenting their activities.

Feedback on Package 1 Infrastructure and Development

- 1.11 INZ has limited comments to the following sections of the Consultation Paper for Package 1:
- Attachment 1.1 Proposed provisions – New National Policy Statement for Infrastructure
 - Attachment 1.5 Proposed Provisions - Amendments to the Resource Management (National Environmental Standards for Telecommunications Facilities) Regulations 2016)
 - Amendments to the National Policy Statement on Electricity Transmission and Amendments to the National Environmental Standards for Electricity Transmission Activities
 - Amendments to the National Environmental Standards for Telecommunication Facilities
 - New National Policy Statement for Natural Hazards

1.12 Our specific comments are set out in the following sections.

2.0 New National Policy Statement for Infrastructure

- 2.1 INZ welcomes the establishment of a National Policy Statement for Infrastructure (NPS-I). This important piece of national direction is long overdue and is a critical component that is currently missing in the wider RMA framework. It is a significant step toward recognising the national importance of infrastructure in the resource management system. Infrastructure is a critical enabler of economic development, social wellbeing, environmental outcomes, and climate resilience. Embedding this recognition in national direction is long overdue
- 2.2 The proposed NPS-I is a critical tool to lift the status of infrastructure within New Zealand's planning system. We note that its development has drawn on the previous work undertaken on the national planning framework. INZ particularly welcomes the comprehensive coverage of different infrastructure types (including social and stormwater infrastructure) and its provisions around maintenance, operations, and renewals.
- 2.3 It will help ensure infrastructure can be planned, delivered, operated, and maintained in a more integrated, timely, and consistent way while enabling the country to meet its climate, housing, productivity, and resilience goals.

Elevating Infrastructure's Role and National Consistency

- 2.4 The NPS-I will help ensure that councils and decision-makers give appropriate weight to infrastructure needs when preparing plans and considering consents. The current planning frameworks often under recognise infrastructure's strategic role and national importance, leading to inconsistent decisions, delays, and constraints on growth and service delivery.
- 2.5 Local plans and decisions vary significantly, making infrastructure planning unpredictable and inefficient. Specific national direction will create a more consistent policy framework, reducing uncertainty for infrastructure providers and communities. This is particularly important for infrastructure networks with cross-boundary impacts (e.g. transport corridors, energy and water networks). This will also help better coordinate with spatial planning and regional growth strategies.
- 2.6 INZ supports the objectives of the NPS-I and supporting policies. In particular, INZ welcomes the recognition of spatial plans (including under the upcoming Planning Act) for identifying current and planned infrastructure. It recommends the NPS-I also clarify inclusion of infrastructure

planning in Regional and National Land Transport Plans and the plans from the new water service entities.

- 2.7 The NPS should also help support co-location of infrastructure (e.g. transport, utilities, communications) through corridors and nodes which will improve efficiency, reduce land use conflict, and enhance delivery.
- 2.8 Infrastructure projects often suffer from delays and uncertainty due to siloed or inconsistent planning processes. The NPS-I should promote early consideration of infrastructure needs in spatial and district plans and better enable designations and plan changes through integration of infrastructure and land use.
- 2.9 INZ support the proposal for the NPS-I to better protect future infrastructure corridors and sites, such as future schools or transport routes, especially when locations are not yet confirmed in plans. It would be useful if this translated into a less onerous designation process in the new RM legislation being developed.

Specific Recommendations

2.10 INZ makes the following recommended amendments to the proposed NPS-I:

- *Definitions D1 Additional infrastructure*
It is good to see that f) a stormwater networks have been included – we think this should also clarify that this includes green infrastructure also.
- *Definitions D10 Maintenance and minor upgrade:*
Remove the word *minor* from the title as the scope of the provisions goes beyond minor upgrades. Also amend c) to read “...to deliver the same or *improved* level of infrastructure services...”.
If these changes are made, then there is no need to have D11 definition for a major upgrade or a definition of upgrading infrastructure in D22.
- *Policy P1 (Recognising the benefits of infrastructure in planning decisions)*
Delete (1)(d) *enabling infrastructure activities that provide value for money*. It is unnecessary as value for money is assessed as part of other decision-making processes. Decision makers could use this to oppose new infrastructure in situations by forming a non-expert opinion that something is not value for money regardless of the infrastructure provider’s assessment.



- *Policy P3* (Spatial planning). This provision doesn't require spatial planning to take place, just that it be considered. INZ wants to see a mechanism that enables critical private infrastructure providers such as telecommunication and electricity networks to be able to input into the spatial planning process. Spatial planning is a valuable tool to show us where growth is expected and could allow for network planning. We recognise that this maybe more appropriate as a Phase 3 element.
- Policy P9 (Planning for and managing the interface and compatibility of infrastructure with other activities)

Amend wording in 1)a) add *reasonably* in before the word *practicable*. Some infrastructure (e.g. mobile phone facility in residential area) could be subjectively considered by some to be incompatible. But it has to be located there.

- Policies P9 and P10 (Assessing and managing the interface between infrastructure and other activities)

INZ strongly supports the efforts to address reverse sensitivity through these policies. However, we remain concerned about the use of the qualifier "where practicable" in several policies, including in the context of avoiding adverse effects or implementing buffers. While intended to provide flexibility, this phrase has been shown in practice to introduce legal uncertainty and inconsistent application across councils. It is likely to become a point of dispute during hearings and appeals and could undermine the weight of national direction by deferring discretion back to local authorities.

Additional Recommendations

- **Ensure alignment with other national direction**

The NPS-Infrastructure should be harmonised with national policy statements on urban development, freshwater, renewable energy, and transport. **INZ recommends that guidance is provided to local authorities as to how the NPS-I will interact with other national direction**, which could lead to legal uncertainty without clear direction. i.e. will it be as enabling as is intended if it gets tripped up by other national direction imperatives.

INZ also recommends enable staged implementation approach. Councils may need support and guidance to implement the NPS effectively through plans, particularly smaller or rural councils with limited resourcing.

In addition, **INZ recommends the NPS-I also clarify inclusion of infrastructure planning in Regional and National Land Transport Plans** and the service delivery plans from the new water service organisations.

- **Reference the National Infrastructure Plan**

The NPS-I does not make any reference to the future National Infrastructure Plan, which is an oversight. To ensure alignment between national and local planning, **INZ recommends that the NPS-I should include a requirement for decision-makers to *have regard to the National Infrastructure Plan***. This would help ensure that nationally identified infrastructure needs and priorities are appropriately considered and translated into spatial plans.

- **Define and elevate Reverse Sensitivity**

Reverse sensitivity can be a significant issue for existing infrastructure in situations where new or intensified sensitive activities (e.g. housing, schools, healthcare facilities) are established nearby. Infrastructure owners then need to deal with the inevitable complaints and may be pressured to reduce that infrastructure's operation. Importantly, the infrastructure itself may not have changed, but its operation is now constrained by the expectations or vulnerability of the nearby activity.

INZ, along with other infrastructure organisations and associations, are encouraged by the NPS-I's explicit recognition of reverse sensitivity as a legitimate and material planning concern, and its promotion of spatial tools to manage such risks. This provides a much-needed bridge between infrastructure needs and land use planning responsibilities.

- **INZ recommends monitoring and review regular** review both of the NPS-I and its implementation. The NPS-I should be reviewed periodically to stay relevant to evolving infrastructure challenges and technological change.
- INZ also notes that the enablement is not consistent across the NPS-I, NPS-REG and NPS-EN are not consistent. This should be revisited and aligned as these are finalised.

3.0 Amendments to the National Policy Statement for Renewable Electricity Generation (NPS -REG)

3.1 **INZ strongly supports** the proposed National Policy Statement for Renewable Electricity Generation (NPS-REG). Renewable energy infrastructure is foundational to New Zealand’s ability to meet its climate targets, ensure energy security, and enable wider infrastructure development across transport, housing, and industry.

Renewable Energy as Critical Enabling Infrastructure

3.2 The generation, transmission, and storage of renewable electricity are essential components of the national infrastructure system. Decarbonisation across all sectors, including transport, construction, and manufacturing, relies on a significant and timely increase in renewable electricity supply. Without it, other parts of the infrastructure pipeline cannot proceed as intended. INZ supports the intent of the NPS-REG to:

- Provide stronger direction to decision-makers to recognise the national significance of renewable generation.
- Facilitate planning decisions that enable new generation and upgrades to existing infrastructure.
- Clarify the relationship between environmental effects and the national benefits of renewable energy.

3.3 One of the key challenges for renewable energy infrastructure has been inconsistent treatment under the RMA, resulting in delays, uncertainty, and cost escalation. INZ supports giving greater weight to the national importance of renewable energy in planning decisions.

3.4 The proposed NPS-REG provides a consistent national framework to guide regional and district plans. This also reduces consenting complexity for projects that are aligned with national energy and emissions reduction goals. Ahead of the development of spatial plans, INZ particularly supports policy provisions that direct councils to identify suitable areas for renewable energy generation. INZ also supports associated infrastructure such as electricity transmission, grid connections, and energy storage. Renewable electricity infrastructure does not exist in isolation

Co-ordination of infrastructure

3.5 The NPS-REG should help councils and infrastructure providers plan in a more integrated way, supporting cross-sector alignment. Renewable electricity infrastructure must be coordinated with:

- Transmission and distribution upgrades.
- Transport electrification (e.g. public transport and EV charging networks).
- Growth planning and urban development (e.g. enabling infrastructure for energy-intensive housing and industry).
- Water infrastructure, given the shared use of land and catchments.

3.6 **INZ supports this NPS-REG as a necessary interim step** to address current planning system constraints. We note that it should be integrated into the next generation of resource management laws (Phase 3 reforms) and recommend that this national direction be maintained or enhanced as part of future frameworks. The NPS-REG provides a model for how national direction can accelerate delivery of nationally significant infrastructure.

4.0 Amendments to the National Policy Statement on Electricity Transmission and Amendments to the National Environmental Standards for Electricity Transmission Activities

- 4.1 INZ generally supports these proposals including the renaming of these to the *National Policy Statement for Electricity Networks* and the *National Environmental Standards for Electricity Network Activities*.
- 4.2 These national instruments are pivotal in ensuring that New Zealand’s electricity infrastructure, both transmission and distribution, can meet growing demand, enable decarbonisation, and support economic development.

Support for Broadened Scope to Include Distribution

- 4.3 INZ strongly supports the proposed title changes and corresponding amendments to expand the scope from transmission-only to *electricity networks* (i.e. both transmission and distribution). This shift better reflects the reality of how electricity is delivered and consumed across New Zealand.
- 4.4 Historically, national direction has disproportionately focused on transmission, despite most electricity infrastructure being distribution-related and embedded in communities. Modernising these instruments to reflect the full electricity system is overdue and will provide national consistency across both tiers of the network.

Enabling Network Upgrades to Support Decarbonisation

- 4.5 The electricity system will require significant expansion and upgrading to meet the needs of transport electrification, low-carbon heating and industrial processes, and growing housing demand and new urban developments. The proposed amendments will help address planning and consenting barriers that have delayed or discouraged timely investment in electricity networks.
- 4.6 These changes are essential for:
- Faster deployment of substation upgrades, new feeders, and distributed energy integration.
 - Avoiding grid constraints that delay other infrastructure or development projects.
 - Enabling storage and demand-side management technologies to be connected.

Improving Planning Consistency Across New Zealand

4.7 Electricity network operators currently face a fragmented and inconsistent planning environment across local authorities. National direction is crucial for:

- Ensuring local plans do not unduly constrain the development, operation, and maintenance of electricity infrastructure.
- Clarifying the national significance of electricity networks.
- Reducing delays and costs through clearer permitted activity pathways and environmental standards.

4.8 The amendments help councils and communities understand the importance of electricity infrastructure while setting reasonable expectations for managing effects.

4.9 INZ strongly supports the proposed changes to the National Environmental Standards appropriately recognise the need for Routine and emergency maintenance, including vegetation management. Upgrading infrastructure is required for climate resilience (e.g. flood risk, wildfire zones) and to improve responsiveness to natural hazards and extreme weather. INZ supports amendments that provide greater flexibility and certainty for operators to maintain and strengthen the network in the face of increasing climate-related events.

4.10 Electricity networks are often left out of broader planning processes until late in the development cycle. These amendments should help ensure electricity infrastructure is considered early in spatial planning and urban growth strategies and support integrated infrastructure corridors (e.g. alongside transport or water). They should also enable proactive investment to anticipate rather than react to growth and demand.

4.11 INZ encourages Government to go further by explicitly linking national direction for electricity networks with spatial and regional infrastructure strategies.

Recommendations

INZ makes the following recommendations:

- **INZ supports the proposed amendments and title changes** to reflect the broader electricity network, not just transmission.



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- **INZ recommends that the NPS and NES changes are aligned** with other national direction (e.g. renewable generation, urban development, transport).
- **INZ recommends regular review** of these instruments to keep pace with technology and decarbonisation targets.
- **INZ encourage MfE to promote integration with local planning and spatial strategies**, ensuring electricity infrastructure is planned for proactively, not reactively.

5.0 Amendments to the National Environmental Standards for Telecommunications Facilities (NES-TF)

(Amendments to the Resource Management (National Environmental Standards for Telecommunications Facilities) Regulations 2016)

- 5.1 INZ supports the proposed updates to the National Environmental Standards for Telecommunications (NES-TF) and considers them to be both necessary and timely.
- 5.2 These updates reflect the increasing importance of digital infrastructure as a critical enabler of social and economic wellbeing across Aotearoa New Zealand. Telecommunications technology has evolved significantly since the NES-TF was last updated almost a decade ago. There are now over 6 million active mobile connections in Aotearoa and a corresponding reduction with less than 500,000 landline connections. The urban environment has also undergone change with significant increases in dwelling density including the adoption of high building limits.
- 5.3 New generations of mobile networks (4G, 5G and beyond), fibre deployment, and the emergence of small-cell infrastructure have all introduced new requirements for installation, siting, and operation. The current regulations do not adequately cater for:
- Widespread deployment of 5G, which relies on denser infrastructure such as small cells and street furniture-mounted antennas.
 - The increasing use of fibre optic technology across both urban and rural areas.
 - Equipment that is now more compact but requires different site rules (e.g. on lamp posts or buildings)
- 5.4 Modernising the NES-TF ensures the regulatory framework reflects the realities of next-generation infrastructure deployment. These standards allow INZ members to do routine infrastructure installs and upgrades without the need to obtain costly individual resource consents. These updates are necessary to enable the telecommunications sector to make network upgrades and improve resilience.

Recommendations

- 5.5 INZ does suggest some changes to what is proposed are needed to enable some futureproofing and ensure that the telecommunications infrastructure keeps up with changes in both the built environment and technology standards.

Pole Height

5.6 The issue of pole height is especially important to ensuring communities and businesses can communicate. Changes to the built environment allowing for taller buildings mean that telecommunications facilities need corresponding height increases to enable mobile signals to get through.

5.7 **INZ recommends** increasing the permitted heights for telecommunications poles. With proposals in the RMA housing package looking at even taller buildings around transport hubs, we think the NES-TF needs to be future proofed, enabling pole height that is building height plus 5 metres (a variation on option 2 for changing regulations 27(5) and 29(4) on pole height rules).

5.8 INZ understands the New Zealand Telecommunications Forum is submitting on these more detailed points and we support their recommendations.

6.0 New National Policy Statement for Natural Hazards (NPS-NH)

6.1 INZ welcomes the development of the proposed National Policy Statement for Natural Hazards (NPS-NH) as a necessary and timely intervention to build resilience into New Zealand's infrastructure planning and development. New Zealand needs a nationally consistent approach that enables forward-looking, risk-informed infrastructure decisions in the face of increasingly frequent and severe climate-related events. We support the embedding of the approach are that local authorities must take a risk-based approach to natural hazard risk and the inclusion of a risk matrix.

6.2 INZ notes that infrastructure can be both vulnerable to natural hazards but also may enable solutions and protection from these events. Infrastructure is both at risk from natural hazards and essential for community response and recovery. The NPS-NH must support infrastructure providers to:

- Plan, locate, design and maintain assets to withstand natural hazard risks.
- Ensure continuity of critical services during and after extreme events.
- Enable long-term resilience and adaptation strategies (e.g. planned retreat, asset relocation, system redundancy).

INZ supports the NPS-NH as a way to ensure natural hazard risks are proactively integrated into land use and infrastructure decision-making.

6.3 INZ is supportive in principle of taking a risk-based approach to hazard management, for government involvement to be justified, the externalities must be shown to be particularly large. Current local planning approaches to natural hazards vary widely and are often reactive, fragmented, or under-informed. A national policy statement will:

- Provide consistent direction to councils on how to assess, manage, and plan for hazard risk.
- Improve coordination between infrastructure providers, local government, and communities.
- Ensure risk assessments are embedded early in planning and consenting decisions, particularly for regionally and nationally significant infrastructure.

6.4 Natural hazards need to be taken seriously. We have already witnessed the loss of life and severe property destruction. A gaping hole in the proposals is any regulation to stop building in high hazards areas. If New Zealand is to get real about climate adaptation it needs to prioritise not making the situation worse in the first place.

- 6.5 The frequency and intensity of natural hazards including flooding, coastal inundation, slips, fires, and storms are increasing due to climate change. Infrastructure providers need clarity on how natural hazard risk should be factored into site selection, design standards, and lifecycle investment decisions. Guidance is also needed as to the planning framework's stance on adaptation options (e.g. upgrading, retreating, replacing, or co-locating assets).
- 6.6 INZ supports the NPS-NH's alignment with the National Adaptation Plan and encourages explicit references to climate projections and dynamic risk assessments to future-proof infrastructure planning.
- 6.7 Not all infrastructure can be located away from hazard-prone areas—for example, bridges, coastal roads, or water treatment plants. The NPS-NH should:
- Recognise that some infrastructure may need to be located in higher-risk areas due to functional, spatial, or economic requirements.
 - Enable this with appropriate mitigation measures, risk-based planning, and clear assessment frameworks.
 - Support resilience-based design, rather than default avoidance.
- 6.8 INZ notes also that the NPS-NH should complement and align the RMA Phase 3 upcoming Planning Act. It also should align with the NPS-UD, NPS- I, and NPS-REG. This alignment is critical to avoid conflicting policy signals and to support joined-up decision-making.
- 6.9 Infrastructure is long-lived and capital-intensive. The NPS-NH must encourage multi-decade planning horizons. Ideally it should support collaboration across sectors and jurisdictions to manage cascading and compounding risks. Councils and infrastructure providers should be encouraged to work together on shared risk management frameworks and adaptation pathways.

Recommendations

- 6.10 Infrastructure New Zealand supports the intent and direction of the proposed National Policy Statement for Natural Hazards. A nationally consistent, risk-based approach to planning and managing natural hazard risk is essential to safeguard infrastructure, communities, and New Zealand's long-term resilience.
- 6.11 **INZ recommends** that the term *significant* natural hazard risk is defined.

- 6.12 **INZ recommends clear guidance** on balancing infrastructure needs in hazard-prone areas.
- 6.13 **INZ recommends alignment with climate adaptation**, spatial planning frameworks and other national direction instruments.
- 6.14 **INZ recommends there is support and guidance** for councils for integrated, cross-sector approaches to managing natural hazard risk.