
The National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020

The National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020 (NPS-FM) has recently been gazetted and will come into force on 3 September 2020. The NPS-FM will replace the current National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2014 (amended 2017) and will make fundamental changes to the way freshwater is managed in Aotearoa.

A prominent shift in the new NPS-FM is the incorporation of Te Mana o te Wai as the primary approach to managing freshwater. Te Mana o te Wai is defined in the NPS-FM as *“a concept that refers to the fundamental importance of water and recognises that protecting the health of freshwater protects the health and well-being of the wider environment. It protects the mauri of the wai. Te Mana o te Wai is about restoring and preserving the balance between the water, the wider environment and the community”*. The NPS-FM identifies a hierarchy of obligations within Te Mana o te Wai that prioritises:

- First, the health and wellbeing of water bodies and freshwater eco-systems.
- Second, the health needs of people (such as drinking water).
- Third, the ability of people and communities to provide for their social, economic and cultural wellbeing, now and in the future.

The core principles of Te Mana o te Wai informing the NPS-FM and its implementation are:

1. *Mana whakahaere*: the power, authority and obligation of tangata whenua to make decisions that maintain, protect and sustain the health and well-being of, and their relationship with, freshwater.
2. *Kaitiakitanga*: the obligation of tangata whenua to preserve, restore and enhance, and sustainably use freshwater for the benefit of present and future generations.
3. *Manaakitanga*: the process by which tangata whenua show respect, generosity, and care for freshwater and for others.
4. *Governance*: the responsibility of those with authority for making decisions about freshwater to do so in a way that prioritises the health and well-being of freshwater now and into the future.
5. *Stewardship*: the obligation of all New Zealanders to manage freshwater in a way that ensures it sustains present and future generations.
6. *Care and respect*: the responsibility of all New Zealanders to care for freshwater in providing for the health of the nation.

The NPS-FM directs that freshwater is to be managed in a way that gives effect to the concept of Te Mana o te Wai – as articulated through the hierarchy and the principles. The NPS-FM is also clear that regional councils must engage with communities and tangata whenua to determine how this concept applies to water bodies and freshwater ecosystems in the region, including through the development of the core “deliverables” under the NPS-FM including:

- The development of long-term visions. Every council must include the long-term visions as objectives in regional policy statements. The long-term visions must be developed through engagement with the community and mana whenua about their long term wishes for the water bodies and freshwater ecosystems in the region.
- Implementation of the national objectives framework. The national objectives framework is a process that requires regional councils to undertake a range of steps such as identifying freshwater management units and values, setting environmental outcomes and including them as objectives in regional plans, identifying and setting baseline states for attributes for each value, setting targets to support the achievement of environmental outcomes and prepare action plans to achieve those outcomes.
- Developing objectives, policies, methods and criteria for any purpose relating to natural inland wetlands, rivers, fish passage, primary contact sites, and water allocation.

Alongside these requirements, the NPS-FM also prescribes a number of policies that must be included by all Regional Policy Statements and requires district and regional plans to align objectives with the environmental outcomes sought. Every local authority must give effect to the NPS-FM as soon as reasonably practicable.

This new NPS-FM is one of several streams of work in the freshwater space. The National Environmental Standards for Freshwater Management have also been introduced and will come into effect on the same day as the NPS-FM. The standards will set requirements for carrying out activities that pose risks to the health of freshwater and freshwater ecosystems.

A full copy of the NPS-FM may be found on the Ministry for the Environment’s website [here](#):

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