



National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity

Information for farmers and growers

Overview

The Government has developed a National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity to help protect and maintain our unique biodiversity.

All councils have had to protect areas with significant native biodiversity since the Resource Management Act (RMA) was introduced in 1991. The challenge has been that there was a lack of guidance about what this meant in practice and the requirement has been inconsistently applied. To address this, the criteria for identifying and managing these significant areas under the [National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity](#) (NPSIB) has now been made the same across Aotearoa New Zealand.

What changes for you will depend on how your council identified and managed these significant areas previously.

For some districts there may be little change while for others it may be more substantial.

Councils will update plans and strategies over the coming years to bring in the new requirements. Some changes will happen immediately.

If you're wanting resource consent for new activities or developments that may affect native plants and animals, you may have more requirements to meet.

Existing activities, such as grazing, can continue provided their effects remain at the same level and don't increase the loss of native plants or animals in a Significant Natural Area (SNA).

Key information on indigenous biodiversity

- Over one third of Aotearoa New Zealand's remaining native vegetation is located outside formally protected public reserve lands and privately owned covenants. Approximately 3 million hectares (26.5 per cent) of the remaining native vegetation is on sheep, beef and dairy farms and 1.3 million hectares (11.5 per cent) is on land used for other purposes (Source: Biodiversity in Aotearoa, 2020)
- Many farmers and growers are already making significant investments in looking after biodiversity on their land through active management, such as pest control, and establishing protection through Queen Elizabeth II Trust covenants or Nga Whenua Rāhui kawenata.

What does this mean for the farming sector?

Farmers and growers are already investing time and resources to protect and restore the large amount of indigenous biodiversity on their land. Many farmers and growers are working voluntarily in partnership with their communities, catchment groups, other organisations and councils, regardless of whether they have an SNA or not.

Indigenous biodiversity has many on-farm benefits, including reducing soil erosion, improving water quality, providing shade for stock, and increasing the resilience of farm systems. Consumers are increasingly demanding sustainability including indigenous biodiversity protection. Farmers and growers across Aotearoa recognise this and are undertaking critical conservation work.

Despite this good work, many of our indigenous species are in decline. We need a more consistent national approach to how we identify and manage indigenous biodiversity, regardless of where it is found.

The NPSIB directs councils to establish consistent approaches in their policies, plans and strategies to maintain indigenous biodiversity. It applies to all land types, and it sets out consistent ecological criteria used by councils to identify where SNAs are located. The aim is to better protect our native plants and animals throughout the country while providing certainty to people who want to develop or change the way they use their land.

Councils will update their policies, plans and strategies in the coming years to reflect NPSIB requirements, meaning there will be changes to existing plan rules and other work councils do for indigenous biodiversity. Councils will be implementing some parts of the NPSIB immediately, so anyone seeking resource consent for new activities or developments that may affect indigenous biodiversity may have additional requirements to meet.

For farmers and growers with no plans to change activities or start a new development, existing farming activities can continue.

Why is it needed?

Aotearoa has one of the highest proportions of threatened species in the world. Many landowners already actively manage and protect indigenous biodiversity on their land, but this is needed across the country to help prevent further loss.

Under the RMA, all councils must identify areas with significant native biodiversity. However, councils across Aotearoa have different criteria for identifying these areas and use different methods to maintain them. This has resulted in confusion and uncertainty for landowners who want to farm or develop their land. The NPSIB directs councils to set clear and consistent approaches in their policies, plans and strategies, which will provide more certainty and clarity for landowners.

Significant Natural Areas on farmland

An SNA may be identified on land that supports significant types or communities of indigenous species, such as areas of forest or bush. The NPSIB lists a set of criteria to identify SNAs and councils are required to work with landowners to identify and manage these areas.

Many councils have already identified or started a process to identify SNAs. Councils that have already identified SNAs will review them to make sure they are consistent with NPSIB criteria and requirements.

Councils that have not yet identified SNAs across their district will be doing this from now through to 2028. As part of this process, council staff will assess any potential SNAs. Councils must work with landowners and the NPSIB reflects this by outlining several engagement principles.¹ You may receive a visit to discuss and assess an area on your property. Not all farms will have an SNA, while some may have multiple SNAs.

Councils are required to work in partnership with farmers and growers, use the best quality information available, and be transparent with how any gathered information will be used. You can dispute the findings of a council's assessment and request that the council undertakes a physical inspection.

How will this affect my farming or growing operation?

Established activities

Established activities and structures in SNAs can continue provided they don't increase adverse effects on an SNA and they are listed in a policy statement or plan. This includes maintenance, operation or upgrades where the effects don't increase in scale, intensity or character and don't result in the loss or degradation of an SNA. The NPSIB doesn't affect existing use rights under section 10 and 20A or the Resource Management Act.

If the effects from an established activity increase in scale or intensity or increase the loss of or damage to an SNA, the activity must be managed as though it is a new activity or development. Where this is the case, landowners will need to speak to their council to check requirements.

This does not impact existing use rights established under the Resource Management Act.

¹ See [NPSIB clause 3.8\(2\)](#) – Assessing areas that qualify as SNAs. Principles include partnership, transparency, quality, access, consistency and boundaries.

Forestry areas

If an area of productive forestry on your property is identified as an SNA, the council must provide a specific regime for harvesting trees and undertaking plantation forestry activities. Any adverse effects on the SNA from forestry activities must be managed to maintain indigenous biodiversity. More specific information on this can be found in the [information sheet for forest owners and managers](#).

Maintenance of improved pasture

Renewing pasture species is part of many farming and growing systems and may affect an SNA. Councils' policy statements and plans must provide for the continuation of an existing regular cycle of periodic maintenance or improvement, provided certain conditions are met to manage environmental effects.

Existing covenants and kawenata

Many farmers, growers and other landowners are already doing outstanding work in partnership with organisations such as the Queen Elizabeth II Trust (QEII) and Ngā Whenua Rāhui, or the Department of Conservation. Partnering with organisations such as QEII allows landowners to protect land with important biodiversity values through legal covenants, regardless of future changes in ownership.

The NPSIB acknowledges the value of this by giving scope to councils to allow landowners with appropriate biodiversity covenants or kawenata to undertake activities provided for in those agreements and approved management plans.

Questions and answers

What am I required to do as a landowner or manager?

If you are not planning any new activities, changes to existing activities, or a new development, existing farming activities can continue. You still need to meet existing council rules on how you manage your land.

Councils that have not yet identified (or are reviewing) SNAs across their district will be starting to do this. As part of that, you may receive some communication from your local council. In the meantime, if you are planning a new activity or development on your property, contact your council first to check the latest requirements.

Will I have to allow access to my land?

If there is a potential SNA on your property, your council may want to visit to verify the SNA. It will seek your permission as landowner to visit. This is a good opportunity to talk to your council about the process, share your knowledge of how your land has changed, and further understand the biodiversity on your property.

Refusing entry won't stop the SNA assessment process applying to your land. It just means the assessment will be done via desktop and satellite imagery, with less opportunities for you to provide information into that process.

Having an SNA on your property does not affect your private property or ownership rights. The NPSIB does not include anything that enables or requires the public to have access to private land or SNAs.

Will the NPSIB restrict me from developing my land or make me change the way I use it?

Existing council rules still apply until councils update their policies and plans. If you want to change an existing activity, start a new activity, or develop land in or nearby an SNA, there may be new requirements depending on what you want to do.

In some cases, you may be restricted from doing something that might have adverse effects on an SNA. If this is the case, being flexible to amending your plans (eg, relocating or rescaling to reduce any adverse effects on a SNA) may provide a pathway for the project to go ahead.

Talk to your council to check on their requirements before starting any new developments if you have indigenous biodiversity on your property.

Am I required to protect biodiversity on my farm or property?

Many farmers and growers are already actively managing indigenous biodiversity on their land. The NPSIB does not require landowners to proactively manage SNAs or other areas of indigenous biodiversity, for example, fence off or control pests.

Councils may require fencing off an SNA as part of a resource consent application for undertaking a new activity or development if it is considered that this will help manage adverse effects on the SNA.

Is there support available if I want to do more to look after SNAs on my property?

Councils, central government or other organisations may offer support for landowners who want to proactively protect, maintain or restore an SNA on their property. There may also be options to establish covenants or kawenata on areas of indigenous biodiversity to legally protect these areas for future generations. Talk to your council or industry body about this or contact a covenanting organisation, such as Queen Elizabeth II Trust, for further advice.

We know there is interest in the concept of a biodiversity credit system from tangata whenua, market experts, businesses protecting nature, ecologists and others. The Government is consulting on this until 3 November 2023. To find out more and have your say see the [discussion document](#).

When does the policy take effect?

The NPSIB will take effect on 4 August 2023 and councils will make changes to their policies and plans over the coming years to reflect NPSIB provisions. However, councils will be implementing parts of the NPSIB straight away, so new activities or developments that may have adverse effects on indigenous biodiversity and need resource consent will need to meet NPSIB requirements. See the [general summary information sheet](#) for a more detailed timeline.

Where can I get more information?

Contact your council, email indigenusbiodiversity@mfe.govt.nz or visit environment.govt.nz.

A [general information sheet](#) is available. This provides an overview of key aspects of the NPSIB. There are also specific information sheets for [tangata whenua](#), [forest owners and managers](#), [infrastructure providers](#) and [urban developers](#).

