



AGENDA

Strategy and Policy Committee Meeting

Date: Wednesday, 5 August 2026

Time: 9:30 am

Location: Council Chambers
Waikato Regional Council
Level 1, 160 Ward Street, Hamilton

Members: Cr Ben Dunbar-Smith – Chair
Cr Liz Stolwyk – Deputy Chair
Cr Warren Maher
Cr Mich'eal Downard
Cr Robert Cookson
Cr Kataraina Hodge
Cr Keith Holmes
Cr Chris Hughes
Cr Tipa Mahuta
Cr Gary McGuire
Cr Jennifer Nickel
Cr Garry Reymer
Cr Noel Smith
Cr Angela Strange

Strategy and Policy Committee

Ngā Tikanga Whakahaere | Terms of Reference

1. *Mana ā-Ture* | Status

This Committee was established by Council under clause 30(1)(a) of Schedule 7 of the [Local Government Act 2002](#). It is a discretionary committee that can be created or disestablished by Council resolution.

2. *Ngā Kawenga* | Responsibilities

This Committee is responsible for the following functions, excluding matters that fall within the specific responsibilities of other committees:

- a. Setting Council's strategic direction and policy responses
- b. Identifying regional issues that require Council intervention
- c. Setting Council's advocacy position on regional issues
- d. Responding to external agency statutory planning processes
- e. Providing thought leadership on matters of regional significance
- f. Establishing strategic priorities for organisational direction and policy setting

3. *Ngā Apatono* | Powers

The Committee has the following powers required to carry out its responsibilities:

- a. Advising Council on regional governance matters, including delegation to:
 - i. Develop Council's strategic direction and recommend policy responses
 - ii. Develop Council's position on regionally significant issues
 - iii. Oversee development of regional by-laws and plans including, the Regional Policy Statement, regional plans, and the Regional Pest Management Plan.
- b. Provide guidance on regional governance projects, including:
 - i. Upper North Island Strategic Alliance
 - ii. Waikato Progress Indicators Implementation
 - iii. Regional and sub-regional spatial planning.
- c. Review and endorse submissions on central government, neighbouring councils, and territorial authority policy documents
- d. Receiving information to:
 - i. Monitor the effectiveness of Council's strategic influence
 - ii. Review and recommend updates to Council's strategic positions
- e. Monitoring implementation of the Regional Policy Statement (RPS) by partners and receiving reports on progress toward RPS objectives
- f. Cross-boundary collaboration to:
 - i. Foster cooperation on inter-regional issues
 - ii. Stay informed of emerging cross-boundary issues
 - iii. Provide guidance and receive updates on collaboration efforts
- g. Establishing hearing panels and subcommittees, and appointing commissioners to:
 - i. Hear and make recommendations on proposed policy statements or plans under the Resource Management Act 1991
 - ii. Oversee other statutory policy processes, including:
 - Regional Biodiversity Strategy
 - Regional Pest Management Strategies
 - Bylaws
- h. Develop Council's governance position on regionally significant and cross-boundary matters

Note: Commissioners are delegated powers under section 34A (1) of the [Resource Management Act 1991](#) to:

- i. Hold hearings and recommend decisions on submissions
- ii. Exercise powers under sections 37, 37A, 39–42A of the RMA

- iii. This delegation excludes final decision-making powers under clauses 10, 17, and 29(4) of Schedule 1 of the RMA

4. *Ngā Tūranga* | **Membership**

4.1 *Ngā Mema* | **Members**

All elected members of the Council are members of this Committee.

4.2 *Ūpoko me te Ūpoko Tuarua* | **Chair and Deputy-Chair**

The Chair and Deputy-Chair are appointed by Council in accordance with clause 25 of Schedule 7 of the Local Government Act 2002.

5. *Tokamatua* | **Quorum**

Two members. Refer clause 23(3)(b) of Schedule 7, [Local Government Act 2002](#)).

6. *Ngā Tikanga Pōti* | **Voting**

- a. Decisions are made by majority vote of members present.
- b. If votes are equal, the Chair has a deliberative and casting vote.

Refer clause 24 of Schedule 7, Local Government Act 2002.

7. *Ngā Hui i te Tau* | **Frequency of meetings**

Bi-monthly or as required.

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1 KARAKIA TIMATANGA

Whakataka te hau ki te uru	Cease o winds from the west
Whakataka te hau ki te tonga	Cease o winds from the south
Kia mākinakina ki uta	Bring calm breezes over the land
Kia mātaratara ki tai	Bring calm breezes over the sea
E hī ake ana te atakura	And let the red-tipped dawn come
He tio	With a touch of frost
He Huka	A sharpened air
He hau hū	And promise of a glorious day
Tīhei mauri ora!	Behold we live

2 APOLOGIES**3 CONFIRMATION OF AGENDA****4 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST**

Members are reminded of the need to be aware of maintaining a clear separation between personal interests and duties and their role as an elected member.

If any member has an interest that creates an actual, or could be perceived to create, a conflict in relation to any item on the agenda, it is recommended that this be disclosed.

5 MINUTES FOR CONFIRMATION OR RECEIPT

Nil

6 GENERAL ITEMS

6.1 SUBMISSION ON THE ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTING AMENDMENT BILL

Rā Date:	10 July 2026
Kaituhi Author:	Naomi Crawford, Team Leader - Policy Implementation
Kaituku Authoriser:	Tracey May, Director, Science, Policy and Information
Mana whakatau Delegation Status:	Committee has delegated authority to make the recommended decision

TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. To seek approval of the content, and subsequent lodgement, of the Waikato Regional Council (WRC) submission on the Environmental Reporting Amendment Bill.

KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. The Environmental Reporting Amendment Bill proposes changes to New Zealand's environmental reporting framework. The Bill would amend the Environmental Reporting Act 2015 to establish a revised national environmental reporting system, including six-yearly state of the environment reporting, new environmental indicators, monitoring standards and methods, and data and evidence priorities reports.
3. The Bill aims to improve environmental reporting and strengthen the evidence base for environmental stewardship and decision-making. WRC's draft submission supports the overall intent of the Bill and recognises the important role environmental reporting plays in increasing public understanding of environmental issues and supporting evidence-based management of natural resources.
4. While WRC's draft submission is generally supportive of the direction of the Bill, the submission seeks amendments to strengthen the relationship between environmental reporting and environmental management, including environmental monitoring, policy effectiveness evaluation, environmental limit setting, statutory planning and adaptive management, assessment of progress toward environmental outcomes, targets and goals, and the use of environmental reporting as a key evidence base for future resource management frameworks.
5. WRC's areas of interest in the submission include:
 - the proposed six-year state of the environment reporting cycle;
 - the relationship between environmental reporting, environmental limits, environmental outcomes and policy effectiveness evaluation;
 - the design and purpose of environmental indicators;
 - national monitoring standards and methods;

- the relationship between environmental reporting, environmental outcomes, targets, goals and environmental limits;
 - data and evidence priorities reports, including implementation cost and resourcing implications;
 - integrated commentary reporting across environmental domains;
 - reporting on environmental drivers, outlooks and uncertainty;
 - implementation arrangements; and
 - recognition of mātauranga Māori and regional expertise.
6. The submission further recommends that any nationally identified data and evidence priorities consider implementation costs, opportunities to utilise existing regional monitoring programmes and indicators, and avoids creating additional unfunded obligations for regional councils. The submission also emphasises the importance of spatially explicit environmental monitoring information, including catchment-scale, freshwater management unit, coastal and regional datasets, as a critical evidence base for environmental reporting, environmental limits, policy effectiveness monitoring, adaptive management, future planning decisions and assessment of cumulative environmental effects.
7. These recommendations are intended to ensure that the environmental reporting framework supports both national reporting objectives and the practical environmental management responsibilities of regional councils.
8. The submission period closes on 20 August 2026.

TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

1. That the report *Submission on the Environmental Reporting Amendment Bill* (Strategy and Policy Committee, 5 August 2026) be received.
2. That the Strategy and Policy Committee
 - (a) Approves for lodgement the proposed Waikato Regional Council submission on the Environmental Reporting Amendment Bill or;
 - (b) Delegates to the Committee Chair (Cr Dunbar-Smith) and the Director Science, Policy and Information (Tracey May) approval for lodgement of the proposed Waikato Regional Council submission on the Environmental Reporting Amendment Bill subject to amendments identified in discussion had at the committee meeting.

HOROPAKI | BACKGROUND

9. New Zealand's environmental reporting framework is currently governed by the Environmental Reporting Act 2015. Environmental reporting plays an important role in providing information on the state of the environment, trends over time, and factors affecting environmental outcomes.
10. The Bill proposes a revised reporting framework that includes six-yearly state of the environment reports, commentary reports, environmental indicators, monitoring standards

and methods, data and evidence priorities reports, and increased emphasis on environmental drivers, outlooks and uncertainty.

11. Regional councils play a significant role in environmental monitoring and reporting. WRC undertakes state of the environment monitoring, policy effectiveness monitoring and environmental reporting across freshwater, coastal, biodiversity, climate change and natural hazard matters. These functions are undertaken pursuant to the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) and other legislation, including through implementation of the Waikato Regional Policy Statement (WRPS) and Waikato Regional Plan (WRP).
12. Environmental reporting also informs statutory planning, environmental limit setting, plan reviews, policy evaluation and adaptive management. Staff therefore consider it important that the reporting framework remains closely connected to environmental management outcomes and future planning frameworks.

TE TAKE | ISSUE

13. While the draft submission supports the overall intent of the Bill, it identifies several areas where amendments are considered necessary to improve the effectiveness of the proposed framework. The submission notes that environmental reporting should be recognised as part of a wider feedback loop between environmental monitoring, planning, environmental management, policy effectiveness evaluation, environmental limit setting and adaptive management, rather than operating solely as a reporting exercise. Environmental reporting should assist decision-makers to understand whether management interventions are achieving intended outcomes and whether environmental conditions are improving over time.
14. The submission notes that the proposed six-year state of the environment reporting cycle may not align well with future statutory planning and monitoring review cycles. The submission also seeks clearer transitional arrangements and seeks guidance on how the Environmental Reporting Act will interact with existing RMA monitoring and reporting requirements during the transition to future resource management legislation.
15. The Bill currently provides that reports may compare environmental findings against policy outcomes, targets, limits and goals. The submission notes this assessment should be mandatory where relevant through replacing the permissive "may" in proposed sections 8(3) and 11(3) with "must", ensuring environmental reporting provides a consistent evidence base for assessing environmental outcomes, targets, limits, goals and management effectiveness. The submission also recommends that environmental reporting frameworks support environmental feedback, learning and adaptive management and recognise the role of environmental indicators in identifying emerging environmental risks before limits are reached.
16. The submission also addresses several matters that are not explicitly provided for in the Bill. These include recommendations to strengthen the use of integrated commentary reporting across environmental domains, ensure environmental reports clearly communicate uncertainty, limitations and key environmental drivers, and recognise regional monitoring programmes, implementation costs and local government resourcing implications when establishing national data and evidence priorities.
17. While the submission supports national consistency where it improves transparency and comparability, it recommends retaining flexibility within monitoring standards and methods to support regional variability, innovation and continuity of long-term monitoring

programmes. The submission also recommends that data and evidence priorities reports place greater emphasis on environmental learning, management effectiveness and regional monitoring priorities, and support interoperability, data federation and effective use of existing regional monitoring networks and information systems where practicable. It recommends that the Bill explicitly considers implementation costs, resourcing implications for local government, use of existing regional indicators and opportunities to avoid unnecessary duplication.

18. The submission further seeks implementation arrangements that recognise regional council expertise and context, mātauranga Māori, and regional environmental variability. It recommends our meaningful involvement in the development of indicators, standards, methods and data priorities, together with appropriate central government funding and implementation support for any additional monitoring, reporting or data collection requirements.
19. The submission supports integrated commentary reports that enable cross-domain assessment of environmental issues and recommends that these reports utilise existing regional indicators and datasets where appropriate. The submission also supports inclusion of environmental drivers and outlooks together with recognition that outlooks may draw on multiple knowledge systems, including mātauranga Māori, local knowledge and regional monitoring evidence where relevant.
20. The draft submission therefore seeks to:
 - improve alignment between reporting and planning review cycles;
 - strengthen requirements to assess environmental outcomes, targets, limits, and goals;
 - provide greater flexibility in monitoring standards and methods;
 - better recognise regional implementation considerations and spatially explicit environmental information;
 - clarify transitional arrangements during resource management reform;
 - enhance consideration of implementation costs and local government resourcing implications;
 - support more integrated environmental reporting and environmental learning; and
 - improve the treatment of environmental drivers, future outlooks, and uncertainty.

TE HAUTŪ ĀHUARANGI | CLIMATE LEADERSHIP

21. The Bill has indirect but important implications for climate leadership and climate resilience across New Zealand. Environmental reporting plays a critical role in understanding the environmental effects of climate change, identifying emerging risks, and informing adaptation responses.
22. WRC has responsibilities relating to climate change adaptation, natural hazards, freshwater management, coastal management and state of the environment monitoring. The draft submission seeks to ensure that environmental reporting remains closely connected to environmental management, policy effectiveness monitoring, environmental limits and statutory planning frameworks. This is important to support evidence-based responses to

climate-related environmental change and to ensure environmental reporting continues to inform future planning and investment decisions.

TE AROMATAWAI I TE HIRANGA | ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

23. Having regard to the decision-making provisions in the Local Government Act 2002 and the Council's Significance and Engagement Policy, a decision to approve the submission in accordance with the recommendations is not considered to have a high degree of significance.
24. Staff are of the opinion that the content and recommendations in this report are consistent with the decision-making requirements contained in Part 6 of the Local Government Act 2002 and that those requirements have been met.

TE HOROPAKI Ā-TURE | LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

25. WRC has a direct interest in the Bill because it undertakes state of the environment monitoring, policy effectiveness monitoring, environmental reporting, and environmental management functions under the RMA and other legislation. These functions support freshwater, coastal, biodiversity, climate change and natural hazard management across the Waikato region.
26. Environmental reporting forms an important component of the evidence base used to support implementation and review of the WRPS and WRP, future environmental planning frameworks, and wider environmental management decisions.

NGĀ WHAIWHAKAARO KAUPAPAHĒRE | POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

27. To the best of the writer's knowledge, a decision to endorse the submission is not significantly inconsistent with, nor is anticipated to have consequences that will be significantly inconsistent with, any policy adopted by the Council or any plan required under the Local Government Act 2002.

TE TIRITI O WAITANGI | THE TREATY OF WAITANGI

28. The draft submission recommends iwi and hapū involvement in environmental reporting, indicator development and data priority setting processes. The draft supports recognition of mātauranga Māori, iwi and hapū knowledge, Treaty settlement obligations, and environmental management arrangements within the environmental reporting framework.

WHAKAKAPINGA | CONCLUSION

29. The draft submission generally supports the Environmental Reporting Amendment Bill and its objective of improving environmental reporting and strengthening the evidence base for environmental stewardship and decision-making. However, we consider that several amendments are necessary to strengthen the relationship between environmental reporting, environmental management, environmental limits, policy effectiveness monitoring, adaptive management, and future statutory planning frameworks.
30. The Committee is asked to endorse the attached submission for lodgement with the Environment Committee.

NGĀ TOHUTORO | REFERENCES

31. [Environmental Reporting Amendment Bill, New Zealand Legislation](#)

ĀPITI HANGA | ATTACHMENTS

1. **Waikato Regional Council submission on the Environmental Reporting Amendment Bill – (Doc #37538887)** [↓](#)

File No: 25 12 05
Document No: 36112898
Enquiries to: Naomi Crawford

20 August 2026

Committee Secretariat
Environment Committee
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

Email: en.legislation@parliament.govt.nz



Dear Sir/Madam

Waikato Regional Council Submission to Environmental Reporting Amendment Bill

Thank you for the opportunity to submit on the proposed Environmental Reporting Amendment Bill. Please find attached the Waikato Regional Council's (the Council's) submission regarding this Bill. The submission was formally endorsed by the Council's Strategy and Policy Committee on **5 August 2026**.

Should you have any queries regarding the content of this document please contact Naomi Crawford, Team Leader, Policy Implementation directly on (07) 859 4637 or by email naomi.crawford@waikatoregion.govt.nz

Regards,

Tracey May
Director Science, Policy and Information

HE TAIAO MAUIRORA	HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT
HE ŌHANGA PAKARI	STRONG ECONOMY
HE HAPORI HIHIRI	VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

Submission from Waikato Regional Council on the Environmental Reporting Amendment Bill**Introduction**

1. We appreciate the opportunity to make a submission on the Environmental Reporting Amendment Bill.
2. Waikato Regional Council (the Council) supports the overall intent of the Bill to improve environmental reporting and strengthen the evidence base for environmental decision-making and environmental stewardship. The Council agrees that environmental reporting plays an important role in increasing public understanding of environmental issues and supporting evidence-based management of natural resources.
3. The Council has a direct interest in this Bill as we are responsible for undertaking state of the environment monitoring, policy effectiveness monitoring, environmental reporting, and a range of resource management functions across freshwater, coastal, air, land, biodiversity, climate change, and natural hazard matters. These functions are carried out pursuant to the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) and other relevant legislation, including through the development, implementation and monitoring of the Waikato Regional Policy Statement (WRPS) and Waikato Regional Plan (WRP). It is noted that the report back from the Environment Select Committee on the Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill provides reference in imminent legislation for regional councils' continued role in environmental monitoring and reporting.
4. The Council considers that environmental reporting should not operate in isolation from environmental management. Environmental reporting should provide a robust evidence base that supports environmental monitoring, effectiveness evaluation, statutory planning, environmental limit setting, assessment of progress toward environmental limits, and adaptive management.
5. Regional councils play a critical role in collecting, interpreting, and applying environmental information to inform management decisions and are active providers of data. We consider that the Bill should recognise and build on the expertise, monitoring networks, and environmental management functions of regional councils to ensure reporting contributes effectively to environmental outcomes.
6. The Council generally supports the direction of the Bill but recommends several amendments to strengthen its connection to environmental management outcomes and statutory planning frameworks. The Council also recommends that implementation of the Bill align with the Natural Environment Bill, Planning Bill and future resource management system to ensure environmental reporting supports environmental limits, monitoring, plan reviews and adaptive management.

Summary

7. In summary, our submission:
 - (a) Supports the overall intent of the Bill to improve environmental reporting and strengthen the evidence base for environmental stewardship.
 - (b) Recommends strengthening the integration between environmental reporting, environmental monitoring, policy effectiveness evaluation, environmental limit setting and adaptive management.
 - (c) Recommends adopting a five-year state of the environment reporting cycle instead of the proposed six-year cycle to better align with statutory planning cycles, regional monitoring reviews and future resource management requirements.
 - (d) Recommends replacing the permissive "may" in proposed sections 8(3) and 11(3) with a mandatory "must" to ensure environmental reporting explicitly assesses progress against policy outcomes, targets, limits and goals.

- (e) Recommends amending the purpose of environmental indicators so that they provide feedback on environmental state, change over time and effectiveness of environmental management. The Council considers that simply tracking an aspect of the environment over time is too narrow and that indicators should also support adaptive management, policy effectiveness evaluation and environmental learning.
 - (f) Supports national consistency where it improves transparency and comparability, but recommends retaining flexibility within monitoring standards and methods to support innovation, regional variability and continuity of existing monitoring programmes.
 - (g) Recommends that data and evidence priorities reports focus on improving environmental data, evidence, feedback and learning for environmental management, and that the Bill require those reports to consider implementation costs, existing regional monitoring programmes, local government resourcing implications and opportunities to avoid unnecessary duplication.
 - (h) Recommends that any nationally identified data or evidence priorities be developed with regional councils and accompanied by clear implementation pathways, funding support and consideration of whether existing regional indicators can meet national evidence needs.
 - (i) Recommends that implementation arrangements explicitly recognise regional council expertise, mātauranga Māori, Treaty settlement obligations and regional environmental variability.
 - (j) Requests involvement in future consultation regarding indicators, monitoring standards, methods and implementation of the reporting framework.
 - (k) Recommends that any new national reporting, monitoring or data collection requirements be accompanied by appropriate central government funding and implementation support.
 - (l) Supports the establishment of the Strategic Evidence Panel and recommends that its role remain focused on strategic environmental evidence, emerging trends and long-term priorities.
 - (m) Recommends clear transitional arrangements to support implementation during the transition between the current and future resource management systems.
 - (n) Recommends practical resourcing and participation mechanisms to support iwi and hapū involvement in environmental reporting and data priority setting.
 - (o) Recommends clarifying the relationship between national data priorities and regional monitoring responsibilities, including how existing regional monitoring networks and information systems contribute to national environmental reporting.
8. The Council does not wish to be heard at this time in support of its written submission to the Environmental Reporting Amendment Bill. The Council appreciates the opportunity to provide these written comments and trusts that the feedback provided will assist the Select Committee in its consideration of the Bill.

Submitter details

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Changes to the Environmental Reporting Act**Integration with environmental management and planning**

1. The Council supports the Bill's extended purpose of improving environmental reporting and supporting evidence-based environmental stewardship.
2. The Council considers that environmental reporting is most valuable when it forms part of a wider feedback loop between monitoring, planning, environmental management and policy review. Environmental reporting should help identify whether environmental interventions are achieving intended outcomes and support future management responses.
3. The Council also notes the increasing role of environmental limits, environmental outcomes and effectiveness monitoring within the future resource management framework. Environmental reporting should be explicitly recognised as part of the evidence base supporting those functions.

We support the Bill's extended purpose "to support evidence-based decisions that lead to effective and enduring environmental stewardship".

We recommend that environmental reporting be explicitly recognised as a key evidence base for environmental monitoring, environmental limit setting, policy effectiveness monitoring and adaptive management.

State of the environment reporting cycle

4. The Council supports moving away from three-yearly national synthesis reporting to a longer reporting cycle. Extending the reporting timeframe may improve the ability to identify meaningful environmental trends, reduce over-reliance on short-term fluctuations, and improve the efficiency and value of environmental reporting.
5. However, the Council recommends that state of the environment reporting occur on a five-year cycle rather than the proposed six-year cycle. A five-year cycle would provide a more timely evidence base for environmental management and planning decisions while still delivering the benefits of a longer reporting period.
6. In particular, a five-year reporting cycle would better align with the proposed five-year regional state of the environment reporting cycle and would provide two reporting intervals within each ten-year statutory planning cycle. This alignment would help ensure national environmental reporting remains a timely and relevant evidence base for plan reviews, policy evaluation, adaptive management and continuous improvement.
7. Environmental reporting should support assessment of progress toward environmental outcomes, limits, targets, policy objectives and other statutory goals. A six-year reporting cycle could reduce the usefulness of national reporting if significant planning and policy reviews are required to rely on information that is already several years old.
8. The Council supports the Bill's provision allowing environmental reports to compare environmental findings against relevant policy outcomes, targets, limits and goals. However, the Council recommends that environmental indicators established under section 14A also be designed to track progress towards these measures, including any intervention thresholds where they exist. This would help identify emerging risks and trends before environmental limits are reached, support earlier management responses, and strengthen the role of environmental reporting as a tool for adaptive management.

We recommend adopting a five-year state of the environment reporting cycle instead of the proposed six-year cycle, to better align with statutory planning, monitoring and review requirements.

We recommend ensuring national environmental reporting remains a timely evidence base for environmental planning, adaptive management, plan review and environmental management decisions.

We recommend that environmental reporting and environmental indicators support assessment of progress toward environmental outcomes, targets, limits and goals, and enable early identification of emerging environmental risks.

We recommend that the Bill include clear transitional provisions to avoid duplication, uncertainty and unnecessary administrative burden during implementation of future resource management reforms.

We recommend providing guidance on how reporting obligations will interact with existing Resource Management Act monitoring and reporting requirements during the transition period.

Environmental reporting and environmental limits

9. The Council considers that one of the most significant opportunities in the Bill is to strengthen the connection between environmental reporting and environmental limit setting. Proposed sections 8(3) and 11(3) currently provide that reports may compare environmental findings against policy outcomes, targets, limits and goals. The Council considers that this comparison should be mandatory where relevant. Future resource management frameworks place significant emphasis on environmental limits as tools for safeguarding environmental and human health outcomes. Environmental reporting should therefore provide a clear and consistent evidence base for assessing whether environmental limits, targets, policy outcomes and statutory goals are being achieved.

We recommend replacing the permissive "may" in proposed sections 8(3) and 11(3) with a mandatory "must".

We recommend requiring state of the environment reports and commentary reports to assess performance against policy outcomes, targets, intervention values, limits and goals where relevant.

We recommend strengthening the role of environmental reporting as a key evidence base for environmental limit setting, monitoring and review.

Environmental indicators

10. The Bill proposes that environmental indicators are used to track aspects of the environment over time. The Council considers that environmental indicators should do more than simply record environmental change by measuring trends using fixed methods over time. Indicators should also help decision-makers understand whether environmental management interventions are effective and whether environmental outcomes are improving. For regional authorities implementing statutory planning and monitoring responsibilities under the RMA, indicators need to provide meaningful feedback on environmental management, not just trend information. The Council therefore considers that proposed section 14A(2) should be expanded so that indicators support adaptive management, policy effectiveness evaluation, investigation of environmental change, and environmental learning.

We recommend ensuring indicators are designed to support environmental stewardship, adaptive management and learning.

We recommend broadening the statutory purpose of environmental indicators in section 14A beyond tracking environmental change over time, to include identifying the causes of environmental change and assessing the effectiveness of environmental management responses.

Scientific monitoring standards and methods

11. The Council supports national consistency where it improves transparency, comparability and public confidence in environmental reporting. However, overly prescriptive national standards can reduce flexibility, constrain innovation, constrain responses to emerging contaminants, affect continuity of existing datasets and reduce the ability to respond to regional circumstances. The Council notes that nationally prescribed monitoring methodologies can become outdated over time as scientific understanding and monitoring technologies evolve. For example, some prescribed air quality monitoring methods may no longer reflect contemporary monitoring practice. The Council considers that environmental monitoring methods should be provided through non-statutory guidance in order to remain fit-for-purpose and capable of adapting to new information, technologies and management challenges, rather than prescribed in legislation.

We support national consistency where it improves transparency and comparability, while recognising regional environmental variability, differing monitoring requirements, and region-specific management frameworks.

We recommend that monitoring standards and methods are provided through non-statutory guidance rather than prescribed in legislation, so that they retain sufficient flexibility to support innovation, emerging contaminants, regional variability and continuity of long-term monitoring programmes.

We recommend avoiding unnecessarily prescriptive requirements that may undermine the usefulness of existing environmental monitoring systems.

Data and evidence priorities reports

12. The Council supports the introduction of data and evidence priorities reports. These reports have the potential to improve environmental monitoring, identify evidence gaps and support future investment in environmental information systems. However, environmental management relies not only on data collection but also on understanding environmental drivers, management effectiveness and system performance. The Council considers that data and evidence priorities reports should also recognise and accommodate regional monitoring priorities necessary to support local statutory responsibilities and region-specific environmental management outcomes. The Council also considers that data and evidence priorities reports should assist in identifying nationally significant evidence gaps where improved information would materially strengthen environmental monitoring, environmental management and regulatory decision-making. This includes areas where nationally significant environmental pressures, contaminants or emerging risks are not presently well understood due to limitations in available monitoring or supporting information.
13. Given regional councils fund and maintain significant environmental monitoring programmes, national data priorities should be developed with explicit consideration of local government implementation costs, resourcing implications, existing regional indicators and opportunities to avoid duplication or share services across local government boundaries. Data priorities should therefore focus on improving environmental learning, management effectiveness and environmental outcomes rather than solely improving national consistency and coverage of indicators. This could include evidence gaps identified through independent environmental reviews and investigations where better information is required to understand environmental risks, contaminant pathways, environmental drivers, and the effectiveness of management responses. The Council also supports reporting arrangements that make effective use of existing regional monitoring networks and information systems, including approaches that promote data federation and interoperability across environmental reporting systems. National reporting frameworks should minimise duplication, support interoperability, and enable environmental information collected by regional authorities to contribute directly to national reporting outcomes where practicable.
14. The Council also considers that environmental reporting should support not only environmental monitoring and environmental limit setting, but also spatial planning and environmental management

decisions. Environmental reporting frameworks should recognise the importance of spatially explicit environmental information, including catchment-scale, freshwater management unit, coastal and regional monitoring datasets. These datasets provide important context for identifying environmental state, trends and baseline conditions, understanding cumulative effects, assessing progress toward environmental outcomes and limits, and informing future planning, investment and adaptive management decisions.

We support the introduction of data and evidence priorities reports as a mechanism for identifying environmental data, monitoring and research gaps and linking environmental reporting to future investment priorities.

We recommend requiring priorities reports to identify monitoring gaps, investigation priorities and opportunities to improve understanding of environmental drivers and management responses.

We recommend broadening the purpose of data and evidence priorities reports to include environmental feedback, learning and management effectiveness.

We recommend clarifying the relationship between national data and evidence priorities reports and regional monitoring programmes to ensure that existing monitoring remains fit for purpose and that local statutory responsibilities can continue to be effectively fulfilled.

We recommend amending proposed section 13(2) to require data and evidence priorities reports to consider implementation costs, resourcing implications for local government, use of existing regional indicators and opportunities to avoid unnecessary duplication and encourage shared services.

We recommend that national data and evidence priorities do not create additional unfunded monitoring or reporting obligations for regional councils.

We recommend that environmental reporting frameworks recognise the value of spatially explicit environmental monitoring data and support the use of state, trend and baseline information at appropriate spatial scales to inform environmental management, environmental limits, planning and adaptive management.

Integrated commentary reports

15. The Council supports the shift from fixed, six-monthly domain reporting to more flexible, annual commentary reports. Commentary reports provide an opportunity to examine emerging environmental issues across multiple domains and to better reflect the interconnected nature of environmental systems. This aligns with the Bill's objective of increasing flexibility and reducing reporting burden while still maintaining regular public reporting on environmental trends and issues. This is also important for regional environmental management, where freshwater, air, land, biodiversity, coastal, climate and natural hazard issues often interact and cannot be understood effectively in isolation.
16. The Council considers that commentary reports should be used to support integrated environmental analysis and timely management responses, while also avoiding unnecessary reporting burden on data providers. Where possible, commentary reports should draw on existing high-quality indicators, regional monitoring programmes and established datasets, rather than creating duplicative reporting expectations. Therefore, the reports should be complemented by more frequently updated indicators on the StatsNZ website. This distinguishes audited/reviewed data from live/raw data and enables users to access current information when required.

We support annual commentary reports that provide an opportunity for integrated cross-domain assessment where appropriate.

We recommend that commentary reports are designed to inform timely integrated environmental management decisions by drawing on established regional indicators and datasets where appropriate.

We recommend that commentary reporting is supported by regularly updated online indicators, so that users can access current information without creating duplicate or unnecessary reporting requirements for regional councils and other data providers.

Drivers, outlooks and uncertainty

17. The Council supports the inclusion of drivers and outlooks in environmental reporting. Understanding drivers of environmental change will improve understanding of both the causes of environmental change and the likely consequences of current trends. The Council notes that many environmental indicators are influenced by natural variability, climatic conditions, lag effects and complex ecological interactions. Reporting frameworks should appropriately acknowledge these factors. The Council also considers that outlooks should transparently communicate assumptions, confidence levels and uncertainty, particularly where projections are based on incomplete or evolving evidence.

We support inclusion of drivers and outlooks within environmental reporting.

We recommend that the Bill be amended to require transparent communication of assumptions, confidence levels and uncertainty.

We recommend ensuring reporting appropriately reflects natural variability, climate influences and lag effects.

Regional context, Mātauranga Māori and implementation

18. The Council considers that mātauranga Māori, iwi and hapū knowledge, Treaty settlement obligations and regional context are important considerations in environmental reporting, monitoring and environmental decision-making. This is particularly relevant in the Waikato region, where environmental management is strongly influenced by Treaty settlement arrangements, joint management agreements and Te Ture Whaimana o Te Awa o Waikato. Where reports include outlooks about future environmental change, those outlooks should be informed by the full range of relevant knowledge systems, statutory obligations, regional circumstances and environmental management contexts.

We recommend ensuring implementation arrangements recognise regional variability and regional council expertise.

We recommend meaningful regional council involvement in developing environmental indicators, standards, methods and data priorities reports.

We recommend that outlooks in state of the environment reports and commentary reports enable the incorporation of mātauranga Māori, iwi and hapū knowledge, local knowledge and regional environmental evidence.

Strategic Evidence Panel and Resourcing implementation arrangements

19. The Council supports practical implementation of the Bill and notes that changes to indicators, standards, methods and reporting requirements may create additional obligations for local government.

Implementation should recognise existing regional investment in monitoring programmes and ensure that transition costs and implementation requirements are appropriately managed. Implementation arrangements should recognise the costs associated with any new monitoring, data collection or reporting requirements and provide appropriate support to assist regional councils with implementation. This is particularly important where national data and evidence priorities, environmental indicators, or scientific monitoring standards and methods may require changes to existing regional monitoring systems.

20. The Council supports the establishment of the Strategic Evidence Panel. An independent Strategic Evidence Panel has the potential to strengthen the quality and credibility of environmental reporting by identifying emerging issues, evidence gaps and long-term priorities. The Council considers the Panel should maintain a strategic focus and avoid becoming involved in operational monitoring decisions, which are more appropriately addressed through existing scientific, technical and regulatory processes.

We recommend phased implementation supported by clear national guidance.

We recommend meaningful engagement with regional councils during implementation.

We recommend that implementation arrangements recognise existing local government investment in monitoring systems and environmental reporting programmes.

We recommend that any additional monitoring, reporting or data collection requirements arising from national environmental reporting frameworks be supported by appropriate central government funding and implementation assistance.

We recommend that new or amended environmental indicators, monitoring standards, methods and data priorities are accompanied by implementation planning that identifies costs, transition requirements, funding implications and opportunities to use existing regional monitoring programmes.

We support the establishment of the Strategic Evidence Panel. We recommend that the Panel maintain a strategic focus on emerging environmental issues, evidence gaps and long-term priorities and avoid operational monitoring decisions.

6.2 WAIKATO REGIONAL ENERGY STRATEGY - UPDATE ON NEXT STEPS

Rā | Date: 28 July 2026

Kaituhi | Author: Michelle White, Senior Policy Planner

Kaituku | Authoriser: Tracey May, Director, Science, Policy and Information

TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. To provide Councillors with an update on the next phase of the Waikato Regional Energy Strategy.

KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. The Waikato Regional Energy Strategy has been updated and was endorsed by Council at its 30 April 2026 meeting¹.
3. Considerable work has been undertaken to socialise the strategy, since endorsement. The next phase of work includes launching the strategy, and establishing a regional energy forum to deliver the strategy.
4. Future updates and progress on delivery will be reported to the Regional Growth and Resilience Committee.

TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That the report *Waikato Regional Energy Strategy - update on next steps* (Strategy and Policy Committee, 5 August 2026) be received.

HOROPAKI | BACKGROUND

5. The Waikato Regional Energy Strategy, first developed in 2009, has been updated to align with today's energy landscape. The updated strategy and supporting documents are now available on the Waikato Regional Council [website](#).
6. The strategy was workshopped with Council before being endorsed by Council on 30 April 2026.
7. The strategy has one action, supported by a set of recommendations under seven pillars (pou).
8. The strategy's action is to establish a Regional Energy Forum. The forum will bring together key participants responsible for the supply, distribution and use of energy across the Waikato, including iwi, infrastructure providers, major energy users, education, local and central government, and commercial representatives.

¹ [Minutes of Ordinary Council Meeting - Thursday, 30 April 2026](#)

9. The forum will develop an implementation plan that outlines actions, timeframes, resourcing, roles and responsibilities. The plan will identify which actions WRC has responsibility for and the resources needed to support their delivery.
10. The strategy's recommendations will be considered by the forum, with those agreed progressed through the (yet to be developed) implementation plan.
11. The Council has a limited suite of policy levers it can use to drive the regional energy transition. It does, however, have some opportunity to enable the transition, but must work in a collaborative partnership with other stakeholders.
12. Recommendations where Council will play a role include:

Pou 1

Strategic partnerships

Strategic partnerships across government, iwi, industry, research and communities accelerate progress by reducing duplication, sharing resources, and combining expertise to unlock innovation and ensure communities shape and benefit from the transition.

Pou 2

Advocacy and leadership

Strong advocacy and leadership drive the region's low-emissions transition by shaping supportive policy and regulation, aligning stakeholders, and signalling long-term commitment.

Pou 3

Supportive policy settings

Clear, coordinated policy and spatial planning provides long-term direction, enables consistent renewable energy development, and builds investor confidence to accelerate delivery.

Pou 5

Information and monitoring

Transparent, timely and reliable information, supported by robust monitoring, enables evidenced-based decisions, reduces uncertainty, and strengthens collaboration.

Pou 6

Funding and finance

Financial schemes and incentives are important to help communities transition, making low-emissions technologies more accessible, reducing upfront costs, and enabling households, businesses, iwi and community organisations to participate meaningfully in the energy shift.

13. Many of the other recommendations relate to sourcing and efficiently using renewable energy in support of Pou 7, which will require input from other parties.
14. Waikato Regional Council will maintain oversight of the strategy and its delivery implementation plan, providing technical and administrative support for the forum.
15. The implementation plan and progress against the plan will be reported to the Regional Growth and Resilience Committee.

UPDATE AND NEXT STEPS

16. Since endorsement, the Strategy has been widely socialised through:
 - (a) Presentation to Combined Waikato Regional Forum, 4 May 2026.
 - (b) Presentation to Priority One and Transpower workshop, 8 May 2026.
 - (c) Presentation to Carbon and Energy Professionals Conference, 27 May 2026.
 - (d) Presentation to Future Proof Implementation Committee, 19 June 2026.
 - (e) Two articles have been prepared for the NZPI e-Planning Quarterly and RMLA Resource Management Journal. At the time writing, the articles are in press awaiting publication.
 - (f) RMLA project award application.
 - (g) Individual meetings with stakeholders.
17. A final version of the strategy has been designed and published on the website.
18. A technical support document (more detailed version of the strategy) is currently in press and will also be published when finalised.
19. The strategy will be officially launched at an event on 12 August 2026 at the Hamilton Gardens. Stakeholders from around the region have been invited. The event will feature guest speakers, an interactive session, afternoon tea, and networking opportunities. Speakers include Simon Upton (Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment), Buddhika Rajapakse (Concept Consulting) and Blair Dickie (Waikato Regional Council).
20. The launch has been designed not only to recognise and reflect positively on the Council's leadership, but also to leverage the experience and knowledge of invited parties and sector representatives to progress the design of the forum. Staff will report back specifics on the outcomes of the launch event.
21. The interactive session will seek input from attendees on how a forum could work. This will centre on the following topics – purpose and role; structure and representation (membership, size, meeting frequency); and governance and resourcing.
22. The outputs will support a draft Terms of Reference (TOR) for consideration by the Council and other parties. Learnings from other forums (e.g. Energy 2007-09, Biodiversity, Water Users, Forestry, Aquaculture) will also be considered in the preparation of the TOR.

TE TAKE | ISSUE

23. The strategy was developed under the guidance of the Strategy and Policy Committee. Now that the strategy has been completed and is moving into its delivery phase, future updates and progress against the implementation plan will be reported to the Regional Growth and Resilience Committee.

WHAKAKAPINGA | CONCLUSION

24. The Strategy and Policy Committee is asked to receive this report and note that future updates on implementation will be reported to the Regional Growth and Resilience Committee.

NGĀ TOHUTORO | REFERENCES

- 25. Reference 1: [Waikato Regional Energy Strategy](#)
- 26. Reference 2: [Waikato Regional Energy Inventory](#)
- 27. Reference 3: [Waikato Regional Energy Scenarios](#)
- 28. Reference 4: [Iwi Māori and the Future of Waikato Energy](#)

ĀPITI HANGA | ATTACHMENTS

Nil

6.3 RESOURCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM REFORM - ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT BACK ON BILLS

Rā | Date: 27 July 2026

Kaituhi | Author: Lisette Balsom, Manager - Strategic Policy Implementation

Kaituku | Authoriser: Tracey May, Director, Science, Policy and Information

TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. This report is to provide an overview of the Select Committee report back on the Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill, due for release on 20 July 2026.

KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. The Government introduced the Natural Environment Bill and Planning Bill (Bills) set to replace the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA), in late 2025. The Environment Select Committee is considering the Bills and the substantial feedback received during their consultation period.
3. Waikato Regional Council (WRC) submitted on the Bills in February 2026, supporting resource management reform and noting a number of areas where we suggested improvements could be made to clarify the legislation.
4. At the time of writing this report, the Select Committee report back report had just been released. Staff will provide a verbal update on key matters from the report to the committee meeting. Attachment 1 also provides early messages on the report back, the excerpts are taken from material prepared by Te Uru Kahika for the regional sector.

TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That the *Resource Management System Reform - Environment Select Committee report back on Bills* (Strategy and Policy Committee, 5 August 2026) be received.

HOROPAKI | BACKGROUND

5. The Government referred the Natural Environment Bill and Planning Bill (Bills), set to replace the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA), to the Environment Select Committee in late 2025. The Government intends the Bills to become law before central government elections this year.

6. The WRC combined submission to the Bills was endorsed at the 10 February 2026 Strategy and Policy Committee meeting.²
7. Under the Bills, there is a greater role for central government, a narrowed scope for environmental regulation, and clear standards for implementation. Central government will prepare one set of national direction as well as national standards under each Act, and local government will prepare a combined plan for each region. The combined plan will comprise a regional spatial plan, a natural environment plan and a land-use plan for each district or city.
8. The Bills also aim to streamline plan making processes, front load engagement, and reduce the number of activities that require consent under the new system. The Bills also introduce the concept of regulatory relief.
9. The RMA will continue to apply while the new system is being established (with some modifications created by the Bills), then will cease to operate once all proposed plans under the new system have been notified.

TE TAKE | ISSUE

10. Under the Bills, central government will prepare one combined national policy direction under each Bill, national standards and regulations. The national instruments will be delivered in two tranches, one due in late 2026 (including national policy direction, instruments for setting limits for life-supporting capacity and human health, national standards for regional spatial plans and some national rules to support the transitional consenting regimes) and the other in 2027 (covering national standards for making land-use plans and standardised plan content). Central government will set environmental limits for human health, while regional councils will be responsible for setting ecosystem health limits in natural environment plans, following any methodologies set in national standards.
11. Councils retain their plan making functions, albeit the plans are now called regional spatial plans, natural environment plans, and land-use plans - together forming a combined regional plan. The split of functions between regional councils and territorial authorities remains largely the same as under the RMA, with territorial authorities responsible for land-use plans and regional councils responsible for natural environment plans. The spatial plans will be jointly prepared by all councils in the region. The spatial plan informs the others and is made first.
12. This means that the hierarchy under the new system is:
 - (a) goals, set in the Bills (there is no hierarchy within the goals themselves)
 - (b) national policy direction
 - (c) national standards
 - (d) regional spatial plans
 - (e) land-use plans (including a land use plan for the coastal marine area prepared by the regional council) and natural environment plans.
13. Each instrument must 'implement' the instrument higher up the hierarchy.
14. The overall shifting of the design of the system is shown on the diagram below. The Government is referring to the system design as a 'funnel' and intends for more decisions to

² [2026-02-10 - Strategy and Policy Committee Meeting Minutes - 10 February 2026](#)

be made at the top of the system, in the legislation, regulations and national instruments, and less consents/permits to be needed compared to the current system.

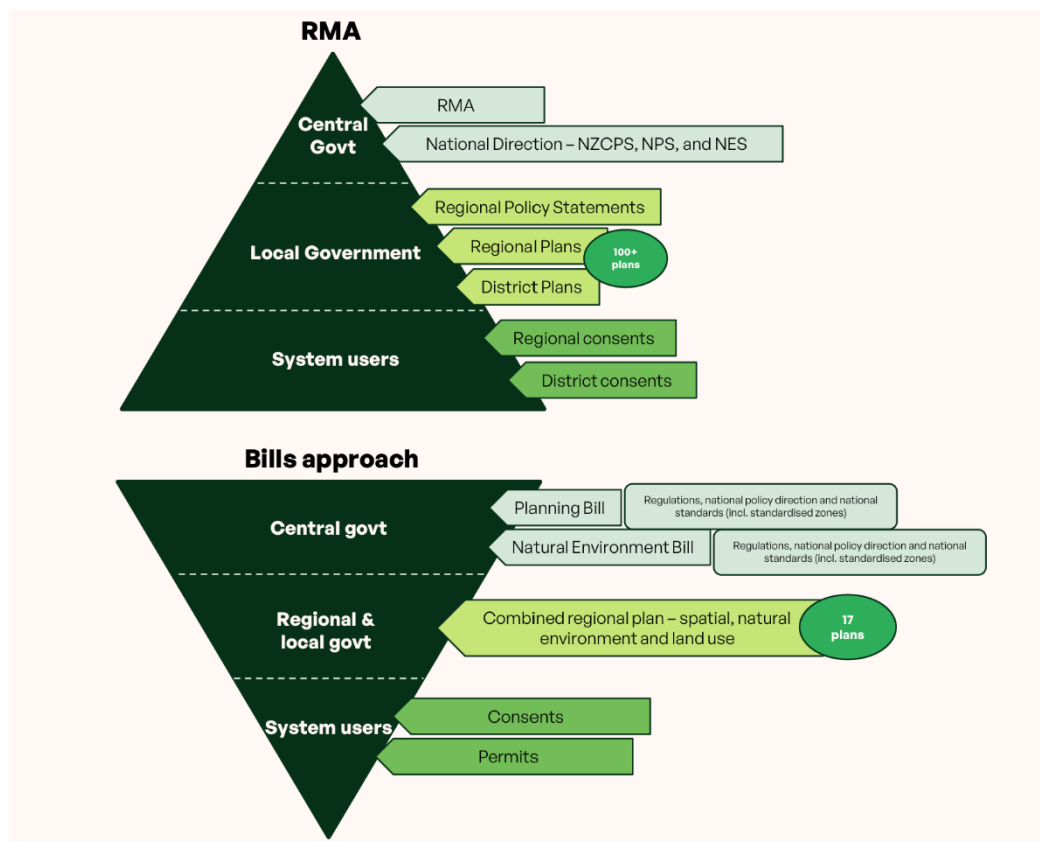


Figure 1 – Comparison of the RMA and new resource management system structure

15. The Bills as currently written refer to “regional councils”, however, given the recent discussion paper on the future of local government, this will potentially change in future.
16. The WRC submission’s high-level points were:
 - Support for resource management reform
 - Council involvement in developing national instruments
 - Role of central government
 - Strong support for regional spatial planning
 - Māori involvement and definition certainty of ‘equivalent effect’
 - Achievement of the goals – environmental limits
 - Supporting a successful transition to the new system
 - Resourcing the changes/permitted activities system settings
 - Participation in plan making
 - Integration between the Bills
 - Transition timing and resourcing.
17. The submission also included tables of technical submission points that covered a range of implementation matters rather than higher level policy issues.
18. The Chair and Chief Executive were also invited to present to the Select Committee, and did so reiterating key matters of importance to our region. There has been ongoing discussion between staff and central government officials relating to technical matters to be covered in Supplementary Order Papers, these will likely be presented to Parliament prior to the final reading of the Bills.

ĒTAHI ATU TAKE | OTHER MATTERS

19. The RMA will continue to apply while the new system is being established (with some modifications created by the Bills). The 'plan stop' will be extended and apply during this period.
20. The RMA will 'cease' by Order in Council only when all proposed plans under the new system have been notified. While no date has been set, the Government has stated that the new system will be fully operational in 6 years. At this point, notified plans would have legal effect and the new planning system will be 'switched on', with all new system instruments and processes applying instead. This means the RMA system will continue to be the law for around 3.5 to 6 years after enactment of the Bills.
21. Significantly there will be a 'transitional consenting framework' that will apply between one month after Royal Assent and the Order in Council setting the 'transition date' for the ultimate repeal of the RMA being made. The transitional consenting framework includes some elements of the Bills:
 - (a) the removal of the special circumstances test for public notification
 - (b) exclusions on the scope of effects
 - (c) provisions on financial assurances and bonds
 - (d) application of procedural principles
 - (e) consideration of any new national standards and rules (once developed)
 - (f) consideration of spatial plans (once developed).
22. This transitional consenting framework has the potential to create uncertainty for a significant period of time while some components of the new system will apply to an otherwise status quo for resource consenting.
23. This follows the automatic extension of consents by the Resource Management (Duration of Consents) Amendment Act in December 2025, which was intended to provide certainty for consent holders during the transition.

WHAKAKAPINGA | CONCLUSION

24. We are expecting the Select Committee report back on the Planning System reform Bills around 20 July 2026. Due to governance timeframes for committee reports, this placeholder report will be supplemented by a verbal overview of the Bills following Select Committee consideration will be provided at the Strategy and Policy Committee.

NGĀ TOHUTORO | REFERENCES

25. [WRC submission to the Planning System Reform Bills](#)
26. [Natural Environment Bill 234-1 \(2025\), Government Bill Contents – New Zealand Legislation](#)
27. [Planning Bill 235-1 \(2025\), Government Bill Contents – New Zealand Legislation](#)
28. [Ministry for the Environment fact sheet – Transitioning into the new planning system](#)
29. [Simpson Grierson – Unwrapping the Resource Management Reform](#)

ĀPITIHANGA | ATTACHMENTS

1. Excerpts from Te Uru Kahika early messages Select Committee report back on new planning system bills (Doc # 37876055) [↓](#)

Te Uru Kahika Messages

Excerpts from Te Uru Kahika Environment Committee Report-Back Resource Management Replacement Bills**Key messages**

- Regional and unitary councils strongly support the need for resource management reform and see a significant opportunity to create a clearer, more efficient system for building homes, infrastructure and productive investment alongside healthy natural environments and resilient communities.
- The Environment Committee's reports are an important milestone, providing a picture of the likely shape of the two Acts intended to replace the Resource Management Act.
- Our early assessment is focused on what has changed through the select committee process and what those changes could mean for transition, implementation, and the Government's intended outcomes.
- The overall architecture remains largely unchanged. There will be two Acts covering the scope of the current one and integration of land-use planning and natural resource management will need to be managed carefully as it is not well-integrated between the bills.
- Core regional functions remain largely as proposed. At a regional level councils will continue to prepare natural environment plans, set regional environmental limits within a national framework, monitor the state of the natural environment, issue natural resource permits, and carry out compliance and enforcement.
- Strategic planning and delivery across regions remain central to the new system. Regional and unitary councils connect decisions about land, water, the coast, air, infrastructure, natural hazards, climate resilience and the natural environment at the scale at which these issues need to be managed.
- Successful implementation will rely on the stability and expertise of the teams working in regional and unitary councils. Our people provide the specialist capability, science, data, operational experience and regional knowledge needed to translate legislation into workable and locally desired outcomes.

Response to the select committee reports

- Resource management is central to our economy, health, and environments so we welcome the necessary extension of the overall transition timeframe from 30 to 39 months; the first national policy direction is now expected 12 months after enactment, up from 9 months, and draft regional spatial plans will be required after 21 months instead of 15 months.
- Regional and unitary councils advocated for additional time so that the first generation of plans could be informed with some meaningful engagement and allow for robust decision-making. While revised timeframes are more realistic, transition will remain complex and demanding so councils must be well supported.

Te Uru Kahika Messages

- Changes clarify that every local authority in a region is entitled to appoint at least one member to its Spatial Planning Committee. This provides greater certainty about council participation in regional spatial planning.
- Spatial Planning Committees will also be required to include a member with knowledge and experience relating to te ao Māori and Māori development.
- Submissions seeking greater recognition of the Treaty within the Bills were not successful. The Government has separately signalled that further amendment papers will seek to remove both existing and initiated Mana Whakahono ā Rohe agreements. They have advised a new undefined mechanism of Iwi Participation Agreements will be introduced.
- Removal of existing Mana Whakahono ā Rohe would have significant implications for councils and mana whenua partners that have invested in enduring relationships and agreed ways of working. Treaty settlements must continue to be upheld, and iwi and hapū must have genuine opportunities to participate in decisions affecting their interests and rohe.
- Environmental limits are a key part of the future system and changes have been made with the expressed intent to make the framework more workable, which seems to include widening the circumstances in which Ministers can allow activities to proceed notwithstanding those limits.
- Environmental limits need to provide credible and durable direction while remaining practical to develop and implement. We are examining closely what the changes would mean for environmental outcomes, regional decision-making, investment certainty, and councils' responsibilities when limits are exceeded.
- We note a recommended revision to the National Standards framework, enabling the Minister to issue standards that allow specified activities that may breach environmental limits.
- Land-use decisions directly affect water, air, soil, biodiversity, and natural-hazard risks so regional and unitary councils will need to consider how the two new Acts can be implemented in a way that avoids complexity and fragmented decision-making.
- The regulatory relief framework also remains largely unchanged and there's considerable uncertainty surrounding the fiscal and decision-making implications.
- Regulatory relief must not discourage councils from making tough but necessary decisions.
- Removal of the proposed market-based and comparative allocation methods. Removing these untested mechanisms avoids imposing significant new systems, costs and implementation risks on councils and greater uncertainty for resource users.
- For consenting, controlled activities have been reinstated for Natural Environment Plans and improvements to CME provisions are retained.

Additional messages on specific detail

- The reports recommended changes to the goals of the two Bills including removal of the proviso that enabling the use and development of natural resources would be within environmental limits – potentially reducing the importance of environmental limits. An

Te Uru Kahika Messages

additional goal is proposed by the reports which is to support and enable the enhancement of the environment. Goals regarding natural hazards have been strengthened from *manage effects* to *safeguard against natural hazard risks*.

- Regional Spatial Plans will be able to incorporate information from existing RMA documents provided it is consistent with the new Acts and national instruments. Regional Spatial Plans must include maps, objectives and actions, and may include policies, methods or other types of provisions, but not rules.
- On regional functions, the reports recommend that regional councils also be responsible for land use planning in the Coastal Marine Area.
- On consenting, the reports made no significant changes to the Bills regarding extending the duration of all expiring resource consents to beyond the transition period. Also, the threshold for public notification of resource consent applications will increase from *more than minor adverse effects* in the RMA to *significant adverse effects* under the Bills, with restrictions on who can submit.

Next steps

- The Environment Committee's report back is an important indication of direction, but it does not represent the final shape of the legislation.
- Further amendment papers are expected as the Bills progress through the law-making process, including potential changes to Mana Whakahono ā Rohe and other matters. Some important settings may remain uncertain until relatively late in the legislative process.
- Regional and unitary councils are continuing to work through the detailed recommendations to understand their implications for communities, the environment, infrastructure, and regional implementation.

6.4 SUBMISSIONS SUMMARY REPORT - AUGUST 2026

Rā | Date: 8 July 2026

Kaituhi | Author: Naomi Crawford, Team Leader - Policy Implementation

Kaituku | Authoriser: Tracey May, Director, Science, Policy and Information

TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. This report provides an update on the submissions that the Waikato Regional Council (the Council) has lodged and identifies upcoming advocacy opportunities.

KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. The Council receives notice of legislative and national policy proposals at various stages of development. Some of these have the potential to impact significantly on the Council and its customers. A number of plan changes and reviews also continue throughout the region's territorial authorities. This is a regular report that summarises consultation opportunities and the submissions that the Council has prepared.

TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

1. That the *Submissions Summary Report - August 2026* (Strategy and Policy Committee, 5 August 2026) be received.
2. That the Committee notes the inclusion of Waikato Regional Council's submission to Waipa District Council Private Plan Change 31 – Te Awamutu T4 Growth Cell, that was lodged under delegated authority, (Attachment 4), and retrospectively receives the submission.

HOROPAKI | BACKGROUND

3. Staff provide this report to the Strategy and Policy Committee at each meeting, identifying current and upcoming submission opportunities for the Council and outcomes of previous submissions, including those approved under delegated authority.
4. Key partners communicate consultation opportunities in different ways, with some not writing directly to the Council. Staff are on various distribution lists and monitor the webpages of key partners once a week to identify consultation opportunities. This includes parliamentary websites, central government department websites, and the consultation webpages of district and regional councils relevant to our region.
 - A spatial map of active local planning processes is provided at **Attachment 1**.
 - A table of district planning processes by territorial authority, and central government legislative and policy updates, is provided at **Attachment 2**.
 - A summary of Fast Track locations and details is provided at **Attachment 3**.

5. Since the Committee's previous update, several significant pieces of legislation have progressed through the parliamentary process and may have implications for local government generally, including Waikato Regional Council's functions and responsibilities.
6. The Regulatory Standards Act 2025 came into force on 1 January 2026, with the key provisions relating to principles of responsible regulation, regulatory stewardship and consistency assessments commencing on 1 July 2026. The Act is intended to improve the quality, transparency and accountability of regulation through the application of principles of responsible regulation. It introduces regulatory stewardship obligations and mechanisms for assessing legislation and regulatory instruments against those principles. For Waikato Regional Council, regional plans, bylaws and other regulatory instruments may be subject to increased scrutiny regarding their consistency with the principles of responsible regulation.
7. While no immediate changes to existing planning or regulatory processes are required, staff are monitoring implementation guidance and any implications for environmental regulation, property rights provisions, Te Tiriti o Waitangi considerations, and future resourcing requirements.
8. The Local Government (System Improvements) Amendment Bill was reported back by the Governance and Administration Committee in November 2025 and has subsequently continued through the parliamentary process. The Bill seeks to strengthen local government accountability, prioritise core services, reduce regulatory burden and support cost-effective service delivery. Amendments recommended by the Committee clarify the relationship between councils' power of general competence and the revised purpose and priorities of local government, amend governance and information access provisions, and require consultation with local authorities before replacement standing orders or codes of conduct are approved. Staff will continue to monitor the Bill as it progresses through its remaining parliamentary stages.
9. The Infrastructure Funding and Financing Amendment Bill has also progressed through the parliamentary process. The Bill is intended to improve the operation of the Infrastructure Funding and Financing Act 2020 by broadening its application, reducing barriers to use, and streamlining processes associated with infrastructure levies. Amendments recommended by the Finance and Expenditure Committee seek to improve the operation of the funding and financing framework while addressing matters raised during the select committee process. The Bill does not currently provide Infrastructure Funding and Financing Act funding mechanisms for regional council functions such as flood protection, stormwater management and regional transport. As a result, key matters raised by Waikato Regional Council in its submission have not been addressed, limiting the extent to which the legislation will assist regional councils in meeting infrastructure funding needs.
10. The report back to Select Committee in regard to the Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill has also occurred. This is the subjective of a separate agenda item on this agenda.
11. Staff will continue to monitor the implementation and progression of these legislative changes and will provide advice to the Committee where implications for Council functions, regulatory instruments, funding arrangements or future advocacy opportunities are identified.

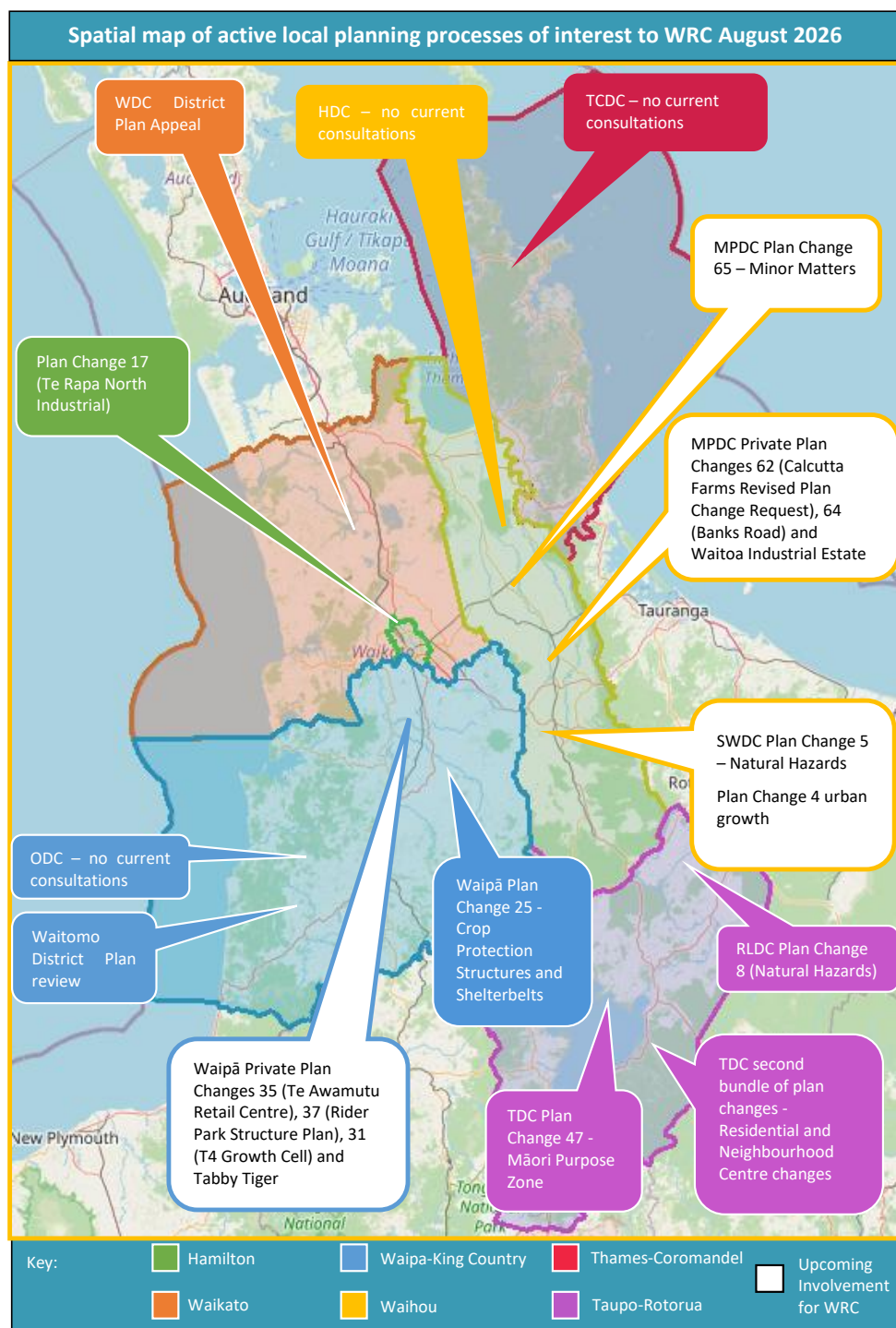
WHAKAKAPINGA | CONCLUSION

12. This report provides an update on central government submission opportunities, recent legislative developments, and district plan processes in which the Council is involved. These reports are provided regularly to the Committee.

ĀPITI HANGA | ATTACHMENTS

1. Spatial map of active local planning processes - (Doc#37423905) [↓](#)
2. District Planning and Central Government Processes - (Doc#37424915) [↓](#)
3. Map of Fast Track Applications - (Doc# 37425784) [↓](#)
4. Waikato Regional Council Submission to Proposed Private Plan Change 31 - Te Awamutu T4 Growth Cell (Doc#37281262) [↓](#)

Attachment 1



District Planning processes by territorial authority**Hamilton City Council**

Process	Plan change stage (where relevant)	What is it?	Current status
Private Plan Change 17: Te Rapa North Industrial	Decision	A private plan change request by Fonterra to "live zone" 91ha of land in the Te Rapa North Industrial Zone by removing the 'Deferred Industrial Zone' overlay.	Appeals have been lodged by Fonterra and Empire Corporation/Porter Group. Staff have reviewed and determined there is no need to join the appeals.

Matamata Piako District Council

Process	Plan change stage (where relevant)	What is it?	Current status
Plan Change 65 – Minor Matters (PC65).	Pre-notification	This plan change aims to fix a range of issues in the District Plan that have caused inefficiencies, unintended outcomes, or implementation challenges. Some of these issues were originally included in PC61.	Plan change was notified on 23 June. Staff reviewed, submission not required.
Calcutta Farms - Revised Plan Change Request - Plan Change 62	Pre-notification	The revised plan change proposes to rezone approximately 20 hectares of rural land at the eastern edge of Matamata (south of Tauranga Road/SH24) to General Industrial Zone.	Pre-notification engagement. Staff are assessing the proposal.
Private Plan Change 64 - Banks Road	Pre-notification	This seeks to rezone approximately 26.3 hectares of land near the southeastern edge of Matamata from Rural Zone to Residential Zone. PC64 is consistent with the Future Residential Policy Area and the Banks Road to Mangawhero Road Structure Plan. The proposal "live-zones" approximately 26.3 hectares as Residential Zone, updates the Structure Plan to reflect master planning and introduces a 400m ² minimum net lot size with a Restricted Discretionary pathway for 325-399 m ² lots (Comprehensive Residential Development).	Pre-notification stage - staff have lodged pre-notification feedback on the draft plan change proposal.

Rotorua Lakes District Council

Process	Plan change stage (where relevant)	What is it?	Current status
Plan Change 8 (Natural Hazards)	Hearing	This reviews the objectives and policies for natural hazards and changes the rules relating to how the District Plan manages specific natural hazards – flooding, wildfire, fault rupture, land stability (slope stability, liquefaction and soft soils) and geothermal hazards –for the whole district, including in the Lakes A Zone.	Independent Hearings Panel made its decision on 9 July 2026. Staff are reviewing the decision.

South Waikato District Council

Process	Plan change stage (where relevant)	What is it?	Current status
Plan Change 5 - Natural Hazards	Pre-notification	This will consolidate provisions relating to natural hazards into one chapter, as per the National Planning Standards. The plan change will map urban flood hazard risks as per the WRPS.	SWDC indicated they will progress this plan change as this topic will be automatically exempt from the plan stop direction from central government.
Plan Change 4 is a district-wide urban growth plan change	Pre-notification	SWDC has shifted PC4 from a relatively broad growth proposal toward a more constrained, infrastructure-led and WRPS-aligned growth framework with recent amendments.	SWDC indicated they will progress this plan change as this topic will be automatically exempt from the plan stop direction from central government.

Waikato DC

Process	Plan change stage (where relevant)	What is it?	Current status
WDC District Plan Review	Appeal	WDC undertook a full review of the Waikato District Plan. WRC submitted on a number of aspects and participated in the hearing process.	The only remaining unresolved appeal that WRC is a party to relates to conservation lots/rural subdivision. This appeal is close to being resolved.

Waipa District Council

Process	Plan change stage (where relevant)	What is it?	Current status
Draft Plan Change 25 - Crop Protection Structures and Shelterbelts	Submission	Waipa DC has resolved to remove the crop protection structures and shelterbelt topic from PC30 and progress it as a separate plan change. This is because of intense interest and lobbying from landowner and industry groups and recent Environment Court proceedings.	WRC did not submit on the plan change. Summary of submissions was notified on 14 May – staff determined there was also no need to prepare a further submission.
Proposed Private Plan Change 37- Rider Park Structure Plan	Submission	Proposal to rezone 94ha of land on the eastern fringe of Cambridge/Leamington for residential and commercial development. Proposal brings forward C5 Cambridge growth cell from post-2035 for development now.	Submission was endorsed at the council meeting on 30 April, subject to minor changes.
Proposed Private Plan Change 31 - Te Awamutu T4 Growth Cell	Pre-notification	This proposes to rezone the T4 growth cell on the western side of Te Awamutu from Deferred Residential to Residential Zone. The T4 growth cell is 29ha and is currently identified in the Waipa District Plan for residential development beyond 2035.	The private plan change request was lodged with Waipā District Council in September 2023. The Council has subsequently requested further information from the applicant. As this is a private plan change request, the statutory plan-stop provisions do not apply. At its previous meeting, the Committee resolved that the submission be reviewed by the Chair prior to lodgement. In accordance with that direction, the submission was prepared by staff, reviewed by the Chair, and subsequently lodged (Attachment 4).
Draft Private Plan Change 32 - Tabby Tiger	Pre-notification	Private plan change to rezone 33 hectares of land between Raynes and Lochiel Roads from Rural to Airport Business Zone (Agri-Tech Precinct).	Plan change application lodged in September 2024. Waipā DC has requested further information from the applicant. As this is a

Process	Plan change stage (where relevant)	What is it?	Current status
			private plan change, the 'Plan Stop' requirements do not apply.
Proposed Private Plan Change 35 - Te Awamutu Retail Centre	Pre-hearing	The plan change seeks to amend the provisions of the Waipā District Plan for the Te Awamutu Large Format Retail Centre at 670 Cambridge Road, Te Awamutu. It also proposes to rezone the nearby land at 638 Cambridge Road from Medium Density Residential to Commercial Zone and to include this land as part of the centre.	Submission lodged, hearing scheduled for 11 August 2026. The applicant has undertaken the additional flood modelling sought in WRC's submission and the submission points have now been addressed.

Waitomo DC

Process	Plan change stage (where relevant)	What is it?	Current status
Waitomo DC Plan Review	Appeal	Waitomo DC are undertaking a full review of their district plan.	WRC's appeal relating to future urban zoning in areas of natural hazard risk has been resolved through direct negotiations. WRC joined aspects of Forest and Bird's appeal relating to the removal of indigenous vegetation in areas of natural features and landscapes. Direct negotiations are ongoing between Waitomo DC and Forest and Bird.

Central Government Proposals - Current processes

Process	What is it?	Current status
Natural Environment Bill and Planning Bill	The government has introduced two new Acts to replace the RMA - a Planning Act and Natural Environment Act. The new resource management legislation will be based on the enjoyment of property rights.	Submission lodged. The Select Committee report is due on 26 June, outcomes will be presented at the August meeting of the committee.
Proposed Time of Use Charging Regulations	Proposed regulations are to support the design of time of use charging schemes under the Land Transport Management (Time of Use Charging) Amendment Act 2025. Time of use charging is proposed to be implemented which would charge people during busy times of use on particular roads. Costs will differ based on vehicle size.	Waikato Regional Transport Committee endorsed submission at its 8 June meeting.
Climate Change response amendment bill	This Bill includes a range of amendments to support the operation of the Climate Change Response Act 2002 (CCRA) and the New Zealand Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS).	First reading only, staff are reviewing and are likely to prepare a submission, once submissions open.
Environmental Reporting Amendment Bill	The amendments would restate the purpose of the Act to clarify its intended use and outcomes of reporting, reduce the frequency of synthesis reports (state of the environment reports), strengthen the mechanisms for data collection and set data collection standards, and add drivers and outlooks as required components of environmental reports.	Staff have prepared a submission for the 5 August committee meeting for endorsement. Submissions close on 20 August.
Climate Change Response (Tort Liability) Amendment Bill	Limiting Climate change-tort liability - It legally ensures that no person, including the Crown, can be held liable in tort for climate change or any climate change-related damage (such as harm, interference, or loss of property) caused by direct or indirect greenhouse gas emissions.	Staff have reviewed and determined that a submission is not required.
Conservation Amendment Bill	Amends the Conservation Act 1987 to streamline the management of conservation land, better enable appropriate use, and support more effective administration overall. A new National Conservation Policy Statement is proposed to replace overlapping plans and provide clearer national direction and consistency.	Submission lodged. The Select Committee report is due on 12 November.

Process	What is it?	Current status
Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Amendment Bill	Amends the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Act 1996 to streamline and improve application processes and pathways, support risk-proportionate decision-making and public participation, and enhance compliance, monitoring, and enforcement under the Act.	Submission lodged. The Select Committee report is due on 17 September.
FNZ review of measures for shore-based harvesting in the Auckland Coromandel area	Responds to ongoing concerns about the sustainability of intertidal shellfish and other fisheries resources in the Auckland Coromandel area and aligns with key management actions from the Hauraki Gulf Fisheries Plan. It proposes intertidal closures (from the high-tide mark to 200 m offshore along the coastline of the Auckland Coromandel mainland and around Waiheke Island) and changes to the recreational daily limits for shellfish in the Auckland Coromandel area. Covers intertidal habitats as well as some subtidal habitats.	Consultation opened on 6 May and submissions closed on 12 June 2026. Submission lodged.
Agricultural Compounds and Veterinary Medicines Amendment Bill	Amendments to Agricultural Compounds and Veterinary Medicines Act 1997: - Intends to reduce barriers and improve efficiency and transparency around approval of agricultural and horticultural products. - A review was undertaken of the existing legislation which made 16 recommendations. The Bill gives effect to those recommendations.	Staff have reviewed and determined that a submission is not required.
MFE: Options to Reduce Emissions from Organic Waste Sector Feedback Document	Seeks feedback on options to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from organic waste, as part of the Government's second Emissions Reduction Plan.	Staff are preparing feedback.
MPI – proposed temporary fishery closures in the Hauraki Gulf	Three local iwi have requested a further two-year temporary closure to harvesting of shellfish at Umupuia beach, Te Mata and Waipatukahu, and Waiheke Island.	Staff prepared feedback which was sent on 26 June.
Proposed regulations for road user charges	Reform of current RUC system: RUC collector will be NZTA but providers will be approved public or private entities. Transition from fuel excise duty to road user charges (all vehicles will be subject to RUCs instead of just diesel and EVs.	Staff have reviewed and determined that a submission is not required.
Draft import health standard for microorganisms, biological	Proposed new import health standard (HIS) for microorganisms, biological products derived from animals, and cell lines. Import risk analysis relates to non-	Staff have reviewed and determined that a submission is not required.

Process	What is it?	Current status
products derived from animals, and cell lines	viable biological products, microorganisms, and other viable cells into New Zealand. This also includes bovine serum from Australia and the USA.	
MBIE – A proposed reliability obligation to manage dry-year risk	Proposal to introduce a new reliability obligation to manage dry-year risk. This would require market participants to secure enough fuel or firm generation capacity ahead of a winter where a shortfall is expected.	Staff have prepared feedback which was lodged on 21 July.
Climate Change Commission - Request for input: Update to advice on the fourth emissions budget	Seeks input into how analysis is updated on Aotearoa New Zealand's fourth emissions budget (2036–2040), due by 31 March 2027. Public opportunity to provide written evidence and insights, from 9 June to 19 July. Following this, the CCC will engage with people further to confirm points of evidence.	Staff have prepared feedback which was lodged on 7 July.
Local Government (Management of Local Authorities) Amendment Bill	The purpose of this bill is to provide the mayor and elected councillors with the mandate to more effectively govern and control the activities of their local authority.	Staff reviewing. Not yet referred to the Select Committee.

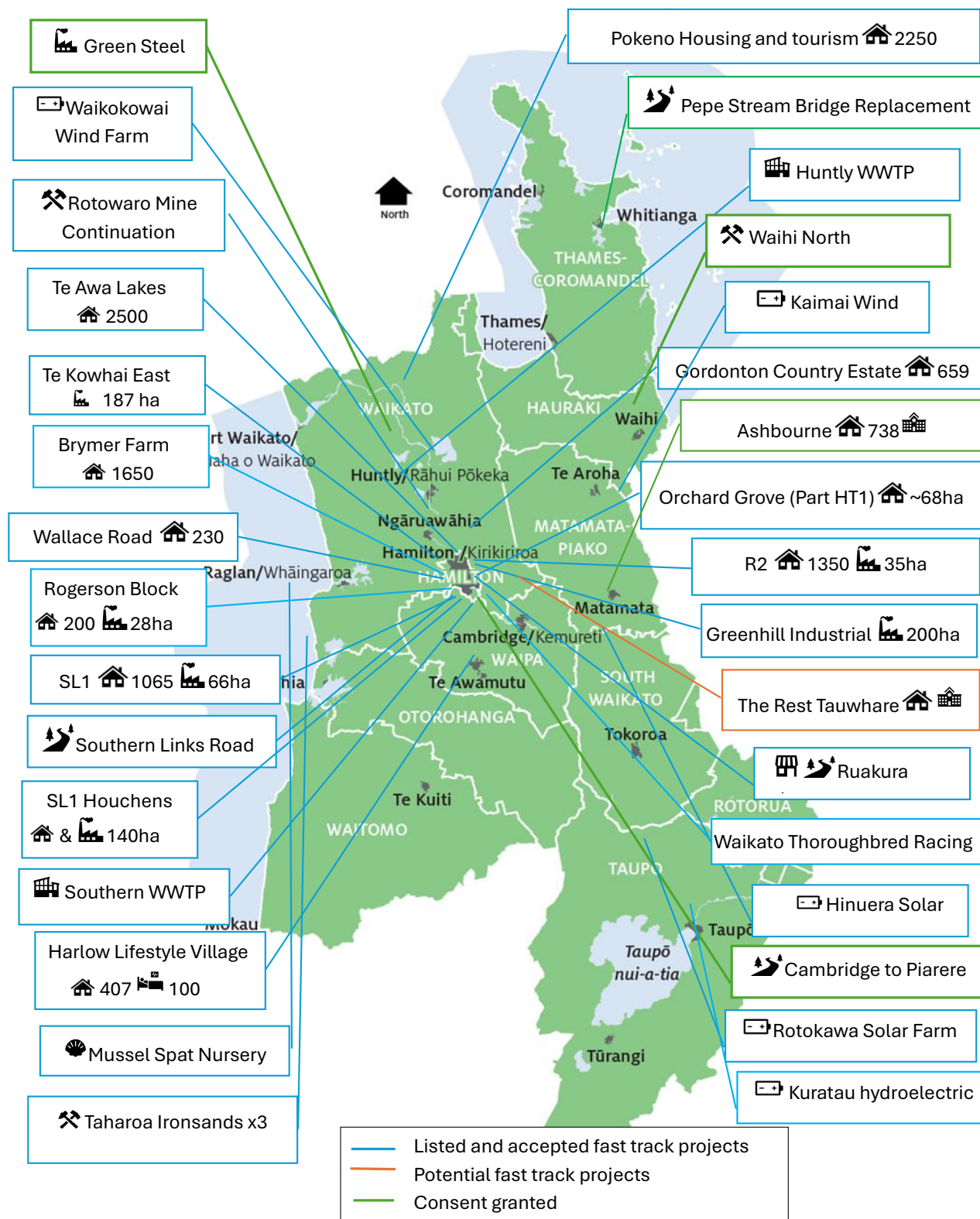
Central government proposals - upcoming processes

Process	What is it?	Current status
Biosecurity Amendment Bill	Bill to give effect to any policy decisions to modernise this legislation. Previously submitted on a discussion document in December 2024.	Expected in 2026.
Local Government Legislation Amendment Bill (title TBC)	Bill to give effect to policy decisions around rate-capping, simplifying LG and potentially other items from the 'forward work programme'.	Policy announcements on 1 December. Legislation not expected until the third quarter of 2026.

Other relevant processes - upcoming

Process	What is it?	Current status
Review of Te Ture Whaimana o te Awa o Waikato	Te Ture Whaimana is the primary direction setting document for the Waikato River and activities within its catchment and was reviewed in 2011 with no amendments made. Under the Waikato-Tainui Raupatu Claims (Waikato River) Settlement Act 2010, clause 19, the review of Te Ture Whaimana is to be initiated no later than 10 years from the previous review. Therefore, this is the first major review of Te Ture Whaimana since it was established more than 10 years ago as a key part of the River Settlement.	Workshops have been held with WRA, Councillors and WRC staff to provide initial feedback. It is likely that formal comment will be sought first half next year.

Waikato Region current and proposed Fast Track projects August 2026



File No: 25 07 00
Document No: 37281262
Enquiries to: Katrina Andrews



9 July 2026

Waipā District Council
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Te Awamutu 3840
Attn: Proposed Private Plan Change 31 Submission

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Waikato Mail Centre
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Dear Sir/Madam

Waikato Regional Council Submission to Proposed Private Plan Change 31 – Te Awamutu T4 Growth Cell to the Waipā District Plan

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the Proposed Private Plan Change 31 – Te Awamutu T4 Growth Cell to the Waipā District Plan. Please find attached the Waikato Regional Council's submission regarding this plan change. This submission was formally endorsed under delegated authority on 9 July 2026. Waikato Regional Council looks forward to being involved in further discussion on this subject.

Should you have any queries regarding the content of this document please contact Katrina Andrews, Senior Policy Advisor, Strategic and Spatial Planning directly on (07) 8590 929 or by email Katrina.Andrews@waikatoregion.govt.nz.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tracey May".

Tracey May
Director Science, Policy and Information

HE TAIAO MAUIRORA HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT
HE ŌHANGA PAKARI STRONG ECONOMY
HE HAPORI HIHIRI VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

Waikato Regional Council submission to Proposed Private Plan Change 31 – Te Awamutu T4 Growth Cell to the Waipā District Plan**9 July 2026****Introduction**

1. Waikato Regional Council (WRC) appreciates the opportunity to make a submission to Proposed Private Plan Change 31 – Te Awamutu T4 Growth Cell to the Waipā District Plan (PPC31). WRC's primary interest is in relation to the Waikato Regional Policy Statement (WRPS). District plans, including plan changes such as this one, are required to give effect to the WRPS under s75(3)(c) of the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA).
2. WRC has approved Proposed WRPS Change 1 - National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020 and Future Proof Strategy Update (WRPS Change 1) to become operative on 15 July 2026. Therefore, the plan change will also need to give effect to the provisions of WRPS Change 1.
3. Our submission seeks to ensure that a strategic and integrated approach is taken to the zoning of land for urban development and that the proposed rezoning is supported by sufficient information and evidence in accordance with the relevant higher-order policy documents under the RMA, including the WRPS.
4. Council neither supports nor opposes the plan change. However, the following submission highlights areas where we recommend further assessment, as well as recommended additions to proposed provisions. In particular, we consider further assessment is required to understand sequencing and the links to urban form and transport, better determination of the potential ecological effects stemming from the plan change, and understanding potential flood hazard impacts. This further assessment should inform amendments to the proposed structure plan and provisions to ensure effects are appropriately quantified and addressed.

Sequencing, urban form and transport

5. WRC acknowledges that the T4 Growth Cell is currently zoned Deferred Residential and is identified for future urban development post-2035 in the Waipā District Plan. As the plan change proposes to bring forward the timing of development of this growth cell indicated in the Future Proof Strategy 2024 and Waipā District Plan, the proposal represents an out-of-sequence development.
6. Method UFD-M49 and APP13 Criteria A of WRPS Change 1 are relevant to the plan change. The Section 32 Evaluation for the proposed plan change provides sufficient assessment against most of Criteria A, however we note that the application does not include evidence that the plan change meets Criterion A(A) - *"That the development would add significantly to meeting a demonstrated need or shortfall for housing or business floor space, as identified in a Housing and Business Development Capacity Assessment or in council monitoring"*. We recommend this be considered further in Waipā District Council's assessment of the proposed plan change.
7. We support the proposed use of residential intensification areas on the structure plan and associated rules to ensure minimum dwelling densities are achieved for the plan change area. This gives effect to Policy UFD-P12 of WRPS Change 1 relating to density targets for the Future Proof area.
8. We also support the inclusion of the walking and cycling connections shown on the proposed structure plan, and the Commercial Overlay areas and associated rules that provide for a limited range of small-scale commercial activities to meet the day-to-day needs of residents of the plan change area.

9. These aspects of the proposed plan change will promote compact development and support multi-modal transport outcomes and connectivity across the site and to the existing Te Awamutu urban area. This aligns with Development Principle i. within APP11 of the WRPS, which promotes compact urban form, design and location.

Relief sought

- a. Provide further consideration of the proposed plan change in relation to WRPS Change 1 APP13 Criterion A(A).
- b. Retain the proposed use of residential intensification areas and associated rules to ensure minimum dwelling densities are achieved for the plan change area.
- c. Retain walking and cycling connections on the proposed structure plan.
- d. Retain the Commercial Overlay areas and associated rules that provide for a limited range of small-scale commercial activities to meet the day-to-day needs of residents of the plan change area.

Long-tailed bats

10. Long-tailed bats are a Threatened - Nationally Critical species present in the Waipā area. Potential habitat for long-tailed bats exists on the plan change site, however no surveys have been undertaken to inform the proposed plan change.
11. Section 2.1.4 of the Ecological Impact Assessment (EIA) provided as Appendix E to the plan change application states that *“Given the acknowledged presence of long-tailed bats nearby, but the lack of maternity roost trees within the site, dedicated acoustic surveys were not undertaken”*. It is unclear how this conclusion was reached, as the EIA does not indicate that any visual assessments of trees were conducted.
12. We note the EIA recommends that rules or standards could be included in the plan change requiring a site-specific bat survey and the preparation and implementation of a Bat Management Plan, however, such rules have not been included in the proposed plan change.
13. Rather than deferring a site-specific survey and development of mitigation measures to a later stage of the process, as recommended in the EIA, we consider that bat surveys should be undertaken prior to any decision on the proposed plan change. This would inform understanding of whether the site provides roosting, foraging or commuting habitat for long-tailed bats and any current use of the site by bats. The results of the surveys should then inform further assessment of potential effects of the proposed plan change, including any loss of potential roost trees, loss of foraging or commuting habitat, and other effects of urban rezoning such as disturbance from artificial lighting.
14. The further ecological impact assessment should then be used to inform any recommended avoidance, remediation and mitigation measures, to give effect to the National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity 2023 (NPS-IB) and the WRPS (Ecosystems and indigenous biodiversity chapter). This may include amendments to the proposed structure plan for protection of significant bat habitat or to provide habitat connectivity and/or the addition of new objectives, policies, rules or assessment criteria to manage effects on bats and their habitat. This should include a requirement to prepare a Bat Management Plan for the plan change area.

Relief sought

- a. Undertake surveys to inform understanding of whether the site provides roosting, foraging or commuting habitat for long-tailed bats and any current use of the site by bats, and inform further assessment of ecological effects of the proposed plan change.
- b. Use the further ecological impact assessment to amend the proposed structure plan and plan change provisions to appropriately manage effects on bats and their habitat, in accordance with the NPS-IB and WRPS.

Freshwater values

15. We consider the EIA has several key limitations in relation to freshwater values and recommend further assessment to ensure effects on freshwater species are appropriately addressed. This is discussed in relation to various sections of the EIA below.

Freshwater fish survey and interpretation

16. The fish sampling reported in the EIA was limited to three eDNA samples, and limited sampling details are provided. Without information on the number of replicates, water volume filtered, filter size, whether samples were taken from flowing or static water, sequence reads per species, or replicate hits, some species may have been missed.
17. The eDNA samples were collected in winter, which is suitable for mudfish sampling but less effective for many other species. We consider that undertaking summer sampling would strengthen the results. Reliance on eDNA alone also means key ecological metrics are missing. Although eDNA is useful for detecting presence or absence, it provides limited information on abundance, population structure, breeding status, and habitat use.
18. The EIA identifies that black mudfish, an At Risk – Declining species, have been detected within the proposed plan change area. This is significant because wetland and stream habitats supporting this species have become highly fragmented across the Waikato.
19. As noted above, eDNA sampling is useful for presence/absence detection but provides limited additional information, so important details about the mudfish population at this site remain unknown. We recommend the site should be surveyed using Gee Minnow traps to determine the extent of mudfish presence. This method is commonly used in development projects where mudfish are present.
20. Overall, we consider a clearer understanding of mudfish and other species on the site is needed to better inform fish values, protection requirements, and mitigation measures for the proposed plan change.

Ponds

21. The EIA states that as the ponds and drains on the plan change site have been determined artificial, they are considered to be of negligible ecological value. We do not consider this conclusion can be reached without pond sampling.
22. The key question is whether the ponds contribute to freshwater values, ecological function, or species habitat. The National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020 (NPS-FM) places emphasis on indigenous biodiversity, habitat of indigenous fauna, and ecosystem health. A waterbody is not automatically of negligible ecological value because it was excavated. We note there are also many examples of eels and mudfish occurring above apparent fish-passage barriers, particularly where connection occurs during flood flows.
23. The EIA tends to separate streams, wetlands, and ponds into discrete units; however, these are likely to function as a connected freshwater network. If the ponds provide refuge, feeding habitat, or

breeding habitat, they contribute to the overall freshwater system and should not be dismissed due to being considered “artificial”.

24. If the ponds are confirmed as fish habitat or seasonal refuge habitat, they should be retained where practicable. If they are removed and fish are present, mitigation for lost habitat should be provided for.

Effects on wetlands

25. We acknowledge the revisions to the proposed structure plan to reduce impacts on streams and wetlands, and we support the approach of protecting as many of the natural hydrological features from development as possible. We consider, however, that there are some remaining areas of uncertainty in relation to effects on wetlands, freshwater habitat loss and proposed compensation.
26. We recommend further assessment be carried out of potential effects of proposed roading on the ecological integrity of Wetland 1. This should include consideration of effects on connectivity and resilience, including effects of noise, light, pollutants and vehicle movements on the functioning of the wetland. Hydrological assessment is also needed to demonstrate that roads will not influence the hydrology or functioning of the remaining wetland parts.
27. The proposed permanent loss of natural inland wetland extent does not align with Policy 6 of the NPS-FM. The EIA states that “*Whilst it is considered the BCM [Biodiversity Compensation Model] provides sufficient evidence to demonstrate the required effects management can be achieved within the site so that there would be no net loss of biodiversity values, or extent of natural wetlands*”. However, we note that the BCM output refers to creation of low value wetland and restoration of already low and high value existing wetlands; we therefore recommend this be clarified. We also recommend further information and clarification is needed about how additional natural inland wetlands are proposed to be established.

Freshwater habitat loss and mitigation

28. The proposed loss of 0.35ha of wetland would mean the permanent loss of black mudfish habitat, wetland invertebrate habitat, wetland hydrological functions, and edge habitat associated with Stream 1. The EIA proposes restoration of retained wetlands, creation of 2.12ha of new wetland habitat, riparian planting, and enhancement works, and predicts an 84.9% net gain outcome (using the BCM).
29. We consider there are potential issues and uncertainties around the proposed compensation, as created wetlands are not equivalent to existing wetlands. There is uncertainty because created wetlands take years to mature, black mudfish colonisation is not guaranteed, hydrology may not replicate existing conditions, and ecological function can take decades to develop. The compensation model is therefore highly dependent on optimistic restoration assumptions.

Altered wetland hydrology, stormwater and long-term risk

30. The EIA assumes wetlands can be retained and enhanced while urban development enabled by the proposed plan change proceeds around them. However, urban development frequently alters groundwater recharge, runoff timing, water-table fluctuations, and hydroperiod (duration of inundation). Even where wetland area remains mapped as “wetland”, ecological function can decline if wetlands dry more often, water levels become flashy (rise and fall rapidly), predation risk increases, and summer refugia disappear.
31. The EIA acknowledges a transition from agricultural contaminants toward urban contaminants such as zinc and copper. Stormwater wetlands can remove most urban contaminant material, but we note that performance often declines if maintenance is poor. As a result, fish habitat quality, invertebrate communities, and wetland vegetation may gradually deteriorate. This may not be detectable immediately following development.

32. Overall, the combination of natural wetland loss, major hydrological changes, and stormwater inputs raises the risk of permanent loss of black mudfish habitat and, ultimately, black mudfish from the plan change area.

Relief sought

- a. Provide further assessment of potential effects of proposed roading on the ecological integrity of Wetland 1.
- b. Provide further clarity in relation to the proposed compensation for loss of natural inland wetland and how additional natural inland wetlands are proposed to be established.
- c. Undertake additional targeted fish investigations sufficient to determine population size, distribution, habitat utilisation and long-term viability of black mudfish and other indigenous fish species across the site prior to any decision on the proposed plan change, to inform further assessment of ecological effects of the proposed plan change.
- d. Use the further ecological impact assessment to amend the plan change to appropriately manage effects on freshwater fish species.
- e. If the investigations determine that the black mudfish population in the plan change area is significant, add a rule requiring a species-specific Black Mudfish Management Plan to be prepared and implemented.
- f. The Black Mudfish Management Plan should also require retained wetlands and compensation wetlands to be legally protected and managed in perpetuity.

Other considerations

Flood hazard management

33. The flood modelling undertaken as part of the plan change application provides sufficient information to inform the plan change process. We note, however, that future modelling/assessment could identify significant changes to the earthworks and subdivision layout to ensure flood hazard and stormwater management is undertaken appropriately.
34. We also note that the North Island Main Trunk culverts are a key flood/stormwater control for the proposed development. It is therefore important that KiwiRail remains involved to inform detailed design as appropriate.

Acid sulphate soils

35. WRC's preliminary regional Acid Sulphate Soils Probability spatial layer¹ indicates a high probability of acid sulphate soil occurrence in the western part of the site.
36. We note that when disturbed (e.g. excavated) and exposed to oxygen, acid sulphate soil materials can produce sulfuric acid which can become mobilised following rainfall. Damage to infrastructure (e.g. concrete) and impacts on the environment (e.g. aquatic ecosystems) can result. The potential for the occurrence of acid sulphate soils at the site should be considered in relation to the proposed development and appropriate guidance for their management² followed if identified on site.

¹ See [Waikato region acid sulfate soils preliminary risk assessment | Waikato Regional Council](#) for the Technical Report.

² [Managing acid sulfate soils | Waikato Regional Council](#)

Further information and hearings

WRC **wishes to be heard** at the hearings for Proposed Private Plan Change 31 – Te Awamutu T4 Growth Cell to the Waipā District Plan in support of this submission and is prepared to consider a joint submission with others making a similar submission.

WRC **could not** gain an advantage in trade competition through this submission.

Submitter details

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I could not gain an advantage in trade competition through this submission.

I am not directly affected by an effect of the subject matter of the submission that:

- (a) does not adversely affect the environment; and
- (b) does not relate to trade competition or the effects of trade competition.

7 PUBLIC EXCLUDED ITEMS

RESOLUTION TO EXCLUDE THE PUBLIC

HE TŪTOHUNGA | RECOMMENDATION:

That in accordance with section 48(1) of the *Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987* (Act) and the interests protected by section 6 or 7 of that Act, the public is excluded from the following parts of this meeting. The general subject of the matters to be considered while the public is excluded, the reason for passing this resolution in relation to each matter, and the specific grounds for excluding the public are set out below:

Meeting item no. and subject	Grounds for excluding the public	Reason for excluding the public
7.1 - Update on Environment Court Proceedings for Proposed Plan Change 1 and Proposed Waikato Regional Coastal Plan Appeals	s7(2)(g) of the Act - To maintain legal professional privilege	section 48(1)(a)(i) of the Act - the public conduct of the relevant part of the proceedings of the meeting would be likely to result in the disclosure of information for which good reason for withholding would exist under section 6 or section 7

8 KARAKIA WHAKAMUTUNGA

Unuhia, unuhia

Unuhia mai te uru tapu nui

kia wātea, kia mā mā,

te ngākau, te tinana, te hinengaro,

i te ara takatū

Koia rā e Rongo

e whakairia ake ki runga

kia tina! TINA!

Haumi ē, hui ē, TĀIKI ē!

Draw on, draw on,

Draw on to the supreme sacredness

To clear, to free

our heart, body and soul

Our pathway prepared

Lo, there is peace

suspended high above

manifest!

draw together!

Affirm!