



Cabinet Economic Policy Committee

Summary

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First National Conservation Policy Statement: Policy Approvals

Portfolio	Conservation
Purpose	This paper seeks agreement: - to policy proposals (the attached proposal document) for the first National Conservation Policy Statement (NCPS); - for DOC to publish the attached proposals document to support the Environment Committee's consideration of the Conservation Acts (Land Management and Other Matters) Amendment Bill (the Bill).
Previous Decisions	In 2025, Cabinet agreed to a suite of changes to reform conservation land management [CAB-25-MIN-0213.01; CAB-25-MIN-0236 and CAB-25-MIN-0334.01]. Drafting is underway on the Bill to implement these changes.
Proposal	The changes introduced through the Bill include making it easier to approve economic activities on conservation land through a streamlined and updated planning framework consisting of a NCPS and a single layer of area plans. A suite of tools and policies for the first NCPS is proposed including: - a list of low impact activities that will be pre-approved for a concession or exempt from requiring a concession (the list of exempt and pre-approved activities is detailed in Appendices 2 and 3 of the proposal document); - establishing a clear and enabling zoning framework for appropriate economic activities (the activities are detailed in Appendix 4, and details on area plans are provided in pages 7-10 of the proposal document); - simplifying the rules that govern activities on conservation land and removing unnecessary restrictions (this includes clarification of the approach to private accommodation on conservation land, and when Crown activities should be exempt from district resource management rules). The Minister intends that DOC publish the proposal document on the NCPS policies, to support the Environment Committee's consideration of the Bill. Approval is sought for DOC to consult on the proposal document in parallel with the select committee process, and to start drafting the NCPS to enable it to progress within desired timeframes.

Impact Analysis	A Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) is attached . A quality assurance panel with members from DOC and MfE consider that the RIS partially meets the Quality Assurance criteria.
Financial Implications	None from this paper.
Legislative Implications	The Bill has a category 3 priority on the Legislation Programme 2026 (to be passed before the 2026 General Election).
Timing Matters	It is proposed that the first NCPS will come into effect as soon as possible following the passing of the Bill.
Communications	Announcements will be made when the Bill is introduced.
Consultation	Paper prepared by DOC, MCH, PCO, MfE (Environment and Climate Change and RMA Reform), Treasury, MoJ, LINZ, DIA (Local Government), MCH (Sport and Recreation), MoT, MPI (Agriculture, Biosecurity, Oceans and Fisheries), MHUD, MBIE (Energy and Resources and Economic Growth), MfR, Treaty Settlements and TPK were consulted. CLO and DPMC were informed. The Minister indicates that all Ministers were consulted.

The Minister of Conservation recommends that the Committee:

Background

- 1 note that in June 2025, Cabinet approved changes to modernise conservation land management and invited the Minister of Conservation (the Minister) to report back on policies for the National Conservation Policy Statement (NCPS) which will unlock economic activity within appropriate constraints [CAB-25-MIN-0213.01];

Policies for the National Conservation Policy Statement

- 2 note that Cabinet agreed in June 2025 that the NCPS will describe “exempt” and “pre-approved” activities to enable faster processing of concessions [CAB-MIN-0213.01];
- 3 agree that the NCPS include the list of exempt and pre-approved activities (along with the terms and conditions for each activity) detailed in the proposal document as Attachment 1 to the paper under ECO-26-SUB-0030 (the proposal document);
- 4 agree that the NCPS require the mapping of “visitor zones” detailed in the proposal document, to describe recreational and tourism values;
- 5 agree that the NCPS includes guidance about where the set of activities in the proposal document are likely to be consistent with visitor zones and statutory land classifications;

- 6 note that in June 2025, Cabinet agreed that the NCPS will specify what content an area plan can include to support faster and more consistent interpretation of area plans during concession decisions [CAB-MIN-0213.01];
- 7 agree that the NCPS will specify that area plans can include the content listed in the proposal document;
- 8 agree that the NCPS will specify that area plans cannot include area-specific policies, including limit-setting policies or concession conditions;
- 9 note that the limitation in paragraph 8 above would not apply to area plan provisions for visitor amenities areas to enable those plans to take a spatial planning approach to development within that zone [CAB-MIN-0213.01];
- 10 agree that the NCPS maintains limited discretion for authorising new private accommodation and clarify that existing private accommodation may be authorised under certain conditions, including where the structure has or has had a valid authorisation at some stage, and where the structure meets all relevant requirements relating to its use for accommodation purposes (or can meet those standards within a certain timeframe specified in the concession agreement);
- 11 agree that the NCPS require a condition to be placed on all private accommodation concessions that demonstrably limits the ongoing use of the structures for private accommodation purposes and that this includes a maximum term of 30 years, with no right of renewal;
- 12 note that in June 2025, Cabinet agreed that the NCPS and area plans can define Crown activities that will be exempt from district resource management rules where they do not have a significant adverse effect beyond the boundary of conservation land [CAB-25-MIN-0213.01];
- 13 agree that the activities listed in Appendix 5 of the proposal document can be exempt from district resource management rules, where conditions of the exemption are met;
- 14 agree to the other policies to guide management of specific activities as detailed in the proposal document;

Preparing the National Conservation Policy Statement

- 15 note that drafting for the Conservation Acts (Land Management and Other Matters) Amendment Bill (the Bill) is underway based on Cabinet's June, July and September 2025 decisions, and that the Bill will be ready for introduction to the House in April 2026;
- 16 note that the NCPS will no longer be incorporated into the Bill;
- 17 agree that the Department of Conservation will publish the proposal document to support the Environment Committee's consideration of the Bill;
- 18 direct DOC to commence consultation on the NCPS proposal document, and to draft the first NCPS;
- 19 invite the Minister to report back to Cabinet on the final policies for the NCPS and draft NCPS;

- 20 authorise the Minister to make minor policy decisions for the NCPS proposals in line with the intent of the policy agreed to by Cabinet [CAB-25-MIN-0213.01];
- 21 authorise the Minister to make minor changes to the NCPS proposal document ahead of publication, in line with the overall policy outlined in the paper under ECO-26-SUB-0030.

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Committee Secretary

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