

Factsheet - Modernising Conservation Land Management

The Government wants to deliver the best possible experiences for New Zealanders on conservation land and achieve better outcomes for conservation.

The Government is modernising how conservation land is managed. Law change will unlock greater economic activity on public conservation land while protecting nature and our iconic landscapes.

Thousands of businesses operate on public conservation land, bringing in millions of dollars a year for local economies. We know businesses and community groups want shorter processing times for permits and other permissions. We want to build a system to deliver that.

A bill is now being drafted to give effect to these decisions. The Government plans to pass these changes into law before the end of the current parliamentary term in mid-2026.

The changes will streamline the system and bring greater flexibility by:

- Providing more certainty for business investment, with clearer updated rules and processes for granting concessions on conservation land
- Cutting red tape by allowing more types of activities to occur without needing a concession at all, or by providing the concession through a streamlined process
- Enabling more flexibility for the Department of Conservation (DOC) to exchange or dispose of conservation land where it makes sense from a conservation perspective
- Providing certainty about the government's Treaty obligations as they relate to conservation.



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

**Te Kāwanatanga
o Aotearoa**
New Zealand Government

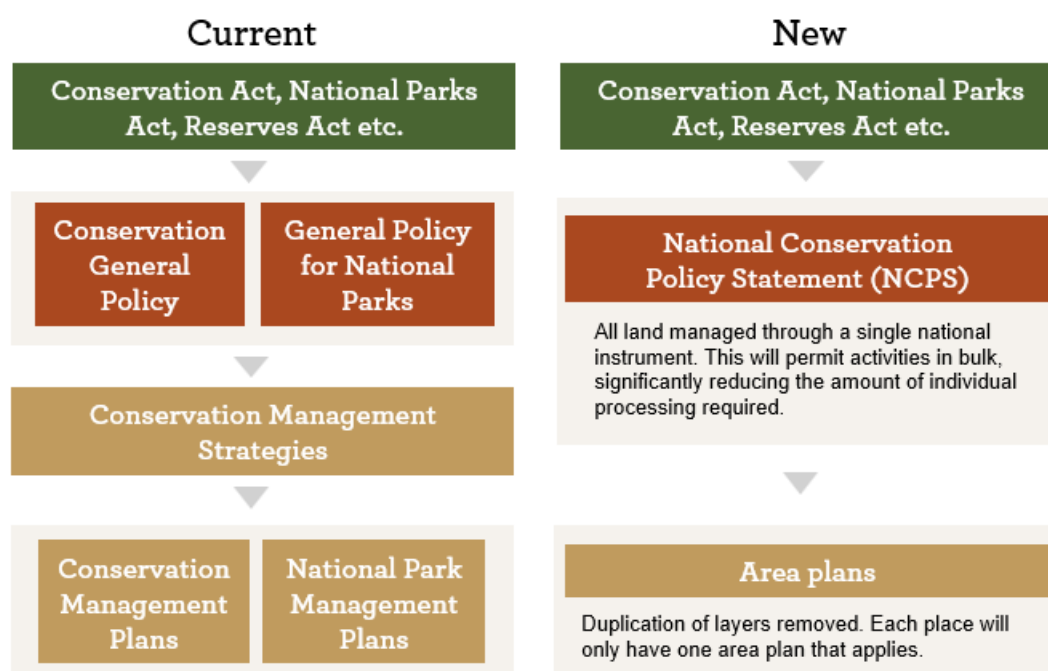
Management planning: Creating a more streamlined, purposeful and flexible system

The management planning system sets the rules for concessions (the permissions for activities on conservation land). These rules are outdated, complicated and hard to change, delaying processing of concessions.

Currently, approximately 80% of planning documents are overdue for review, some by more than 15 years. There is too much uncertainty for applicants, decision makers and Te Tiriti o Waitangi / Treaty of Waitangi partners (Treaty partners).

Changes will:

- Enable a broader range of activities to take place on conservation land
- Streamline and simplify management planning by revising national policies and creating a single layer of area plans



Concession processes: Setting clear process requirements and timeframes

The concessions system is no longer fit for purpose. It's expensive, slow and out of date. Bespoke analysis is undertaken for every single concession application, even for lower-risk similar activities.

Fixing how we do concessions will make it easier for Treaty partners and businesses to work with DOC. This will provide greater experiences and services to New Zealanders and support our regional communities. This will in turn support DOC to deliver better results for conservation.

We know business and community groups want shorter processing times for permissions, permits and concessions. We're going to deliver that by:

- Taking some applications out of the system by exempting or pre-approving some activities
- Setting new statutory timeframes for DOC to make decisions
- Streamlining public notification and reconsideration steps in the process
- Applying more standard pricing, terms and conditions
- Allowing longer terms for concessions that provide critical infrastructure, or based on the useful life of fixed assets and structure.

Competitive allocation of concessions

Competitive allocation of concessions can ensure fairness and drive innovation in services.

Under current law, DOC generally has to take a 'first in, first served' approach to concession applications. This makes it hard to use contestable processes to allocate new opportunities.

Changes will:

- Make it easier to contestably allocate new concession opportunities among multiple operators where demand is high and supply is limited (e.g. beehive permits or aircraft landing permits in particular locations)
- Clarify that Treaty principles do not require concessions to be made contestable.

The Government will make further decisions on whether there are any situations in which concessions must or must not be contestable.

Land exchange and disposal: Making the system more flexible, where it makes sense for conservation

The bar is high to exchange and dispose of conservation land, even where it could deliver greater conservation benefit. It is possible to enable more flexibility where it makes sense for conservation.

Changes will support better maintenance of conservation land by allowing:

- Land exchanges where it makes sense from a conservation perspective
- Land disposals when it is good for overall conservation management, subject to tests to protect conservation values and other factors such as cultural and historic significance and public access.

Approximately 40% of conservation land (the most precious parts) will not be eligible for land exchange and disposal under the new settings, including national parks, nature reserves, wilderness areas, Ramsar sites and World Heritage Areas.

Treaty of Waitangi obligations: Providing clarity around obligations

Currently, there is ambiguity about how to give effect to Treaty principles, which is required by section 4 of the Conservation Act. This has resulted in slow processes and decision-making in the conservation system.

Changes will provide clarity on what is required to give effect to Treaty principles by:

- Stating what is and isn't required to give effect to Treaty principles in relation to statutory planning, concessions, land exchanges and disposals, and amenities areas
- Adding requirements around procedural steps, new statutory roles for iwi and Treaty partners, and requirements to consider Treaty rights and interests where these are currently not explicit so that the expected standard to meet is clear for all
- Retaining section 4, and adding a descriptive clause linking to new requirements in law
- Making it clear that meeting the new requirements means complying with section 4 in relation to the relevant process or decision
- Clarifying that section 4 does not require concessions to be contestable – this is an area of ambiguity that results in major delays and legal risks in significant concession processes.



Treaty settlements will be upheld

Many Treaty settlement commitments provide for Treaty partner involvement in planning and concessions processes in the conservation system. Engagement with iwi and post-settlement governance entities is underway to discuss how to uphold the intent of Treaty commitments and takutai moana (marine and coastal area) rights in the context of these changes.

Treaty settlements will be upheld. Decisions on how specifically this will occur are yet to be made.

Amenities areas: A new way to allow for recreational and public facilities

Amenities areas are small areas on conservation land suitable for greater development in the form of visitor facilities and services. They play an important function: they show where tourism facilities can go to help visitors, while limiting the spread of buildings into the surrounding pristine environment. The current settings for amenities area are not fit to manage the growth in visitors across conservation land.

Changes will enable better strategic planning for tourism growth in conservation areas by:

- Broadening the types of conservation land in which amenities areas can be established under specific conservation criteria
- Creating an efficient process for establishing amenities areas, with a test to balance protecting and preserving conservation values in the wider area.

