environment SOUTHLAND
REGIONAL COUNCIL
Te Taiao Tonga

Notice is hereby given of the

Strategy & Policy Committee - Rautaki me Mahere

Wednesday 18 November 2026 at 1:00 pm

Environment Southland Council Chamber, 220 North Road, Invercargill
26/SP/87

Committee Members

Cr Lyndal Ludlow (Chair)
Cr Eric Roy
Cr Paul Evans
Cr Alastair Gibson
Mr Stewart Bull *(Mana Whenua)*
Cr Jon Pemberton
Cr Maurice Rodway
Cr Geoffry Young
Cr Roger Hodson
Cr David Rose
Cr Ewen Mathieson
Cr Phil Morrison
Chair Jeremy McPhail (*ex officio*)

Agenda

This meeting will be livestreamed through YouTube and will be available to view on our website. https://www.es.govt.nz/about-us/live-stream

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Hayley Fitchett

General Manager Strategy & Regulation

RECOMMENDATIONS IN COUNCIL REPORTS ARE NOT TO BE CONSTRUED AS COUNCIL POLICY UNTIL ADOPTED BY COUNCIL

Terms of Reference

Strategy and Policy Committee | Rautaki me Mehere

Council assigns to the Committee responsibilities from time-to-time, and the Committee provides advice and reports back to Council on the following:

1. Provide governance oversight of the development, review, and proposed changes to regional and organisational Strategies, Policies, Plans, and By-laws, including new legislative and regulatory framework requirements and the Long-Term Plan;

2. Provide governance oversight into the monitoring the efficiency and effectiveness of regional and organisational Strategies, Policies, Plans, and By-laws;
3. the appointment of hearing committees or panels to hear submissions on regional Policies, Plans and By-laws;

4. Provide governance oversight into consultation, engagement and partnership by the Council, including as related to regional and organisational Strategies, Policies, Plans and By-laws;
5. Provide governance oversight into science and monitoring activities and information/findings, including as used to inform Council positions at a governance level and as inputs to Council's Strategies, Policies, Plans and By-laws[1]. This also includes the receipt, and if necessary, endorsement of, scientific studies/reports; receipt of SOE reports and/or score cards;

6. The compiling of submissions to Government and other entities as needed (if the Council timetable does not provide for same);

7. Oversee Climate Change and Hazards strategic direction and resulting Science and Strategy, Policy and Planning programme of work, including integration into the Long-Term Plan and implementation of the new legislative and regulatory framework; and
8. Receive regular reporting from the Integrated Catchment Management Committee and the Regulatory Committee to consider insights, feedback and views on the efficiency and effectiveness of the Council's Strategies, Policies, Plans and By-laws.

9. Provide regular reporting to the Finance and Performance Committee, Risk and Assurance Committee and the Council on the efficiency and effectiveness of the functions listed in 1-7 above, and provide insights, feedback and views as required on the same.

Chair: Lyndal Ludlow
Deputy Chair: Ewan Mathieson
Members: Cr Paul Evans, Cr Alastair Gibson, Cr Roger Hodson, Cr Ewan Mathieson, Cr Phil Morrison, Cr Jon Pemberton, Cr David Rose, Cr Eric Roy, Cr Geoffrey Young, Cr Maurice Rodway, Chair Jeremy McPhail (ex officio), Mana Whenua Representation
Quorum: Seven
Approved by Council at the Ordinary Meeting of Council on 9 February 2026.

1 Noting that the Integrated Catchment Management Committee will have similar role, but with respect to science information related to operational activity

1 Welcome I Haere mai

2 Apologies I Ngā pa pouri

At the time of the agenda closing, no apologies had been received for this meeting.

3 Declarations of interest

Councillor Mathieson – Noting to the Committee, and recorded in the minutes, that he is a member of the Waiau Working Party. This is relevant for the paper today on the Waiau, as members of the Working Party will be joining staff at the table for this agenda item.

4 Public forum, petitions and deputations I He huinga tuku korero

At the time of the agenda closing, no public forum, petitions or deputations were received for the meeting.

5 Confirmation of minutes I Whakau korero

Attached are the minutes from the Strategy & Policy Committee meeting held 1 October 2026.

Minutes of the Strategy & Policy Committee - Rautaki me Mahere

Held at Environment Southland, 220 North Road, Invercargill
Thursday, 1 October 2026 at 10:00 am

Present:

Cr Lyndal Ludlow (Chair)
Cr Eric Roy
Cr Alistair Gibson
Cr Paul Evans
Cr Jon Pemberton
Cr Roger Hodson (*via Zoom*)
Cr Jeremy McPhail (ex officio)
Cr Phil Morrison
Cr Maurice Rodway
Cr Ewen Mathieson (*from 10.38 am*)
Cr Geoffrey Young (*from 10.10 am*)
Mr Stewart Bull (Mana Whenua Appointee)

In Attendance:

Mr Stephen Hall (Chief Executive)
Donna Ferguson (Acting General Manager Strategy & Regulation)
Karen Wilson (General Manager Science)
Liz Devery (Regional Planning Manager)
Shana Lee (Team Leader Policy)
Anke Habgood (Senior Advisor Strategy)
Rebekah Frampton (Principal Biosecurity Officer)
Emma Sadler (Senior Policy Analyst)
Nicole White (Policy Analyst)
John Drewry (Acting Science Integration Manager)
Upul Karunarathne (Team Leader Strategy and Organisational Planning)
Lindsay Roberts (Strategy and Policy Assistant)
Deborah O'Donnell (Governance Advisor) - minutes

1 Welcome I Haere mai

Cr Ludlow welcomed everyone to the meeting and opened the meeting with a whakataukī:
"Te toia te haumatea. Nothing can be achieved without a plan, workforce, and a way of doing things."

2 Apologies I Ngā pa pouri

Resolved:

Moved Cr McPhail, seconded Cr Roy that apologies be accepted on behalf of Cr David Rose (for absence) and Cr Ewen Mathieson (for lateness).

Carried

3 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest made by councillors.

4 Public forum, petitions and deputations I He huinga tuku korero

There were no public forum, petitions or deputations presented at the meeting.

5 Confirmation of minutes I Whakau korero

Resolved:

Moved Cr Rodway, seconded Cr Roy that the minutes of the Strategy and Policy Committee meeting held on 20 August 2026 be confirmed as a true and accurate record.

Carried

6 Notification of extraordinary items/urgent business I He panui autaia hei totoia pakihi

There were no extraordinary items or urgent business tabled for inclusion in the agenda.

7 Questions I Patai

There were no questions asked by the councillors.

8 Chairman and councillors reports I Ngā purongo-a-tumuaki me ngā kaunihera

At the time of the agenda closing, no Councillor Reports were received for the meeting. The Chair did not present a report.

9 Reports

9.1 Climate Change and Community Resilience Portfolio update

The purpose of this item was to provide an update on the progress being made by the Regional Climate Change Working Group (RCCWG), as part of the Climate Change and Community Resilience Portfolio.

Ms Habgood took the report as read. The following points were noted:

- a letter was recently sent to all partner agencies updating them on the progress of the Regional Climate Change Working Group workstream.
- the most recent Regional Climate Change Working Group workshop was outlined, with the focus being on generating information to inform agencies in time for integration into the Long-Term Plan (LTP);

- the Chair noted a long-standing advocacy for climate change to be embedded as a standing consideration within the council's strategic framework, suggesting that the LTP discussions may be an appropriate time to formalise this;
- it was noted that the regional spatial planning process represented another avenue for integrating climate change as a central consideration;
- staff confirmed that conversations about resourcing and funding implications were currently underway, noting that the current LTP cycle was the appropriate point to address those resourcing questions;
- legislative reform uncertainty was acknowledged as a complicating factor, particularly around what may be required of regional councils and territorial authorities through the regional spatial planning process going forward.

Resolved:

Moved Cr Rodway, seconded Cr Morrison that the Strategy and Policy Committee receive the report Climate Change and Community Resilience.

Carried

9.2 Draft Feedback on National Wilding Conifer Management Strategy

To advise Council on the key aspects of the proposed feedback to the Draft New Zealand Wilding Conifer Management Strategy 2027-2047 and receive formal approval to reply.

Ms Lee introduced the item, noting that staff were seeking input from Councillors in regard to the draft feedback document that was attached to the report. Feedback received today would be incorporated into the report and emailed to councillors before it was finalised.

The submission deadline was 9 October 2026, with a published strategy expected in early 2027.

The strategy's main focus areas included long-term direction for decisions, transition towards enduring stewardship, greater equity and diversification of funding resources, and improved cooperation around monitoring.

The feedback from Councillors was:

- strengthen language throughout;
- replace the final lines of the submission conclusion with stronger wording stating that ongoing failure to address seed sources will result in significant costs to ratepayers in future;
- add stronger messaging around Douglas fir specifically;
- add importance of communication with landowners encouraging proactive removal of unsuitable species.

Councillors asked staff to report back on the impact of the submission once the strategy was finalised.

A question was raised about whether regulatory relief provisions could apply in reverse -- that is, whether councils could seek relief for costs imposed upon them by activities carried out by others. Staff advised they would look into this.

Resolved:

Moved Cr McPhail, seconded Cr Evans that the Strategy and Policy Committee:

1. receive the report – Draft Submission on Wilding Confer Management Strategy; and

2 approve the attached feedback on the Draft New Zealand Wilding Conifer Management Strategy 2027-2047 on the basis that the feedback will be finalised after incorporating any feedback from this meeting and making any necessary editorial refinements prior to sending.

Carried

9.3 Make Rule 24 of the Southland Water and Land Plan operative

To note that the Environment Court has issued its tenth interim decision confirming the drafting of Rule 24 of the Southland Water and Land Plan and for this committee to make a recommendation to Council to make that provision operative under Clause 20 of Schedule 1 of the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA).

Ms Devery explained that this was an administrative step to end a long and complex process, the final approval would be requested at the next Ordinary Meeting of Council. It was noted that the Rule was already being treated as operative as it had been through the full court process to get to this stage.

Resolved:

Moved Cr Gibson, seconded Cr Young that the Strategy and Policy Committee:

1. receive the report making Rule 24 of the Southland Water and Land Plan Operative;

2. recommend to full Council to make Rule 24 of the proposed Southland Water and Land Plan operative on 2 November 2026 in accordance with Clause 20(1) of Schedule 1 of the Resource Management Act 1991 and direct staff to take necessary steps to meet associated statutory requirements.

Carried

9.4 Natural Hazards Science Update

This report provides an update on the natural hazard and climate adaptation science work programme as required by the Te Mahere Wā-Roa 2024-2034 Long Term Plan.

Ms Wilson spoke to the report, noting that the item was being provided to the Committee for information, to satisfy a requirement of the Long-term Plan. She explained that pages 33 and 34 of the agenda had been included in error, as the information in these pages was already included in the body of the item.

Key points from the report were:

- regional climate change projections and data applications had reached key milestones and work was now underway;
- the natural hazards knowledge assessment was progressing, with outputs expected within the next few months, methodology development was ongoing;
- Councillors raised the importance of identifying communities most at risk so that targeted communication could be provided;
- a question was raised about whether national tools are being used to process science information. Staff confirmed the focus is on standard national tools;
- the hydrodynamic coastal flood monitoring work was noted as ongoing.

Resolved:

Moved Cr Morrison, seconded Cr Mathieson that the Strategy and Policy Committee receive the report – Natural Hazards Science Update.

Carried

9.5 LTP Update

The report provided an update on the development of the 2027-2037 Long-term Plan and summarised responses received from the pre-engagement survey.

Mr Karunarathne took the report as read. There was no discussion or questions.

Resolved:

Moved Cr Evans, seconded Cr Pemberton that the Strategy and Policy receive the report Long-term Plan update.

Carried

9.6 Government Legislation & Policy Monitor Report

To provide an overview of the current and upcoming national policy changes, with a focus on those expected to have a significant impact on Environment Southland's operations and the Southland region.

Ms White provided a brief outline of the matters covered in the report. Key points were:

- the Planning Act had now received royal assent – implementation planning was underway;
- National Policy Direction - staff currently were currently developing a draft submission which would be circulated to Councillors as soon as possible. Submissions close on 16 October 2026;
- local government reform – decision on Head Start proposals had been delayed;
- rates capping bill passed its first reading, consultation being undertaken to 1 December, with a report to come back early next year.

Councillors raised concern about the rates capping proposal and its potential impact on the council's ability to implement its LTP work programme.

Councillors expressed frustration at the volume and pace of legislative change and the pressure it placed on regional councils. It was suggested that regional councils had not always communicated their value effectively to central government and the public, and that this was something the council should address.

A question was raised about the diagram on page 35 regarding the RMA bill timeline and local government reform pathway. It was noted that much remained uncertain and that some matters should not be treated as settled.

The Chair requested that staff prepare a one-page summary of how the transition period for legislative implementation will overlay with the council's current work programme.

Resolved:

Moved Cr Morrison, seconded Cr Pemberton that the Strategy and Policy Committee receive the

report – Policy Monitor.

Carried

9.7 Strategy, Policy and Regional Planning Group Update

This report is an update on the work being carried out by the strategy and policy, and regional planning teams.

Ms Devery took the report as read.

Discussion arose around the development of a strategy for stock effluent disposal sites across Southland and New Zealand Transport Association's (NZTA) involvement. NZTA had previously asked for funding for projects at short notice and, without provision for these projects in the Long-term Plan or Annual Plan it was difficult for the council to agree to fund them. It was noted that the recent decline of a request from NZTA was due to lack of earmarked funding, not a lack of recognition of need.

There was further discussion regarding the funding of stock effluent sites, with some Councillors being opposed to rates being used to fund these. There was a suggestion that the sites should be funded through the government fuel tax, or by the industry.

Cr McPhail took this opportunity to thank Ms Devery for her assistance at a recent meeting in Gore, discussing the Gore flood risk and implementation of the Gore District Plan, noting there had been strong community interest in receiving information about natural hazard risks and guidance from Environment Southland.

Resolved:

Moved Cr Morrison, seconded Cr Young that the Strategy and Policy Committee receive the report – Strategy, Policy & Regional Planning Group Update

Carried

9.8 Update on Councillor Requests and Actions

This report captures Councillor requests and actions that have occurred during Strategy and Policy Committee meetings and provides an update on how these are being responded to.

The following two questions were raised at the August meeting:

What was the total cost of securing the Rule 24 Environment Court Decision – Ms Devery explained that due to the complex nature of the process it was not possible to differentiate the costs for a particular Rule, as a number of these were being considered over the same period. The predominant costs were legal support, planning and scientific evidence support, and for Rule 24 they amounted to approximately $300,000. These were external costs only, staff costs and communications with the Ministry were not included.

Who is going to lead follow-up work regarding ownership, maintenance responsibilities and potential MOU arrangements for the Tuatapere Domain floodbanks – staff involved in this were not present at today's meeting and this question was deferred to the next meeting.

Cr Morrison asked for a summary of the costs of responding to elevated nitrate groundwater in Gore, Lumsden and other localities, since 1 July 2024 and for the subsequent financial year. He noted that council should be tracking these costs going forward, as this issue will consume more resources in the future.

Resolved:

Moved Cr McPhail, seconded Cr Evans that the Strategy and Policy Committee receive the report – Update on Councillor Requests and Actions.

Carried

10 Extraordinary/urgent business I Panui autia hei totoia pakihi

There were no extraordinary items or urgent business tabled for inclusion in the agenda.

11 Public excluded business I He hui pakihi e hara mo te iwi

Resolved:

Moved Cr Morrison, seconded Cr Pemberton in accordance with section 48(1) of the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987 and the particular interest/s protected by section 7 of that act, that the public be excluded from the following parts of the proceedings of this meeting, namely:

11.1 Waiau – Council Direction on Approach

The general subject matters to be considered while the public is being excluded, the reason for this resolution in relation to the matter, and the specific grounds for excluding the public, as specified by Section 48(1) of the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987 are set out below:

GENERAL SUBJECT MATTER	REASON FOR PASSING THE RESOLUTION	GROUNDS UNDER S.48(1)
11.1 Waiau Council Direction on Approach	To protect the privacy of natural persons, including that of deceased natural persons.	S.7(2)(a)

Carried

11.36-11.46 am – a break was taken at this time.

13 Termination

There being no further business, the Chair closed the meeting at 12.25 pm.

6 Notification of extraordinary items/urgent business I He panui autaia hei totoia pakihi

7 Questions I Patai

No questions received prior to the agenda being sent.

8 Chairman and councillors reports I Ngā purongo-a-tumuaki me ngā kaunihera

At the time of the agenda closing, no Councillor Reports were received for the meeting.

9 Reports

9.1 Submission on Maari Field Marine Consent Application

Report by: Shana Lee, Team Leader Policy
Approved by: Hayley Fitchett, General Manager Strategy and Regulation
Report Date: 18 November 2026

Purpose

To seek the Strategy and Policy Committee's endorsement of Environment Southland's draft submission on OMV New Zealand Limited's application for marine consent for ongoing operations at the Maari Field, and input to inform refinement of the submission before it is presented to Council for approval on 9 December 2026.

Summary

OMV New Zealand Limited has applied for marine consent for ongoing operations at the Maari Field in the South Taranaki Bight.

The draft submission focuses on ensuring appropriate safeguards are in place to manage the potential effects of a significant marine pollution incident on Southland, particularly Fiordland. It does not take a position on whether the consent should be granted.

Submissions close on 10 December 2026. Following Committee feedback and final refinements, the submission will be presented to Council on 9 December 2026 for approval before lodgement.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Strategy and Policy Committee **resolve to:**

1 Receive the report – Submission on Maari Field Marine Consent Application.
2 Endorse the general direction of the draft Environment Southland submission on OMV New Zealand Limited's Maari Field marine consent application.
3 Provide any feedback on the draft submission for staff to incorporate, together with any necessary editorial and technical refinements, before the final submission is presented to Council for approval on 9 December 2026.

Background

OMV New Zealand Limited has applied to the Environmental Protection Authority for marine consent to enable ongoing operations at the Maari Field in the South Taranaki Bight.

While the Maari Field is a considerable distance from Southland, it appears that there is a risk that a significant spill could potentially affect the Fiordland coastline and wider Southland coastal marine area. Environment Southland's submission therefore focuses on ensuring that potential effects on Southland are appropriately recognised and managed.

The submission does not take a position on whether the consent should be granted. Instead, it seeks appropriate safeguards relating to:

- prevention and mitigation of spill risks;
- consideration of credible worst-case spill scenarios;
- timely notification and coordination with Environment Southland, mana whenua and other response agencies;

- adequate resources, specialist equipment and logistical arrangements to respond in remote areas such as Fiordland;
- integration with New Zealand's national marine oil spill response framework; and
- appropriate consent conditions to support environmental protection, preparedness and ongoing review.

The submission also highlights the significant environmental, cultural, recreational and economic values of Fiordland and the wider Southland coastal environment. A major marine pollution event could affect sensitive ecosystems, customary values and practices, tourism and other activities dependent on the coastal environment.

Submissions close on 10 December 2026. Feedback from the Strategy and Policy Committee will be incorporated, together with any necessary editorial and technical refinements, before the final submission is presented to Council on 9 December 2026 for approval and subsequent lodgement.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi Implications
The draft submission recognises the cultural significance of Fiordland and the wider Southland coastal marine area to Ngāi Tahu and associated rūnanga, including customary practices and cultural values that could be affected by marine pollution.

It seeks early and effective coordination with mana whenua and other response agencies, including identification and prioritisation of culturally sensitive areas in spill response planning.

This aligns with Environment Southland's partnership commitments under the Charter of Understanding and supports meaningful mana whenua involvement in matters that could affect culturally significant environments and resources.

Fit with strategic framework

OUTCOME	CONTRIBUTES	DETRACTS	NOT APPLICABLE
Managed access to quality natural resources	X		
Diverse opportunities to make a living	X		
Communities empowered and resilient	X		
Communities expressing their diversity			X

Attachments

1. 2026 11 04 Draft Environment_Southland_Maari_Field_Submission [**9.1.1** - 4 pages]

Draft Environment Southland Submission

OMV New Zealand Limited – Maari Field Marine Consent Application

To: Environmental Protection Authority (EPA)

Submitter: Environment Southland

Subject: Protection of the Fiordland and Southland Coastal Marine Area

1. Introduction

Environment Southland appreciates the opportunity to submit on OMV New Zealand Limited's application for marine consent associated with ongoing operations at the Maari Field in the South Taranaki Bight.

While the Maari Field is located a considerable distance from the Southland region, Environment Southland has an interest in ensuring that potential environmental effects extending beyond the immediate operational area are adequately assessed and managed.

Of particular concern is the potential for an oil spill or other adverse operational event to affect the Fiordland coastline and wider Southland coastal marine area, as identified in the spill trajectory modelling referenced in Appendix I of the application.

Environment Southland's submission focuses on the adequacy of risk mitigation measures, oil spill preparedness, response capability, and protection of the region's significant environmental, cultural and maritime values. It is also important to note that these values are vital to support a tourism sector which is important to the Fiordland and Southland economy.

2. Oil Spill Risk and Coastal Impacts

Environment Southland notes and recognises the oil spill modelling included in Appendix I of the application. While appreciating that the applicant has gone to considerable effort to provide such data, Environment Southland considers that the potential for oil contamination to reach the Southland coastline warrants appropriate consideration, notwithstanding the distance between the Maari Field and the region.

The Fiordland coastline is particularly sensitive due to its remote location, ecological significance, challenging maritime conditions, and limited accessibility for emergency response operations.

Environment Southland requests that the EPA ensures that:

- Oil spill trajectory modelling adequately considers credible worst-case discharge scenarios, including adverse weather, seasonal variations and oceanographic conditions.
- Potential impacts on Fiordland and the wider Southland coastline are specifically addressed in the assessment of environmental effects.
- Appropriate preventative measures and operational safeguards are established to minimise the likelihood of a significant spill.

- Contingency arrangements provide for an effective response should oil or other contaminants threaten the coastal marine environment of Southland and other regions.

Environment Southland considers that the assessment of risk must account not only for the likelihood of an incident but also the potentially significant consequences for remote and environmentally sensitive coastlines.

3. Oil Spill Response Preparedness

From a maritime oil spill response perspective, Environment Southland emphasises the importance of clear operational responsibilities, early notification and effective coordination between the operator, Maritime New Zealand and affected regional authorities.

The geographical isolation of much of Fiordland presents significant challenges for deploying personnel, equipment and vessels in the event of a major marine pollution incident.

Environment Southland therefore seeks assurance that:

- Comprehensive and current marine oil spill contingency arrangements are maintained for Maari Field operations.
- Maritime New Zealand and potentially affected regional councils are included in appropriate emergency planning and notification arrangements.
- Response resources and specialist equipment can be mobilised promptly to remote Southland coastal locations.
- The operator's emergency response arrangements are appropriately integrated with New Zealand's national marine oil spill response framework.
- Regular exercises and reviews demonstrate the effectiveness of response arrangements, including scenarios involving potential impacts on the Fiordland coastline.

Environment Southland considers that responsibility for managing the consequences of an operational incident should remain appropriately with the operator and relevant national response agencies, without placing unreasonable operational or financial burdens on affected regional authorities.

4. Environmental, Cultural and Econmic Significance of Fiordland

Fiordland and the wider Southland coastal marine area contain internationally significant natural environments, sensitive marine ecosystems and areas of considerable cultural importance to Ngāi Tahu and associated rūnanga.

The coastal marine environment supports important biodiversity, customary practices, commercial and recreational activities, and cultural values that could be adversely affected by marine pollution. As referred to above, these values are also important socio-economically in supporting the tourism sector in the region, and the Fiordland / Te Waipounamu region has international significance, so maintenance of these values is also important to New Zealand on the world stage.

Environment Southland recognises the importance of protecting these values and maintaining meaningful engagement with mana whenua when considering potential environmental impacts and response arrangements.

Environment Southland also acknowledges its ongoing working relationship with the Fiordland Marine Guardians and the collective commitment to the sustainable management and protection of the Fiordland marine environment.

The potential consequences of a significant oil spill for Fiordland's marine ecosystems, cultural values and coastal communities reinforce the need for robust preventative safeguards and effective response planning.

5. Requested Safeguards and Consent Conditions

Environment Southland notes the proffered conditions as provided by the applicant in Appendix A. While these are noted, Environment Southland requests that, should the EPA determine that marine consent may be granted, appropriate and enforceable conditions are imposed to ensure:

1. Risk prevention: Robust operational safeguards, maintenance, monitoring and incident prevention measures are maintained throughout the consent period.
2. Spill contingency planning: Oil spill response arrangements explicitly consider the potential for contamination to reach Fiordland and the wider Southland coastline.
3. Early notification: Environment Southland and other relevant agencies receive timely notification of incidents that could reasonably threaten the Southland coastal marine area.
4. Response coordination: Clear arrangements are established for coordination between the operator, Maritime New Zealand, Environment Southland, mana whenua and other relevant response agencies.
5. Response capability: Adequate resources, equipment, logistical support and funding arrangements are available to support a response in remote and environmentally sensitive coastal areas.
6. Ongoing review: Spill trajectory modelling, contingency plans and operational risk assessments are reviewed when material changes occur and updated to reflect relevant new information.
7. Environmental protection: Response planning incorporates the identification and prioritisation of sensitive ecological, cultural, and coastal areas potentially affected by an incident.

6. Conclusion

Environment Southland recognises that the Maari Field is geographically removed from the Southland region. However, the potential for an oil spill or other adverse operational event to affect the Southland coastline establishes a legitimate regional interest for Environment Southland to engage in the application.

Environment Southland's primary concern is ensuring that appropriate safeguards, risk mitigation measures and effective response arrangements are established to protect the Fiordland and wider Southland coastal marine environment.

Given the ecological, -cultural and socio-economic significance of Fiordland, together with the considerable logistical challenges associated with responding to marine pollution in remote coastal areas, Environment Southland considers that a precautionary and well-coordinated approach is warranted.

Environment Southland seeks assurance that any consent granted will include appropriate and enforceable conditions addressing the potential consequences of an incident extending into the Southland region, including effective preventative measures, timely notification, adequate response capability and protection of the region's environmental and cultural values.

Environment Southland requests that these matters be taken into account by the decision-making authority when considering the application.

DRAFT

9.2 Draft Submission on the Rates Capping Bill

Report by: Nicole White, Policy Analyst
Approved by: Hayley Fitchett, General Manager Strategy and Regulation
Report Date: 18 November 2026

Purpose

To present a draft submission on the Local Government (Rates Capping) Amendment Bill for councillor feedback prior to finalisation and lodgement.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Strategy and Policy Committee **resolve to:**

1 Receive the report - 2026 11 03 Draft Submission on Rates Capping Bill and 2026 09 08 Policy Brief on Local Government (Rates Capping) Amendment Bill.

2 Approve the lodgment of the submission, subject to its refinement to incorporate feedback from this meeting and any necessary editorial amendments, with retrospective approval to be sought from the full Council at its next available meeting.

Summary

The Government is consulting on the Local Government (Rates Capping) Amendment Bill, which proposes a nationally prescribed rates capping framework applying to local authorities throughout New Zealand. Submissions close on 1 December 2026.

A draft submission has been prepared for councillor consideration and is attached to this report. The draft submission has been informed by Environment Southland's previous submission on the rates target proposal, internal review of the Bill as well as the perspectives of the broader regional sector.

Supporting background information is provided in the attached policy brief, which includes:

- An overview of the Bill and its key provisions.
- Discussion of potential implications for Environment Southland.
- Context for the positions taken in the draft submission.
- Appendix 1, which compares key themes raised in Environment Southland's earlier submission on the rates target proposal against the Bill and summarises Environment Southland's current assessment.

The draft submission acknowledges that the Bill represents an improvement on the earlier rates target proposal in several respects, particularly through the introduction of a more developed exemption framework and greater detail regarding implementation and oversight arrangements. However, it maintains that significant concerns remain regarding the application of the framework to regional councils.

The draft submission raises concerns relating to:

- Regional council responsibilities, statutory obligations and cost pressures.
- Funding increasing Government directed responsibilities and reforms.
- Flood protection, river management, climate resilience and public safety infrastructure.
- Biosecurity programmes and emerging pest incursions.
- Long-term planning and investment certainty.
- Local democratic decision-making.
- Operation of the rates price formula.

Councillors are invited to provide feedback on the draft submission. Following the meeting, staff will incorporate feedback and undertake editorial changes before finalising and lodging the submission.

Background

The Local Government (Rates Capping) Amendment Bill proposes a framework intended to constrain future rates increases through a nationally prescribed rates capping regime.

Environment Southland previously submitted on the Government's rates target proposal which informed development of the Bill. While the Bill responds to a number of concerns raised during that consultation process, staff consider that several issues remain relevant to regional councils and warrant further advocacy through the select committee process.

The attached policy brief provides:

- An overview of the Bill and its key provisions.
- Discussion of potential implications for Environment Southland.
- Comparison of the Bill against themes raised in Environment Southland's previous submission on the rates target proposal.
- Context for the positions taken within the draft submission.

Consultation and Next Steps

Staff have sought targeted input from relevant subject matter experts across the organisation. Feedback received to date has assisted in strengthening several aspects of the draft submission, particularly in relation to:

- Flood protection, river management and climate resilience.
- Biosecurity and the importance of early intervention.
- Long-term planning certainty.
- Increasing statutory responsibilities and Government directed obligations.
- The relationship between funding constraints and long-term resilience outcomes.

Additional subject matter expert feedback is still being sought and may result in further refinements to the draft submission.

Following the Strategy and Policy Committee meeting:

- Councillor feedback will be incorporated into the draft submission.
- Staff will continue to consider and incorporate subject matter expert feedback where appropriate.
- A final review of the submission will be undertaken.
- A final submission will be circulated to councillors approximately one week prior to lodgement.
- The submission will be lodged with the Finance and Expenditure Committee by 1 December 2026.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi Implications

The Local Government (Rates Capping) Amendment Bill does not appear to contain an explicit Te Tiriti provision in its current form. Its main Te Tiriti implications are therefore indirect, through the effect that funding constraints could have on councils' ability to deliver functions affecting Māori interests.

Fit with strategic framework

OUTCOME	CONTRIBUTES	DETRACTS	NOT APPLICABLE
Managed access to quality natural resources	X		
Diverse opportunities to make a living	X		
Communities empowered and resilient	X		
Communities expressing their diversity	X		

Attachments

1. 2026 11 03 Draft Submission on Rates Capping Bill [**9.2.1** - 6 pages]
2. 2026 09 08 Policy Brief on Local Government (Rates Capping) Amendment Bill [**9.2.2** - 6 pages]

Our Reference:

1 December 2026

Finance and Expenditure Committee
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

Environment Southland's Submission on the Local Government (Rates Capping) Amendment Bill

Introduction

1. The Southland Regional Council, trading as Environment Southland, thanks the Finance and Expenditure Committee for the opportunity to submit on the Local Government (Rates Capping) Amendment Bill. As a local authority governed by the Local Government Act 2002, Environment Southland relies on rates revenue to service the Southland community across its statutory mandates. Consequently, Environment Southland is keen to ensure that any changes to New Zealand's rating system enable councils to continue delivering essential services, infrastructure investment and long-term environmental, resilience and public safety outcomes.
2. Environment Southland acknowledges the Government's objective of improving accountability and providing greater certainty for ratepayers. The Council also recognises that the Bill goes some way to addressing several concerns raised during consultation on the earlier rates target model, including providing greater detail regarding implementation, exemptions, oversight arrangements and future review of the framework. However, Environment Southland remains fundamentally concerned that the Bill continues to rely on a nationally prescribed rates capping framework that does not adequately accommodate the responsibilities, funding pressures and long-term investment needs of regional councils. While the Bill introduces a more developed exemption regime than the earlier proposal, Environment Southland remains unconvinced that the framework demonstrates it can appropriately balance rates affordability with councils' statutory obligations, resilience responsibilities, long-term stewardship functions and increasing Government directed obligations.
3. Environment Southland supports strong accountability, transparency and responsible financial management. Local authorities are already subject to extensive consultation, audit, reporting and financial management requirements under the Local Government Act 2002, which are intended to provide transparency, accountability and community oversight of council decision-making. Environment Southland is concerned that, while existing accountability requirements continue to expand through legislative and policy reform, regional councils are simultaneously facing greater constraints on their ability to fund and deliver those responsibilities. The Council remains unconvinced that the Bill has demonstrated why existing accountability mechanisms are insufficient or how regional councils will continue to fund growing statutory obligations within the proposed framework. Environment Southland stresses the importance that any rates capping framework is sufficiently tested to prove it preserves councils' ability to fulfil their statutory obligations, respond to local circumstances and make investment decisions that reflect community priorities and long-term needs.
4. In summary, the key points of this submission are:
    - The Bill applies a common rates capping framework across all local authorities despite significant differences in statutory responsibilities, risk profiles, funding pressures and service delivery obligations.

- The Bill does not adequately address how regional councils are expected to fund increasing statutory responsibilities and Government directed obligations within the proposed framework.
- Flood protection, river management, climate resilience and natural hazard mitigation activities require stronger recognition within the framework, particularly given their critical public safety and resilience functions.
- Biosecurity programmes and emerging pest incursions require greater flexibility and funding certainty than is currently provided.
- Councils require greater certainty to plan, fund and deliver long-term infrastructure, environmental management, resilience, and spatial and strategic planning outcomes.
- The Bill shifts greater influence over local funding decisions towards a regulator and the Minister, reducing local flexibility to respond to local priorities, risks and circumstances.
- Further testing is required to demonstrate that the rates price formula operates fairly across different local authority circumstances, including regional councils.

The Bill does not adequately recognise regional council responsibilities, statutory obligations and cost pressures

5. Environment Southland is concerned that the Bill applies a common rates capping framework across all local authorities despite substantial differences in statutory responsibilities, service delivery obligations, asset portfolios, funding arrangements and exposure to environmental and natural hazard risks. While territorial authorities and regional councils both perform essential public functions, regional councils undertake responsibilities that differ significantly in their nature, funding drivers and risk profiles, including flood protection and river management, natural hazard management, biosecurity, environmental monitoring and compliance, emergency management, and implementation of national direction and other government reforms. Many of these functions arise from legislative obligations or risk management responsibilities and cannot simply be deferred, reduced or avoided without potentially increasing future costs, reducing community resilience or compromising environmental outcomes.

6. Environment Southland is concerned that the framework does not sufficiently recognise that many regional council expenditure pressures are outside councils' direct control. Councils are required to respond to legislative change, implement Government directed reforms, maintain critical public safety infrastructure, manage environmental risks and respond to emerging challenges such as climate adaptation and biosecurity threats. At the same time, councils continue to face increasing costs associated with infrastructure delivery, construction and contractor pricing, environmental monitoring programmes and resilience investment. Environment Southland notes that many local government cost drivers are influenced by infrastructure, maintenance, construction and service delivery costs that do not necessarily align with broader consumer inflation measures. The Council is concerned that a nationally prescribed framework may not adequately accommodate these expenditure drivers or the diverse circumstances of different local authorities.

7. Environment Southland acknowledges that the Bill is an improvement on the earlier rates target model and that consideration of council cost pressures when reviewing future target ranges responds, in part, to concerns previously raised by the Council. However, the Bill does not explicitly require the Minister or a regulator to recognise the particular responsibilities and expenditure drivers of regional councils when establishing future target ranges or assessing exemption applications. The Council remains concerned that the framework has not been sufficiently tested against the circumstances of regional councils and that, without greater recognition of these factors, it may constrain councils' ability to meet statutory obligations, invest in resilience and respond effectively to future challenges. More broadly, a framework that applies consistently

across local government should also be capable of recognising the different responsibilities, cost pressures and investment drivers faced by different types of local authorities.

Recommendation:

- ***Amend the Bill to require the Minister and a regulator to explicitly consider regional council statutory responsibilities, Government directed obligations, natural hazard management functions and associated cost pressures when establishing future target ranges and assessing exemption applications.***

Flood protection, river management and climate resilience require improved recognition within the framework

8. The Bill excludes drinking water, wastewater and stormwater services from the rates capping framework but does not provide equivalent recognition for flood protection and river management activities. Environment Southland considers this distinction difficult to justify. Flood protection infrastructure is critical public safety infrastructure that protects communities, productive land, homes, businesses, critical lifelines and economic activity from significant flood risk. Similar to water infrastructure, these assets require ongoing investment, maintenance, renewal and adaptation to ensure they continue to provide effective levels of service and community protection. Environment Southland notes that excluding water services from the framework significantly reduces the impact of rates capping on territorial authorities, whereas regional councils do not have access to a comparable mechanism for many of their most significant infrastructure and public safety responsibilities.
9. Southland's floodbanks, drainage schemes, pump stations and river management activities require long-term investment and asset management programmes that extend well beyond annual budgeting cycles. Environment Southland manages approximately 1,400 kilometres of drainage infrastructure and flood resilience assets valued at more than $460 million. These assets protect communities, productive land, businesses, transport networks and critical infrastructure from significant flood risk, and play an important role in supporting community safety, economic resilience and continuity of essential services. Environment Southland is concerned that the framework does not adequately recognise the nature of these long-term investment programmes, particularly where proactive investment is required to reduce future risks rather than in response to a specific hazard event or infrastructure failure. Examples include the Mataura River Flood Resilience Project and critical flood management investments such as the Stead Street Pump Station redevelopment, which seek to reduce future flood risk and improve community resilience before a major event occurs.[1][2] As climate change contributes to more frequent and severe extreme weather events and evolving hazard risks, maintaining and upgrading flood resilience infrastructure is more important than ever to reduce future recovery costs and support community resilience.
10. Environment Southland acknowledges that the Bill provides exemption mechanisms intended to accommodate infrastructure investment. However, the Council remains concerned that uncertainty regarding future target ranges and access to exemptions may discourage proactive resilience investment or create additional complexity for long-term asset management planning. While the exemption framework may provide a pathway for councils to seek relief after a significant event or where specified criteria are met, Environment Southland is concerned that the framework places greater emphasis on responding to adverse events rather than enabling councils to proactively reduce future risks. Effective flood protection and river management rely on sustained investment before disasters occur. Delaying investment increases exposure to

[1] Environment Southland, *Mataura River Flood Resilience Project*.
[2] Environment Southland, *Stead Street Pump Station;* New Zealand Government, *New pump station protects regional airport from flooding*.

flooding, reduces community resilience, increases future recovery costs and ultimately places greater burdens on ratepayers and communities.

Recommendations:

- ***Exclude flood protection and river management rates from the rates price calculation, consistent with the Bill's treatment of water services, or alternatively provide specific recognition for flood protection, river management and resilience infrastructure within the exemption framework.***
- ***Clarify that long-term flood resilience, river management, climate adaptation and natural hazard mitigation investment can be appropriately accommodated within the framework, including through the assessment of Type 2 exemptions for prudent financial management.***
- ***Establish a criteria-based legislative pathway for councils to access relief from the rates cap for investment in flood protection, river management, climate resilience and other statutory public safety infrastructure.***

Biosecurity programmes require greater recognition within the rates capping framework

11. Environment Southland remains concerned that the Bill still does not adequately recognise the funding pressures associated with biosecurity management and pest eradication programmes. Regional councils play a significant role in preventing, managing and responding to biosecurity threats, including pest plant and animal programmes, eradication initiatives and responses to emerging incursions. Effective biosecurity management often relies on rapid intervention and sustained investment to prevent pests becoming established and spreading further.
12. Environment Southland's operational experience demonstrates that delaying intervention can significantly increase future management costs and reduce the likelihood of successful eradication. Once a pest becomes established and widespread, management often shifts from eradication to ongoing containment and long-term control, creating an enduring financial and operational burden. This issue is particularly relevant for threats such as wilding conifers, where early intervention and sustained investment can avoid substantially larger control costs in the future and help protect indigenous biodiversity, productive land and landscape values. The Council considers that many biosecurity programmes share characteristics with long-term infrastructure investment, where upfront expenditure is necessary to avoid substantially greater future costs and impacts.
13. Environment Southland raised concerns regarding biosecurity funding flexibility during consultation on the earlier rates target model. While the Bill provides general exemption mechanisms, it does not specifically recognise biosecurity eradication programmes, emerging pest incursions or regionally significant biosecurity responses. The Council is concerned that a framework which does not adequately recognise these obligations may reduce councils' ability to respond effectively when urgent intervention is required and may discourage the early investment needed to avoid larger future management costs and achieve long-term environmental, economic and community benefits.

Recommendations:

- ***Provide specific recognition of biosecurity eradication programmes, emerging pest incursions and regionally significant biosecurity responses within the exemption framework.***
- ***Require the Minister, when establishing or reviewing future target ranges, and a regulator, when assessing exemption applications, to have regard to biosecurity obligations, long-term cost avoidance, and the environmental, economic and community outcomes associated with early intervention and pest eradication programmes.***

Councils require certainty and flexibility to make long-term investment decisions

14. Environment Southland supports the inclusion of exemption mechanisms and acknowledges that the Bill represents an improvement on the earlier rates target model. However, significant uncertainty remains regarding how councils are expected to plan, fund and deliver long-term infrastructure, environmental and resilience programmes within the framework. Councils are required to prepare Long-Term Plans, Infrastructure Strategies, Asset Management Plans and Financial Strategies, all of which rely on reasonable assumptions regarding future funding arrangements. The Council is concerned that future target ranges, regulator decisions and exemption outcomes may not be sufficiently certain at the time key planning and consultation decisions are made.

15. This issue is particularly relevant given the significant reforms and responsibilities being placed on local government. Regional councils are expected to plan for and deliver climate adaptation, natural hazard resilience, environmental management, implementation of national direction and the new resource management system. Many of these responsibilities are being expanded through legislative and policy reform and require long-term investment, planning and capability development. The Council is not satisfied that the Bill adequately addresses how regional councils are expected to fund these growing obligations. Funding constraints may encourage the deferral of investment and expenditure that would otherwise improve resilience, reduce future costs and support long-term environmental, infrastructure and community outcomes. The Bill risks undermining this approach, as in many cases early intervention and proactive investment are more cost-effective than responding to problems after they have emerged.

16. Environment Southland is concerned that the Bill shifts decision-making authority away from locally elected representatives and communities towards regulator and Ministerial approval processes. While accountability is important, local authorities are democratically elected to balance affordability, service levels, statutory obligations and long-term investment needs through consultation and planning processes established under the Local Government Act. Environment Southland considers that decisions regarding these trade-offs should continue to be made primarily at the local level, except in genuinely exceptional circumstances.

    Recommendations:

    - ***Require the Minister, when establishing or reviewing future target ranges, to explicitly account for new statutory responsibilities, Government directed reforms, and legislative or regulatory obligations imposed on local authorities.***
    - ***Provide greater certainty regarding future target ranges and exemption processes to support effective long-term infrastructure, environmental management, resilience, and spatial and strategic planning.***
    - ***Ensure the framework preserves local democratic decision-making by limiting regulator intervention to exceptional circumstances and recognising that decisions regarding rates, service levels and investment priorities should primarily be determined through local planning and consultation processes.***

The rates price formula requires further testing across different council circumstances

17. Environment Southland remains concerned that the practical implications of the rates price formula are not yet fully understood across the diversity of New Zealand local authorities. While the formula provides a relatively straightforward mechanism for measuring rates increases, its impacts may vary considerably depending on council circumstances, including rating structures, growth patterns, population trends, asset portfolios, statutory responsibilities and investment requirements.

18. This issue is particularly relevant for regional councils, which often have significantly different funding and expenditure profiles from territorial authorities. Regional councils are responsible for functions such as flood protection, biosecurity, environmental management and natural hazard resilience, many of which are driven by statutory obligations, environmental risks and long-term investment requirements rather than population growth or service demand alone. Environment Southland is concerned that a formula developed primarily around rates affordability may not adequately reflect these factors.

19. Environment Southland previously recommended that the rates target model be tested against a range of local authority circumstances, including lower-growth regional councils. While the Bill provides greater detail regarding the calculation methodology, the Council remains of the view that additional testing and analysis are required to demonstrate that the framework operates fairly and effectively across different council types. This is particularly important given the potential implications for long-term infrastructure investment, resilience outcomes and delivery of statutory functions. The Council is concerned that the formula may create unintended consequences for councils whose expenditure requirements are driven more by statutory obligations and risk management responsibilities than by growth in rating units.

    Recommendation:

    - ***Undertake further testing and modelling of the rates price formula across a range of council circumstances, including regional councils, lower-growth authorities, and councils with significant natural hazard, biosecurity, environmental management and resilience responsibilities.***

20. In Environment Southland's view, the Bill in its current form creates a significant risk that councils' ability to plan, invest and respond to emerging challenges may be constrained by centrally imposed funding limits that do not adequately reflect local circumstances, statutory responsibilities or long-term infrastructure needs.

21. Environment Southland strongly encourages the Committee to amend the Bill to ensure the framework adequately recognises regional council responsibilities, supports long-term resilience and infrastructure investment, preserves councils' ability to fulfil their statutory obligations and maintains appropriate local flexibility to respond to community priorities, risks and emerging challenges.

DRAFT

Policy Brief: Local Government (Rates Capping) Amendment Bill

Purpose

This policy brief provides an overview of the Local Government (Rates Capping) Amendment Bill and outlines potential implications for Environment Southland.

The brief is intended to assist councillors in considering Environment Southland's draft submission on the Bill.

Appendix 1 compares the key themes raised in Environment Southland's previous submission on the rates target proposal against the provisions of the Bill and summarises Environment Southland's current assessment.

Executive Summary

The Government has introduced the Local Government (Rates Capping) Amendment Bill, which would establish a nationally prescribed framework intended to constrain future rates increases by local authorities.

The Bill is intended to improve accountability, provide greater certainty for ratepayers and encourage fiscal discipline within local government.

Compared with the earlier rates target proposal, the Bill provides greater detail regarding implementation, exemption pathways, oversight arrangements and future review of the framework. It also provides additional flexibility through a more developed exemption regime.

However, significant concerns remain regarding the application of the framework to regional councils.

Environment Southland's responsibilities include flood protection and river management, biosecurity, natural hazard management, environmental monitoring, compliance activities and implementation of national direction. Many of these functions are driven by statutory obligations, public safety considerations and long-term risk management requirements.

Environment Southland remains concerned that the Bill does not adequately demonstrate how regional councils will continue to fund increasing statutory responsibilities, resilience requirements and Government-directed obligations within a framework that constrains future rates growth.

These concerns are reflected in the draft submission.

Background

The Local Government (Rates Capping) Amendment Bill establishes a framework through which future rates increases would be constrained by nationally prescribed target ranges.

The Bill is the result of the Government's earlier consultation on the proposed rates target model. Environment Southland submitted on that proposal and raised concerns relating to:

- Statutory obligations
- Infrastructure investment
- Flood protection and river management
- Biosecurity funding
- Local democratic decision-making
- Council cost pressures
- Operation of the proposed rates formula

The Bill addresses several concerns raised during consultation by providing greater detail regarding implementation, exemptions and review mechanisms. However, Environment Southland considers that many of the underlying concerns remain relevant.

Key Provisions of the Bill

- Establishes a target range of 2% to 4% annual rates price growth.

- Excludes rates and charges associated with water services.
- The target range applies to a council-wide “rates price” (a per-rating-unit average) rather than individual properties.
- Future target ranges may be amended through an Order in Council process following review and Ministerial recommendation.
- Introduces a statutory regulator responsible for monitoring compliance and administering exemptions.
- Requires future target ranges to be reviewed and set through an Order in Council process.
- Creates two permanent exemption pathways:
    - Exceptional circumstances exemptions (Type 1).
    - Prudent financial management exemptions (Type 2).
- Creates transitional exemptions for:
    - Significant capital works programmes.
    - Councils facing financial sustainability issues.
- Requires councils to incorporate compliance with the target range into future Long-Term Plans and Annual Plans.
- Transitional implementation begins in 2027, with mandatory compliance commencing from 2029/30.

Potential Implications for Environment Southland

Regional Council Responsibilities and Statutory Obligations

The Bill applies a common framework across local government despite significant differences in responsibilities, funding arrangements, expenditure drivers and risk profiles.

Environment Southland undertakes a number of functions that differ from those of territorial authorities, including:

- Flood protection and river management
- Natural hazard management
- Biosecurity programmes
- Environmental monitoring and compliance
- Emergency management activities
- Implementation of national direction and regulatory reform

Many of these activities arise from statutory obligations or risk management responsibilities and cannot easily be deferred or reduced without potentially increasing future costs, affecting resilience outcomes or compromising environmental outcomes.

Council Cost Pressures

Environment Southland continues to face increasing costs associated with infrastructure delivery, construction, contractor pricing, environmental monitoring programmes and resilience investment.

Many local government cost drivers are influenced by infrastructure, maintenance, construction and service delivery costs that do not necessarily align with broader consumer inflation measures.

The Bill requires consideration of council costs when future target ranges are reviewed. However, questions remain regarding the extent to which future target ranges will reflect the expenditure pressures faced by different council types.

Flood Protection, River Management and Climate Resilience

Flood protection and river management are among Environment Southland's most significant public safety responsibilities.

Environment Southland manages approximately 1,400 kilometres of drainage infrastructure and flood resilience assets valued at more than $460 million.

Unlike water services, flood protection and river management activities remain within the rates-capping framework despite requiring significant long-term investment, renewal and adaptation.

The Bill provides greater flexibility through exemption pathways. However, Environment Southland remains concerned that the framework may not adequately support proactive resilience investment intended to reduce future hazard risks before significant events occur.

This issue may become increasingly important as climate change contributes to more frequent and severe extreme weather events and evolving natural hazard risks.

Biosecurity

Environment Southland plays an important role in preventing, managing and responding to biosecurity threats.

Biosecurity programmes often require rapid intervention and sustained investment to prevent pests becoming established and spreading further.

Once a pest becomes widespread, management frequently shifts from eradication to long-term containment and control, with significantly higher costs over time.

The Bill provides broad exemption mechanisms but does not specifically recognise biosecurity eradication programmes, emerging incursions or regionally significant biosecurity responses.

Long-Term Planning and Investment

Councils are required to prepare:

- Long-Term Plans
- Financial Strategies
- Infrastructure Strategies
- Asset Management Plans

These planning documents rely on reasonable assumptions regarding future funding arrangements.

The Bill may create uncertainty regarding future target ranges, exemption availability and regulator decisions, which may affect councils' ability to plan and fund long-term infrastructure, environmental management and resilience programmes.

This issue is particularly relevant as local government continues to respond to planning reform, climate adaptation requirements, emergency management reform and other legislative and policy changes.

Governance and Local Decision-Making

The Bill increases the role of Ministerial and regulator decision-making within the rates-setting framework.

Local authorities are already subject to extensive consultation, reporting, audit and financial management requirements under the Local Government Act 2002.

The Bill therefore raises broader questions regarding the balance between local democratic decision-making and central oversight of funding decisions.

Rates-Price Formula

The Bill introduces a rates-price formula intended to measure rates increases across local authorities.

While the formula provides a consistent framework, its effects may vary depending on:

- Growth patterns
- Rating structures
- Asset portfolios
- Funding arrangements
- Statutory responsibilities

- Investment requirements

Further testing may be required to understand how the formula operates across different council types, including regional councils.

Summary of Key Submission Themes

The draft submission focuses on the following themes:

- Recognition of regional council responsibilities, statutory obligations and cost pressures.
- Funding increasing Government-directed responsibilities and reforms.
- Stronger recognition of flood protection, river management, climate resilience and public safety infrastructure.
- Greater flexibility and certainty for biosecurity programmes and emerging incursions.
- Improved certainty for long-term planning and investment.
- Preserving local democratic decision-making.
- Further testing of the rates-price formula across different council circumstances.

Appendix 1: Assessment of Environment Southland's Previous Submission[1] Themes Against the Bill

Environment Southland previously submitted on the Government's rates target proposal. The Bill addresses a number of concerns raised during that consultation process and is an improvement on the original proposal in several respects. However, Environment Southland considers that many of the underlying concerns raised in its earlier submission remain relevant. This appendix summarises how the key themes raised in Environment Southland's previous submission are reflected in the Bill and informs the positions taken in the current submission.

Issue Area	Bill Provisions	Assessment Status	Assessment
Recognition of council cost pressures and ability to continue delivering statutory obligations	s 26B requires Minister to consider local authority costs, legislative change costs, economic trends and regulator advice when setting future target ranges. Type 2 exemptions (ss 26K-26Q) provide a mechanism where councils can demonstrate prudent financial management.	Concern remains despite improvements	The Bill provides greater recognition of council costs than the original proposal. However, ES remains concerned that it does not adequately demonstrate how regional councils will continue to fund increasing statutory responsibilities, resilience requirements and Government-directed obligations within the framework.
Regional council responsibilities and service delivery obligations	Framework applies broadly across all local authorities, with limited distinction between council types.	Concern remains	ES remains concerned that the framework does not adequately recognise the differing responsibilities, expenditure drivers, risk profiles and funding arrangements of regional councils compared to other local authority types.
Flood protection, river management and resilience infrastructure	Water services exclusion provisions; infrastructure-related exemption provisions; Type 1 and Type 2 exemptions.	Concern remains despite improvements	The Bill provides greater flexibility through infrastructure-related exemptions. However, flood protection and river management infrastructure do not receive equivalent treatment to water services, despite performing critical public safety and resilience functions. Concerns remain that proactive resilience investment may be constrained.
Biosecurity programmes and emerging pest incursions	General exemption framework.	Concern remains	The Bill does not specifically recognise biosecurity eradication programmes, pest incursions or the importance of early intervention. ES remains concerned that the framework may not adequately accommodate the funding flexibility required for effective biosecurity responses.
Exemption framework and flexibility	Type 1 exemptions, Type 2 exemptions, prudent financial management provisions, transitional provisions.	Concern remains despite improvements	The Bill provides a significantly more developed exemption framework than the original proposal and addresses several concerns raised by ES. However, concerns remain regarding planning certainty, reliance on discretionary approvals and how exemption pathways will operate in practice for long-term resilience and infrastructure investment.

[1] A1417886

Long-term infrastructure planning and investment certainty	Target range review provisions; exemption framework; regulator powers.	Concern remains	ES remains concerned that uncertainty regarding future target ranges, regulator decisions and exemption outcomes may complicate long-term planning, infrastructure investment and resilience programmes
Local democratic decision-making and accountability	Regulator oversight functions; Ministerial powers; exemption decision-making processes.	Concern remains	ES remains concerned that the framework shifts greater influence over funding decisions toward regulator and Ministerial processes, despite councils already operating within established consultation, planning and accountability frameworks under the LGA.
Rates-price formula and different council circumstances	Rates-price formula provisions.	Concern remains	ES remains unconvinced that sufficient testing has been undertaken to demonstrate that the formula will operate fairly across different council types, particularly regional councils with significant natural hazard, environmental management and biosecurity responsibilities.
Consideration of infrastructure underinvestment and long-term resilience outcomes	Exemption framework; prudent financial management provisions.	Concern remains	While the Bill includes mechanisms intended to accommodate infrastructure investment, ES remains concerned that the framework places greater emphasis on responding to events than enabling proactive investment that reduces future costs, improves resilience and avoids larger future liabilities.

9.3 Regional Spatial Plan Position

Report by: Liz Devery, Regional Plan Manager
Approved by: Hayley Fitchett, General Manager Strategy and Regulation
Report Date: 18 November 2026

Purpose

To confirm Environment Southland positions on Regional Spatial Planning prior to a joint Council and Te Ao Mārama Board workshop scheduled for 8 December. These positions will be used to guide discussions in order to inform progress with the development of a Joint Process Agreement and the establishment of a Spatial Plan Committee for Murihiku Southland.

Summary

This report seeks confirmation of Environment Southland's position on funding and cost-sharing principles for the Regional Spatial Plan programme ahead of a joint workshop involving the four Murihiku Southland councils and Te Ao Mārama. The report outlines the statutory context for regional spatial planning, summarises previous Council positions on governance arrangements, and recommends a set of principles to guide Environment Southland's participation in discussions on future programme funding. As these principles are intended to guide discussions only and do not commit Council to any funding arrangement, staff consider the matter appropriate for consideration by the Strategy and Policy Committee.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Strategy and Policy Committee **resolve to:**

1 Receive the report – Regional Spatial Plan Position.

2 Notes that discussions with partner councils on governance and funding arrangements for the Regional Spatial Plan are ongoing

3 Endorses the following principles to guide Environment Southland's participation in discussions on funding and budget sharing arrangements for the Regional Spatial Plan:

   a. the Regional Spatial Plan delivers region-wide benefits and should be supported through a shared regional funding contribution;
   b. all participating councils should make a meaningful financial contribution to demonstrate commitment to the process and its outcomes;
   c. cost-sharing arrangements should be equitable, transparent and based on agreed funding principles;
   d. affordability should be a key consideration when determining funding shares;
   e. funding arrangements should support the development of a sound evidence base, effective community engagement and meaningful Māori participation; and
   f. programme costs and expenditure should be subject to clear governance and reporting arrangements.

4 Notes that these principles are intended to guide discussions with partner councils and do not predetermine any final funding formula or cost sharing arrangement

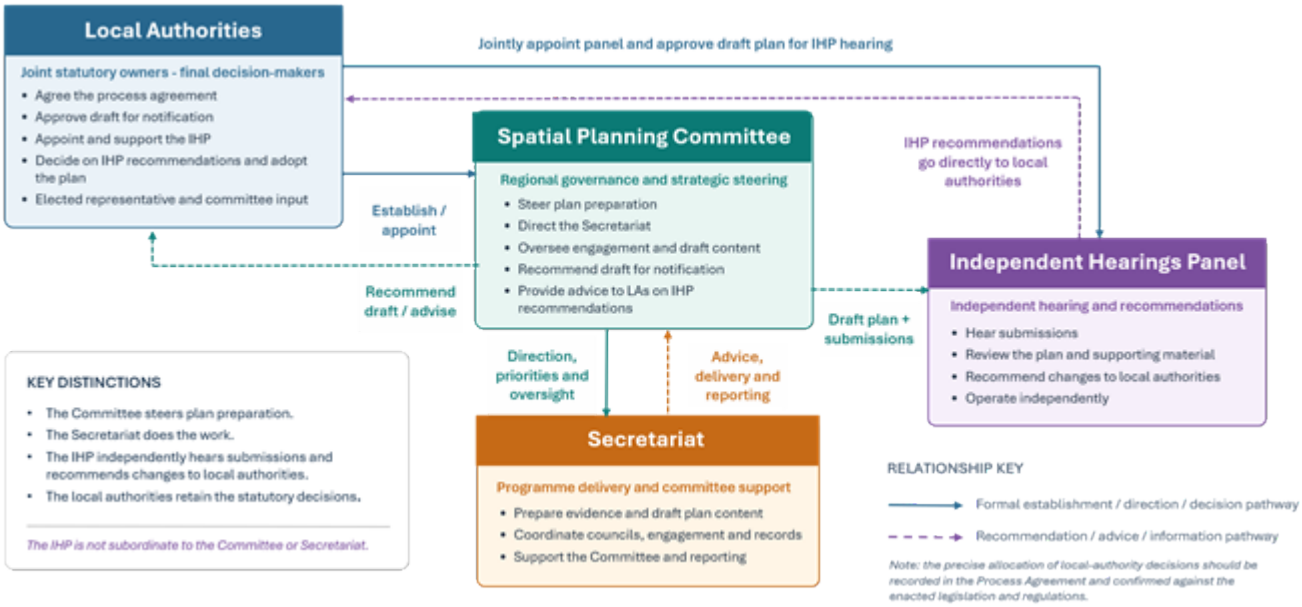
Background

The Regional Spatial Plan (RSP) is a new planning instrument established under the Planning Act. It will provide the long-term strategic direction for how Murihiku Southland grows and develops over the next 30 years and beyond. The RSP will identify the region's key opportunities and challenges, including future growth, infrastructure, environmental outcomes, climate resilience and community wellbeing. It will also guide future planning and investment decisions across local government.

The RSP is being developed jointly by Environment Southland, Invercargill City Council, Gore District Council and Southland District Council, alongside Te Ao Mārama. The four councils are collectively responsible for preparing and approving the plan and are required to work together to reach agreement on key decisions throughout the process.

To support development of the RSP, the councils must establish a Regional Spatial Planning Committee and agree a Joint Process Agreement. These arrangements will determine how the councils work together, how decisions are made, how engagement is undertaken, and how the programme is managed and resourced.

A Secretariat will provide technical, policy, engagement and programme support to the Committee. The Committee will oversee preparation of the draft plan and make recommendations to the councils, while the councils retain responsibility for key statutory decisions, including notification and adoption of the final plan Figure 1 shows how the Councils, the Committee and the Secretariat interact with each other and with the independent hearings panel.



To guide the development of the RSP, the Joint Process requires the four Councils to adopt a process agreement setting out:

a. how the Councils will work together and with the Committee
b. whether decision-making on any matters or parts of the draft RSP will be divided between the Councils, or all decisions made by consensus
c. how the Committee will carry out pre-notification consultation, including which infrastructure providers and representatives of the development sector, other sectors and the wider community it must consult
d. how the Secretariat will be established and managed
e. processes to ensure each Council complies with iwi participation legislation, including agreements under it, and any joint management agreement
f. any other matter prescribed in regulations.

The Councils and the Committee must take reasonable steps to notify the draft RSP by 30 June 2028, 21 months after Royal assent, and to decide on the recommendations of the independent hearings panel within nine months after that. On that timetable, key decisions to adopt the spatial plan fall in early 2029, after the October 2028 local elections. Each district council must then notify a land use plan, and

Environment Southland must notify a natural environment plan and a coastal land use plan, within nine months of the Councils' RSP decisions.

Work is therefore underway to establish governance, management and funding arrangements that will enable the programme to proceed efficiently and meet statutory timeframes.

Joint Council Workshop 8 December 2026
The proposed joint workshop will bring together elected members from the four councils and Te Ao Mārama to discuss the establishment of the Regional Spatial Planning programme. Key matters for discussion include governance arrangements, committee establishment, development of the Joint Process Agreement, and principles for programme funding and cost sharing.

The workshop is intended to provide a shared understanding of partner council perspectives and identify areas of agreement that can inform future formal decisions by each council.

Environment Southland Positions

In preparation for that workshop, at Council on 20 October, Council endorsed the following positions:

a. two elected members from each participating council on the Regional Spatial Planning Committee;
b. an independent chair, jointly selected through an agreed appointment process;
c. collective, regionally focused decision-making, with consensus as the primary approach and a clear process for resolving disagreements;
d. secretariat hosting to be determined following Committee establishment, with Environment Southland considered as a potential host;
e. meaningful community participation, environmental stewardship and assessment of existing evidence and engagement to be explicitly reflected in the agreed arrangements

These positions provided a foundation for discussions on funding and budget-sharing arrangements.
At the Council workshop held on 10 November 2026, there was strong support for the principle that the Regional Spatial Plan is a region-wide initiative delivering benefits across Murihiku Southland and that the costs should therefore be shared across participating councils rather than being borne solely by Environment Southland.

Councillors noted that financial contribution promotes ownership of the process and helps ensure all parties are invested in achieving successful outcomes. The workshop discussion also highlighted the importance of affordability, recognising the significant costs associated with implementing the new planning system and the need to balance those costs against other Long Term Plan priorities. Councillors expressed a preference for funding arrangements that are fair, transparent and based on agreed principles.

Subject to further discussion with partner councils, the following principles are proposed to guide Environment Southland's participation in funding discussions:

- the Regional Spatial Plan delivers region-wide benefits and should be supported through a shared regional funding contribution;
- all participating councils should make a meaningful financial contribution to demonstrate commitment to the process and its outcomes;
- cost-sharing arrangements should be equitable, transparent and based on agreed funding principles;
- affordability should be a key consideration when determining funding shares;
- funding arrangements should support the development of a sound evidence base, effective community engagement and meaningful Māori participation; and
- programme costs, staffing and expenditure should be subject to clear governance and reporting arrangements.

These principles are intended to guide discussions at the joint workshop and do not predetermine any funding formula. Further work will be required with partner councils to determine an approach that is fair, practical and capable of supporting delivery of the Regional Spatial Plan programme.

A combined position statement reflecting the already endorsed position and these statements are included in Appendix A to this report.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi Implications

The Regional Spatial Plan programme is currently being developed in acknowledgement *of He Huarahi Mō Ngā Uri Whakatupu* Charter of Understanding that exists between the partner agencies. Te Ao Mārama have been actively involved in programme establishment and will participate in the joint workshop. Council's previous positions support mana whenua involvement in regional spatial planning governance and decision-making.

Funding decisions may influence the ability to support effective tangata whenua participation, partnership and mātauranga Māori input throughout the development of the Regional Spatial Plan.

Risks and Implications

- Failure to reach agreement on governance or funding arrangements may delay establishment of the Regional Spatial Planning Committee.
- Delays could impact the ability of councils to meet statutory timeframes under the Planning Act.
- Funding arrangements that are perceived as inequitable may reduce partner council support for the programme.
- Early agreement on principles does not remove the need for future decisions on governance, budgets and funding allocations.

Fit with strategic framework

OUTCOME	CONTRIBUTES	DETRACTS	NOT APPLICABLE
Managed access to quality natural resources	x		
Diverse opportunities to make a living	x		
Communities empowered and resilient	x		
Communities expressing their diversity	x		

Attachments

1. Environment Southland position statement (002) [**9.3.1** - 2 pages]

Environment Southland position statement – Regional Spatial Planning

Environment Southland welcomes the opportunity to work closely with the other Southland councils and mana whenua to develop the Murihiku Southland Regional Spatial Plan. By bringing our different perspectives together early and building on the work already done, we can focus on the choices that matter most for Southland and deliver a sound first plan within the time available. That plan can set a clear strategic direction for Murihiku Southland and give us a shared basis for future planning and investment.

Environment Southland's preferred positions (As endorsed by Council on 20 October 2026)

- Council representation. Two elected members from each participating council on the Regional Spatial Planning Committee. This gives each council an equal voice and shares the workload. Environment Southland also proposes that each council nominate an alternate to step in when either member is unavailable, so each council can maintain its full representation.
- Independent chair. An independent chair, jointly selected through an agreed appointment process, would guide discussions impartially, give all parties a fair hearing and keep the Committee focused on the interests of the region.
- Decision-making. The Committee would make decisions collectively in the interests of Murihiku Southland, seeking consensus first. A clear process for resolving disagreements would give members a way forward when views differ and help keep the programme on track.
- Mana whenua partnership. A strong, ongoing partnership with Ngāi Tahu ki Murihiku via Te Am Mārama Inc, with participation arrangements shaped with mana whenua. Their enduring relationships with whenua and wai, and the knowledge and perspectives they bring through te ao Māori, can help shape the region's priorities from the outset.
- Secretariat. Environment Southland has put itself forward and is open to hosting the secretariat. Once established, the Committee can consider the hosting options and decide which best meets its needs.
- Plan development. Explicitly provide in the Process Agreement for meaningful community participation, environmental stewardship and a review of existing evidence and previous engagement. This gives communities a chance to shape the plan, keeps the long-term health of the environment in view and helps focus new work where it is needed.

Funding principles for regional discussion (As discussed at Environment Southland councillor workshop 10 November 2026)

- Funding principles. The Regional Spatial Plan delivers benefits across Murihiku Southland and should be supported through a shared regional funding contribution. Environment Southland supports exploring funding approaches that recognise the region-wide nature of the programme and seek a broadly consistent cost to ratepayers across the region.
- Shared commitment. All participating councils should make a meaningful financial contribution to demonstrate commitment to the process, shared ownership of the work programme and support for its outcomes.
- Equity and transparency. Cost-sharing arrangements should be equitable, transparent and based on agreed funding principles so that funding responsibilities are clearly understood and supported by all participating councils.
- Affordability and financial resilience. Affordability should be a key consideration when determining funding shares. Funding options should also be assessed to determine whether

spreading costs across participating councils could help manage potential constraints associated with rates capping.

- Supporting quality plan development. Funding arrangements should support the development of a sound evidence base, effective community engagement and meaningful participation by mana whenua, recognising that these are essential to developing a sound and enduring Regional Spatial Plan.
- Governance and accountability. Programme costs and expenditure should be subject to clear governance, oversight and reporting arrangements to ensure accountability, transparency and confidence in how public funds are used.

9.4 Waiau Catchment Update

Report by: Rachael Millar, Chief Advisor
Approved by: Hayley Fitchett, General Manager Strategy and Regulation
Report Date: 18 November 2026

Purpose

The Chairs of the Waiau Working Party, Waiau Rivercare Group and Waiau Catchment Liaison Committee will attend to provide an update following last month's community and Waiau Working Party meetings. The update will outline the key matters raised and proposed next steps.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Strategy and Policy Committee **resolve to:**

1 Receive verbal report - Waiau Catchment Update.

Attachments

Nil

9.5 Government Legislation & Policy Monitor Report

Report by: Nicole White, Policy Analyst
Approved by: Hayley Fitchett, General Manager Strategy and Regulation
Report Date: 11 November 2026

Purpose

To provide an overview of the current and upcoming national policy changes, with a focus on those expected to have a significant impact on Environment Southland's operations and the Southland region.

Summary

The key Central Government-driven policy developments that occurred since the last committee meeting include the following. Please refer to the Executive Summary and the relevant sections of the Policy Monitor for more details on each matter.

- Transition to the new planning system begins
- National Direction programme is complete
- Public Works reform is complete
- Southland reorganisation proposals under assessment
- Local Government System Improvements Act enacted

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Strategy and Policy Committee resolve to:

1 Receive the report – Government Legislation Policy Monitor

Fit with strategic framework

OUTCOME	CONTRIBUTES	DETRACTS	NOT APPLICABLE
Managed access to quality natural resources	X		
Diverse opportunities to make a living	X		
Communities empowered and resilient	X		
Communities expressing their diversity	X		

Attachments

1. 2026 11 04 Policy Monitor - agenda version [**9.5.1** - 21 pages]

Policy Monitor

Updated: 04 November 2026

This monthly document monitors the most significant of the policy and legislation changes the coalition government is driving across various areas. All information is publicly available or received via formal channels such as letters from ministries and correspondence from LGNZ, Taituarā, and Te Uru Kahika. To make it easier to follow, updates to the previous version have been marked in red.

Executive Summary – Key Legislative and Policy Developments

Transition to the New Planning System Begins

The Planning Act and Natural Environment Act received Royal Assent on 30 September 2026, formally commencing the transition from the Resource Management Act 1991 to New Zealand's new planning system. The focus now shifts from legislative development to implementation, with councils beginning preparations for national direction, regional spatial planning, and future planning instruments. MCERT has established implementation support for councils and launched planning.govt.nz as the central source of guidance and transition information.

National Direction Programme Complete

The Government has announced completion of the National Direction Programme, describing it as the largest overhaul of national direction in the history of the RMA. Sixteen national direction instruments have been developed or amended over the past two years, with the final reforms introducing nationally consistent rules for electricity and telecommunications infrastructure. The Government has stated that these instruments will provide a bridge between the former RMA framework and the new planning system while future national direction is developed.

Public Works Reform Complete

The Public Works Amendment Act 2026 has received Royal Assent, completing the Government's wider programme of Public Works Act reform. The reforms modernise land acquisition, objection, and compensation processes, introduce new incentives for negotiated acquisitions, and are intended to reduce delays and uncertainty associated with infrastructure delivery while retaining protections for landowners.

Southland Reorganisation Proposals Under Assessment

The Government continues to assess proposals submitted through the Head Start local government reform process. In Southland, competing proposals have been advanced by Invercargill City Council and Southland District Council, while Gore District Council has elected to continue participating in the Local Government Commission's investigation process. The Local Government Commission's investigation into potential local government reorganisation in Southland is ongoing, with a further decision expected shortly.

Local Government System Improvements Act Enacted

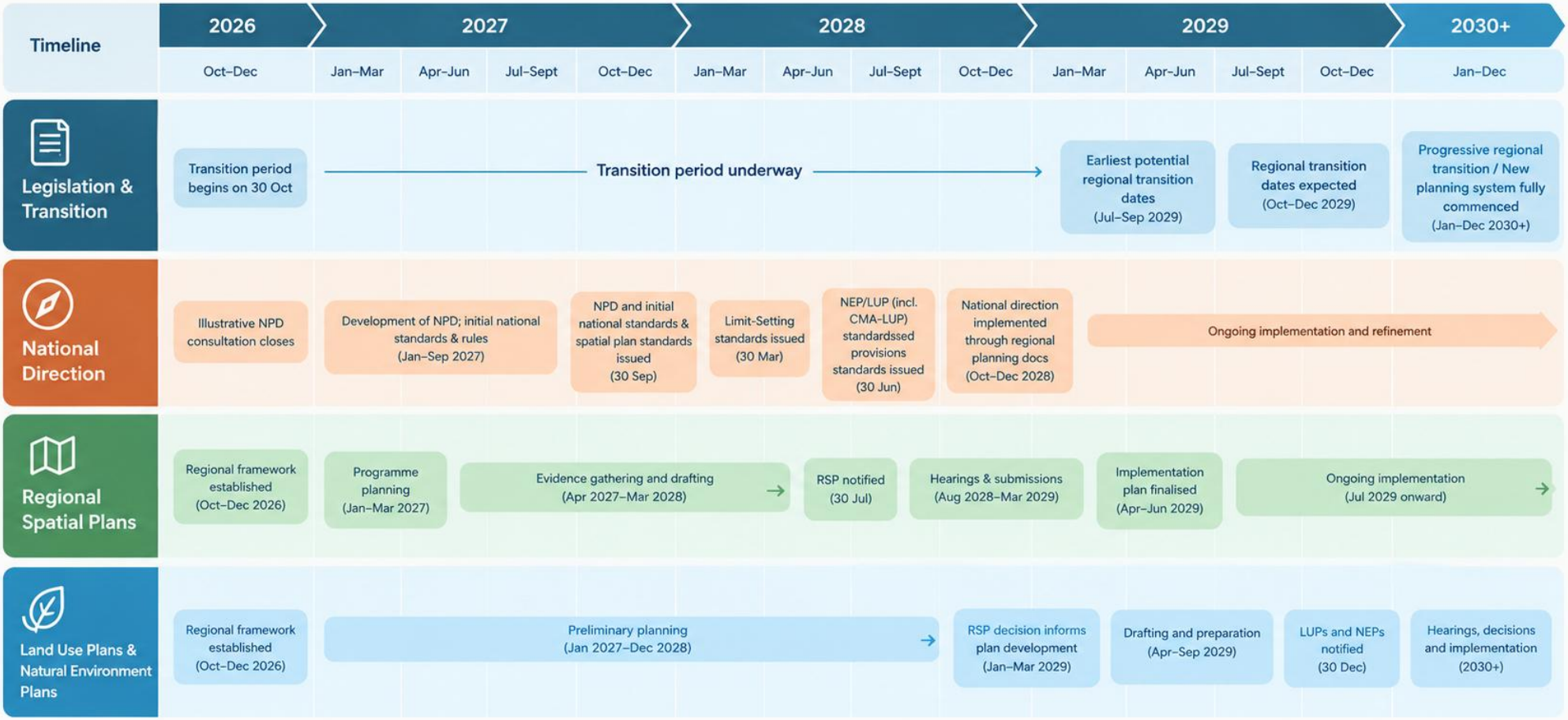
The Local Government (System Improvements) Amendment Act 2026 has received Royal Assent. The Act introduces measures intended to strengthen council accountability and transparency, improve financial discipline, and refocus local government on core services. Recent amendments also strengthen councils' ability to recover growth-related infrastructure costs associated with future Fast-track developments and restrict voting rights on council committees to elected members, subject to statutory and Treaty settlement exceptions.

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Regional Planning and Transition Roadmap

Key legislation, national direction and regional planning milestones



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The following colour coding is used throughout:

Resource Management /Coastal	Climate Change and Biosecurity	Transport and other Infrastructure
Primary Industries	Other topics	Te Tiriti/Te Ao Māori

The format is as follows:

Policy area	
Legislation/policy name	Announcements, dates, and signals
	ES staff involvement, implications, and next steps

Updates

Resource Management	
RMA replacement legislation (Phase 3) *Planning Bill* *Natural Environment Bill*	On 30 September 2026, the Planning Act and Natural Environment Act received Royal Assent, commencing the transition from the Resource Management Act 1991 to New Zealand's new planning system. The legislation introduces a new planning framework comprising Regional Spatial Plans, Natural Environment Plans, and Land Use Plans, with these instruments intended to progressively replace existing regional and district planning documents during the transition period. The new system retains a strong role for national direction and standards, while introducing significant changes to spatial planning, environmental limits, infrastructure planning, regulatory relief, mana whenua participation, and public participation processes. The first package of National Policy Direction and national standards is expected during 2027, draft Regional Spatial Plans are expected to be notified in 2028, and the new system is expected to become progressively operational through 2029 and 2030. Further information on the new planning system and transition arrangements is available on the Government's planning reform website: https://www.planning.govt.nz/ On 25 August 2026, the Government launched consultation on an illustrative National Policy Direction (NPD) for the new planning system. While not legally binding, the iNPD provides an early indication of how national priorities relating to housing and development, infrastructure, primary production, resource use, and public values may be reflected within the future planning framework. Consultation closes on 16 October 2026.
	The reforms introduced through the Planning Act and Natural Environment Act are expected to result in fundamental changes to New Zealand's resource management system and therefore all facets of Environment Southland's operations. Staff assessed the implications of the illustrative National Policy Direction consultation and lodged Environment Southland's submission on 16 October 2026 (Objective ID: A1579558). The consultation provided an early opportunity to influence the development of future national direction under the new planning system. With the legislation now in force, Environment Southland's focus has shifted toward implementation and transition planning. This includes assessing implications for Council functions and work programmes, preparing Regional Spatial Plans, engaging on National Policy

	Direction, and working with central government agencies, and regional sector groups on implementation requirements, funding arrangements, capability needs and transition support. Environment Southland submitted on the legislation (Objective ID: A1425408) and presented an oral submission to the select committee on 18 March 2026. Council's oral submission can be watched here.
Resource Management (Consenting and Other System Changes) Amendment Act 2025	Passed into law on 20 August 2025, this Act introduced targeted amendments to the Resource Management 1991 ahead of the transition to the new planning system established by the Planning Act and Natural Environment Act. See here for the Beehive release. Key changes include: • A temporary halt on council plan and policy development, (with limited exemptions) until the end of 2027. • New ministerial intervention powers, allow the Minister for the Environment to direct councils to prepare or amend planning documents or use specific process, where there is demonstrated non-compliance with a national policy statement. • Broadened discharge rule provisions under section 70 of the RMA, enabling councils to permit discharges that impact aquatic life, water clarity or colour, and stock drinking water, provided those effects already exist and the relevant plan will improve the within 10 years. The requirement to consider the effects of floatable or suspended materials for permitted activities has been removed. • Councils' ability to review marine farm consent conditions will also be constrained until September 2030. A summary of the Amendment Act, including changes introduced in the final stages of the process is available here. Also, the MfE has published a series of factsheets relating to the Act.
	Council provided a submission to the select committee (Objective ID: A1221000) and spoke to the committee during a formal hearing on 13 March 2025.
National Direction Programme	Since mid-2025, the Government has developed and amended a range of national direction instruments under the Resource Management Act (RMA). While these were developed under the RMA framework, they are intended to support the transition to the new planning system established by the Planning Act and Natural Environment Act. On 8 October 2026, the Government announced completion of its National Direction Programme, describing it as the largest overhaul of national direction in the history of the RMA. Over a two-year period, the Government developed or amended 16 national direction instruments intended to remove barriers to housing, infrastructure, energy, and primary sector development. The Government has stated that these instruments will operate as a bridge between the former RMA framework and the new planning system while future National Policy Direction is developed. New national direction instruments include the following: October 2026 • Resource Management (National Environmental Standards for Electricity Network Activities) Regulations 2026 June 2026 • Resource Management (National Environmental Standards for Papakāinga) Regulations 2026 December 2025 • Resource Management (National Environmental Standards for Detached Minor Residential Units) Regulations 2025 • National Policy Statement for Natural Hazards 2025 • National Policy Statement for Infrastructure 2025

	Amended national direction instruments include the following: October 2026 • Resource Management (National Environmental Standards for Telecommunication Facilities) Amendment Regulations 2026 May 2026 • Resource Management (National Environmental Standards for Commercial Forestry) Amendment Regulations 2023 • Resource Management (National Environmental Standards for Marine Aquaculture) Regulations 2020 April 2026 • Resource Management (Stock Exclusion) Amendment Regulations 2026 • Resource Management (National Environmental Standards for Electricity Transmission and Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Activities) Amendment Regulations 2026 December 2025 • National Policy Statement for Highly Productive Land Amendment 2025 • New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement Amendment 2025 • National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity Amendment 2025 • National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management Amendment 2025 • Resource Management (National Environmental Standards for Freshwater) Amendment Regulations 2025 • National Policy Statement for Renewable Electricity Generation Amendment 2025 • National Policy Statement for Electricity Networks Amendment 2025 The Ministry for the Environment have the links to each of the national direction instruments, notices, and recommendations and decisions reports. The changes are intended to support infrastructure planning and delivery and enable growth in the primary sector. With the Planning Act and Natural Environment Act now in force, future national direction is expected to be progressively developed under the new planning system. An illustrative National Policy Direction (iNPD) was released in August 2026 to test the proposed structure and content of future national direction and inform development of the first package of National Policy Direction expected during 2027.
	Staff have undertaken substantial work to assess the implications of the new and amended national direction instruments and to ensure Council is well positioned to comply with their requirements. These changes continue to inform work programmes, planning processes, and implementation planning. Staff will continue to monitor future national direction developed under the Planning Act and Natural Environment Act and assess any implications for Council.
Freshwater Farm Plans	In October 2024, the Government paused the rollout of freshwater farm plans. With the withdrawal of the national regulation, regional rules took centre stage, requiring Southland farmers to have a certified Southland Farm Plan by 27 November 2024 (six months following the Southland Water and Land Plan becoming operative). On 21 November 2024, the Government announced that it is applying an alternate national timeline in Southland, giving farmers further 18 months to comply with the Southland Water and Land Plan rule for certified Southland Farm Plans (until mid-2026). On 18 May 2026, Cabinet announced a Southland-specific amendment to the Resource Management (Freshwater Farm Plan) Regulations, providing a further extension for certification of Farm Plans in the region. The certification deadline will now be November 2027. Through the Resource Management (Consenting and Other Matters) Amendment Act, the Select Committee has introduced changes to reduce the number of farms required to have a

	Freshwater Farm Plan and to take a risk-based approach to the need for certification. See here for more information. Freshwater Farm Plans would, however, remain within the system as a tool to manage environmental impacts. The Government has signalled a future direction for freshwater farm plans, including a proposed shift towards a more risk-based approach to certification and auditing requirements. The detailed interaction between the future national framework and existing regional requirements remains uncertain and will continue to be monitored as further information becomes available. The Ministry for the Environment is continuing to work with industry, sector groups, and councils to finalise the regulatory framework through the Government's wider resource management reform programme.
	Farm plans have long been a cornerstone of Southland's conceptual approach to managing environmental contamination risks associated with farming activities and are a key tool in the Southland Water and Land Plan. To comply with the Plan, Southland farmers carrying out activities that fall under the Freshwater Farm Plan provisions of the RMA have until November 2027 to get their farm plan certified. The outcome of the Government's review of national policies on farm plans could potentially affect the implementation of regional farm plan rules in Southland, depending on the specifics of the proposals. Following amendments to the RMA, smaller farms (generally between 20-50ha) are now only managed through the SWLP and not the Order in Council. They are required to have a certified farm plan to retain permitted activity status under a number of provisions. The Ministry for the Environment has commissioned an investigation report under s360I of the RMA to consider modifying the Southland Water and Land Plan in relation to the certification timeframe requirements for these smaller land holdings. Consultation on the proposed amendment has now closed. Environment Southland provided feedback on the proposal, alongside other submitters. The feedback will be considered by the Minister Responsible for Resource Management Reform, who will decide whether to proceed to the regulation-making stage. The message to the community remains that farm plans are seen as an important tool for managing the effects of activities on the region's waterways, and more specifically on the waterways within their catchments. Documenting what actions are proposed to address risks in our catchments is a valuable exercise. Rural landholders are encouraged to commence the development of their farm plan. There is catchment context information available on Environment Southland's website. Environment Southland staff have met with the existing approved certifiers to progress practical farm plan development and certification matters. Guidance material is being progressed, and staff are available to assist with questions. The interface between the government regulated freshwater farm plans and the Farm Environmental Management Plans required by the Southland Water and Land Plan is a matter that is at the forefront of staff's mind and will inform any feedback provided to the relevant Ministry. Our guidance materials are now developed and available for public use on the Environment Southland website. The Government has signalled a future direction for freshwater farm plans, including a proposed shift toward a more risk-based approach to certification and auditing requirements. Significant implementation detail remains under development and supporting regulations are still being drafted. MCERT has advised that Freshwater Farm Plan regulations are not expected to be gazetted before the 2026 General Election, with current indications suggesting gazettal may occur during 2027. However, timing and implementation arrangements remain subject to further policy and regulatory decisions. Staff are assessing the implications of these developments for the Southland Water and Land Plan and will continue to engage with central government, industry groups, practitioners, and landholders as further information becomes available.

Fast-Track Approvals Act	The Fast-track Approvals Act commenced on 23 December 2024, establishing a permanent fast-track regime for infrastructure and development projects of significant regional or national benefit. It replaced the temporary COVID-19 fast-track law with a permanent process combining approvals under key Acts like the RMA. The FTAA is a key element of the current government's "*Going for Growth*" agenda.
	Scope:
	• 149 projects appear in Schedule 2 of the Act and can apply directly to the Environment Protection Authority, as their inclusion removes the need for a ministerial referral.
	• The EPA began accepting substantive applications in early 2025, following commencement of the Act, see here. After initial slow progress, FTAA processes have accelerated significantly in the second half of the 2025 with a number of major projects approved.
	Southland Projects listed in the Act:
	• ICC – Awarua Alternate Water Supply Project
	• Sanford Ltd – Makarewa Hatchery Project
	• Ngāi Tahu Seafood – Hananui Aquaculture Project (open ocean)
	  ○ Approved through the Fast-Track process on 10 August 2026.
	• Impact Marine Bluff Ltd – Bluff Salmon Farm Project (land-based)
	• Contact Energy – Southland Wind Farm Project
	  ○ Approved through the Fast-Track process on 2 April 2026.
	Process notes:
	• Panels have discretion to decline or condition projects if their environmental impacts are considered too great or cannot be adequately mitigated. Details on the relevant process and projects are available here.
	More information:
	https://www.fasttrack.govt.nz/
	In addition, the Government introduced the Fast Track Approvals Amendment Bill on 3 November 2025, proposing a number of changes to the initial legislation, including a new fast-track consent option for new supermarkets that would improve grocery competition. The Bill was enacted on 16 December 2025.

	Fast-track processes continue to gain momentum nationally. On 10 August 2026, the Hananui Aquaculture Project off Rakiura/Stewart Island became the first aquaculture project approved through the Fast-track process. The Southland Wind Farm Project has also been approved through the Fast-track process. The EPA panel considering the Jericho wind farm application from Pioneer Energy Group partnership has called for submissions by 5 October 2026. A draft submission has been prepared for Council consideration on 23 September 2026. Timeframes for fast-track inputs are tight. While these have been met to date by Environment Southland, there has been some pressure on this relative to other workloads. Staff attended the EPA and MCERT Fast-track roadshow in Queenstown in August 2026 and participated in a national session with the EPA Panel Convenor in September 2026. These engagements provided further guidance on Fast-track processes and implementation expectations. Staff will continue to monitor existing Southland projects and any future Fast-track applications lodged within the region.
Resource Management (Duration of Consents) Amendment Act	On 9 December 2025, the Government introduced and passed this Bill under parliamentary urgency, enabling expedited passage without select committee review. Royal Assent was achieved on 16 December. The Bill extends the duration of existing or recently expired resource consents (excluding water and wastewater) until 31 December 2027. This measure is intended to provide certainty for consent holders during the transition to the new planning system. See here for the relevant press release.

	The extension is intended to reduce immediate pressure on councils and consent holders to reapply during the transition period. Councils will need to update consent registers and communicate changes to affected parties. Transitional planning is important to manage administrative processes and prepare for the new framework under the Planning and Natural Environment Bills. In the Southland region, 469 current authorisations issued under the Resource Management Act were affected.

Coastal	
Offshore Renewable Energy Act	The Offshore Renewable Energy Act 2026 received Royal Assent on 9 July 2026, establishing NZ's first regulatory framework for offshore renewable energy developments, including offshore wind, solar, wave, and tidal projects. The legislation delivers on the Government's commitment under Electrify NZ to provide greater certainty for investment, enable the selection of developments that best serve NZ's national interests, and manage risks to Crown and the public arising from offshore renewable energy activities. The Act introduces a two-stage permitting regime. Developers must first obtain a feasibility permit to investigate a proposed site before applying for a commercial permit to construct and operate offshore renewable energy infrastructure. The framework also includes provisions for safety zones around developments and requires developers to decommission infrastructure at the end of its operational life. During the legislative process, the Government has amended the Bill in response to submissions from offshore wind developers, concerning seabed mining. The amendments enable designated marine space for offshore renewable projects while pausing new permit grants for seabed mining under the Crowns Mineral Act. The Government has indicated that officials will provide advice on the timing of the first permit tender round, which is expected to commence in the coming months. MBIE is continuing to develop regulations that will support implementation of the new regime. Please refer to this link for an overview of the proposed regulatory regime. Further information is also available here.
	Offshore renewable electricity generation within the Southland region is likely to have a substantial impact on the management of marine resources within Southland's coastal waters, with implications for the review of the regional coastal plan. Environment Southland provided a written submission (Objective ID: A1230000) and delivered an oral submission to the Select Committee on 13 March 2025.
New Zealand Aquaculture Development Plan 2025-2030	A new plan to grow the aquaculture industry has been released by the Oceans and Fisheries Minister on 8 March 2025. The relevant announcement can be accessed here. The Aquaculture Development Plan is intended to be the roadmap for growing New Zealand's aquaculture industry to $3 billion in annual revenue by 2035, as set by 2019 Government Aquaculture Strategy. The industry currently generates $760 million in annual revenue and employs more than 3000 people.
	While aquaculture provides the potential to generate regional economic benefits, the relative lack of knowledge regarding the intricate dynamics within the ocean ecosystems, and the open nature of the ocean environment present significant environmental risks, which must be addressed early and effectively. While the Plan does not set out any requirements for Environment Southland, it is expected to inform the development of national policies impacting on aquaculture activities within Southland's coastal areas.

Climate Change	
Climate Change Response Amendment Bill	The Bill was introduced to Parliament on 15 July 2026 and is awaiting its first reading. The stated aim of the Bill is to improve efficiency and effectiveness of the Climate Change Response Act 2002 through targeted changes relating to climate adaptation planning, governance of the NZ Emissions Trading Scheme (NZ ETS), industrial allocation settings, carbon removal activities, and other administrative and operational provisions. A key component of the Bill is the introduction of requirements for councils to prepare climate adaptation plans for priority locations that face significant climate-related natural hazard risks. The Bill also proposes changes to support the operation of the NZ ETS, including enhanced market governance arrangements, a mechanism to add new emissions sources and carbon removal activities to the scheme, and amendments intended to reduce duplication and complexity within the existing legislative framework. The Government has stated that the changes do not alter the core architecture of NZ's climate change framework or its statutory emissions reduction targets.
	These proposals have the potential to influence how Environment Southland plans for and responds to climate-related risks. Given the regional significance of these changes, staff are undertaking analysis of the Bill and are likely to prepare a submission during the select committee process. Consultation will open after the first reading of the Bill.
Climate Change Response (Tort Liability) Amendment Act	The Climate Change Response (Tort Liability) Amendment Act passed its final reading on 18 August 2026 and received Royal Assent on 24 August. The Act amends the Climate Change Response Act 2002 to create a statutory bar on tort liability for climate change damage or harm caused by greenhouse gas emissions in both current and future court proceedings. The Government stated that climate change obligations should continue to be addressed through New Zealand's statutory climate change framework, including the Climate Change Response Act and the New Zealand Emissions Trading Scheme, rather than through civil litigation.
	The Act is not expected to have direct implications for Environment Southland's statutory functions. Staff will maintain a watching brief on any implications arising from implementation of the legislation.
Emergency Management Act	The Emergency Management Act 2026 has replaced the Civil Defence Emergency Management Act 2002 on 3 September, establishing a new legislative framework for emergency management in New Zealand. The reforms respond to recommendations from the North Island Severe Weather Events Inquiry and other reviews and are intended to improve disaster resilience, emergency response, recovery arrangements, and system-wide coordination. Key changes include: • Strengthened emergency management powers and procedures • Clearer roles and responsibilities across the emergency management system • Greater involvement of communities and iwi Māori in emergency management planning • Stronger tools to support national consistency across the sector • New powers enabling precautionary actions to be undertaken before a formal emergency declaration in certain circumstances • Enhanced provisions relating to animal welfare during emergencies. The Government has indicated that implementation of the Act forms part of the wider Strengthening Emergency Management Roadmap, including new technology systems,

	operational improvements, and a future review of the National Civil Defence Emergency Management Plan.
	Given Southland's exposure to multiple natural hazards including flooding, Environment Southland has a strong interest in ensuring the emergency management system is fit for purpose. Emergency Management Southland provided a written submission during the early public engagement in 2025, while participating in the development of a submission by the regional sector group (Objective ID: fA73336). Environment Southland has submitted on the Emergency Management Bill (Objective ID: A1425408) and presented an oral submission to the select committee on 25 February 2026. Staff have completed an initial assessment of the legislation and will continue to support implementation planning and assess operational implications as the new framework is implemented.
Amendments to Second Emissions Reduction Plan 2026-30 (ERP2)	Final amended ERP2 and addendum were published on 29 January 2026. The Government confirmed it will not proceed with an on-farm agricultural emissions pricing system by 2030, instead opting for a technology-led approach to reducing agricultural emissions. 11 emissions reduction tools are expected to be rolled out by 2030. A discussion document was released in November 2025 to support consultation. The amended ERP2 forms the Government's primary strategy for meeting emissions budgets while aligning with revised biogenic methane targets and broader changes to ETS and forestry settings.
Climate Change Response (2050 Target and Other Matters) Act	In December 2025, the government enacted the Climate Change Response (2050 Target and Other Matters) Act, establishing a new biogenic methane target of 14-24% below 2017 levels by 2050. This replaced the previous target range of 24-47%. The revised target aligns with the Government's technology-led approach outlined in ERP2, with greater emphasis placed on research, innovation, measurement, and adoption of emissions-reduction technologies rather than emissions pricing mechanisms.
	Environment Southland has an interest in supporting an effective climate change response while maintaining the long-term resilience and productivity of Southland's rural economy. These policy changes collectively signal a shift toward technology-led emissions reduction, revised methane targets, and tighter controls on forestry conversions entering the ETS. Given Southland's significant agricultural sector and ongoing community interest in farm-to-forestry conversions, these changes have the potential to influence future land-use decisions across the region. Staff continue to monitor developments and work with territorial authorities through the Regional Climate Change Working Group to support regional planning, climate change responses, and broader strategic discussions relating to land use and emissions reduction.

Biodiversity & Biosecurity

Amendments to the Biosecurity Act	The Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) ran a consultation on this matter in December 2024. More details are available here. While the Government previously signalled that a Biosecurity Amendment Bill would be introduced in 2026, no Bill has yet been introduced to Parliament. Staff will continue to monitor developments.

	Environment Southland's submission was provided to the Ministry within the consultation timeframe (Objective ID: A1208835). It is likely to be participating in the select committee's formal consultation process once the relevant bill becomes available.
Conservation system reform *Conservation Amendment Bill* *National Conservation Policy Statement*	The Department of Conservation led a public consultation on proposals to explore charging for access to some public conservation land and streamline concessions and planning processes and enable more flexibility around land exchange and disposals. The consultation web page includes more details on the relevant proposals. The public submission closed on 28 February 2025. A relevant press release can be accessed here. The Conservation Amendment Bill has been introduced to Parliament on 7 May 2026 and the Environment Select Committee have opened for consultation until 2 July 2026. Key proposals: • clearer rules for granting concessions – certain activities would be pre-approved activities e.g. taking water samples for scientific research • develop a new document (a National Conservation Policy Statement) to manage all conservation land (replacing existing, separate management plans for conservation land and national parks) • introduce access fees for international visitors at a small number of highly visited sites (e.g. Milford Sound) • make it easier to exchange or dispose of public conservation land - over half of New Zealand conservation land will be eligible for land exchange and disposal under the new settings. Parallel consultation was undertaken on a National Conservation Policy Statement intended to sit under the amended Act once finalised. Consultation closed on 10 August 2026. The proposed National Conservation Policy Statement would establish national direction for conservation land through a new planning hierarchy, including visitor zoning, activity status classifications and standardised concession frameworks. Consideration of submissions is underway, with decisions on the timing the next steps to be made by the incoming Government.
	Environment Southland's submissions were provided to the Department of Conservation in February 2025 (Objective ID: 1236427 and 1236547). The submissions for the Bill and the National Conservation Policy Statement were both lodged within their consultation timeframes (Objective ID: A1519995, A1506580) Furthermore, Environment Southland's oral submission on the Conservation Amendment Bill was presented to the Select Committee on 17 September 2026.
Implementing New Zealand's biodiversity Strategy 2025-2030	The Department of Conservation led a public consultation on the next implementation plan for New Zealand's Biodiversity Strategy, with submissions closed on 30 June 2025. The discussion documents and other supporting materials can be viewed here. Following consideration of submissions, a new implementation plan, Action for Nature, was developed and approved by Cabinet. The plan was publicly released by the Minister of Conservation. It sets out the Government's priorities and actions to restore biodiversity and support nature to recover over the coming period, and forms New Zealand's implementation plan under the Convention on Biological Diversity.
	Environment Southland's submission was provided to the Department of Conservation within the consultation timeframe (Objective ID: A1303998) in June 2025. Staff reported to the Strategy & Policy Committee regarding impact of submission on 3 June 2026.

Primary Industries	
Minerals Strategy for New Zealand to 2040	The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment published Minerals Strategy for New Zealand to 2040 on 31 January 2025. The goal is specified as doubling the value of New Zealand's mineral exports to $3 Billion by 2035.
	Policy changes on the extraction of minerals could potentially have a substantial impact on Southland's economy, environment as well as Environment Southland's operations. Regional safeguards could play a key role in ensuring that any economic gains from potential expansion of mining in Southland do not come at the disproportional cost in other areas.
Amendment to the Crown Minerals Act 1991	On 26 September 2024, the Government introduced a Bill encompassing a package of changes to the Crown Minerals Act 1991 to address gas security challenges and increase revenue from mining activities. The package includes the reverse of the 2018 ban on new petroleum exploration outside onshore Taranaki, changes to how petroleum exploration permits are allocated, streamlining of regulations for recreational gold mining, and other changes to signal to the international market that New Zealand is 'open for business'. The Bill passed is third reading on 31 July 2025 and formally passed into law on 5 August 2025. Notably, the Act amends the decommissioning regime by introducing Ministerial discretion to assign liability to former permit holders or those who held an interest in a permit. More details are available here.
	The potential impact of the proposals on Southland and Environment Southland's operations remains unclear, as it will be influenced by multiple factors, including market demands, and the cost of production.

Te Tiriti & Te ao Māori legislation	
References to Te Tiriti in legislation	The National-New Zealand First coalition agreement includes a commitment to review legislation, excluding Treaty settlement legislation, that contains references to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. The review seeks to either repeal those references or replace them with more specific wording describing the relevance and application of the Treaty in individual Acts. The Government began this process in 2025 through a review of Treaty references across 19 Acts administered by 11 government agencies. More information is available here. A letter dated 2 April 2026, signed by Ministers Paul Goldsmith and Shane Jones, outlined Cabinet's decisions to repeal, amend, or standardise Treaty references across a range of legislation. References to be repealed: 1. Education and Training Act 2. Energy Efficiency and Conservation Act 3. Land Transport Management Act 4. Organic Products and Production Act 5. Smokefree Environments and Regulated Products Act 6. Crown Pastoral Land Act 7. Plant Variety Rights Act References to be amended: 8. Data and Statistics Act 9. Hazardous Substance and New Organisms Act Cabinet also agreed that references to the Treaty of Waitangi and Te Tiriti o Waitangi should be standardised where appropriate and that, in a number of Acts, Treaty-related obligations should generally not exceed a "take into account" threshold. To implement these decisions, the Government introduced three Bills: • References to Tiriti o Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi (Repeals) Amendment Bill • References to Tiriti o Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi (Strength of Legislative Obligations) Amendment Bill • References to Tiriti o Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi (Standardisation) Amendment Bill The Bills completed their first readings under urgency in September 2026 and have been referred to the Justice Select Committee for consideration. Collectively, they seek to repeal, amend, standardise, or clarify Treaty references across a range of legislation, while excluding Treaty settlement legislation. The Bills are currently open for public submissions, with feedback due by 1 December 2026.
	The proposed changes are not expected to have direct implications for most of Environment Southland's statutory functions. However, amendments to legislation containing Treaty references may influence the broader policy and legislative environment in which councils operate. Staff will maintain a watching brief on the progression of the Bills and assess any implications for Council as the select committee process progresses.

Water Services Infrastructure	
Local Water Done Well	The first Bill of the Government's Local Water Done Well initiative repealed the legislation intended to introduce the three waters scheme. The second Bill, the Local Government (Water Services Preliminary Arrangements) Bill, was passed into law in August 2024. It provided the framework and transitional arrangements for the new water services system, including a requirement for local authorities to submit a water services delivery plan within 12 months.

	The third Bill, the Local Government (Water Services) Bill set out details relating to the water services delivery system, economic regulation and consumer protection regime and changes to the water quality regulatory framework. It is significant for regional councils as it proposes to introduce new national standards for wastewater and stormwater environmental performance among other things. This Bill was enacted in August 2025. More information on the water services legislation changes is published on the Taumata Arowai website.
	Environment Southland submitted on this matter (Objective ID: 1233315) and orally presented to the committee during a formal hearing in March 2025.
Water Services (Wastewater Environmental Performance Standards) Regulations	The Water Services Authority Taumata Arowai ran a public consultation on wastewater environmental performance standards in April 2025. The proposed standards are expected to: • improve consenting efficiency for wastewater treatment plants and support the upcoming wave of reconsenting • set consistent treatment expectations while balancing upgrade costs with public health and environmental outcomes • support national consistency and improved performance data to inform planning and community engagement The regulations are now in force, except for overflow and bypass requirements, which take effect from December 2028 to align with future stormwater and wastewater risk management plans. See here for the relevant press release.
	The proposed standards are expected to have a significant impact on Environment Southland's operations as well as Southland's natural environment and communities. With the right settings, efficiency improvements and cost savings are achievable. However, depending on their final form, the proposals may lead to an overly simplified approach to managing wastewater treatment and discharge, potentially creating challenges for integrated water resource management, and increased disparities among different user groups. Environment Southland's submission outlining the regional regulator's perspective in detail was lodged with the Water Services Authority – Taumata Arowai on 24 April 2025 (Objective ID: A1265043).

Transport	
Transport Government Policy Statement (GPS)	The Government Policy Statement (GPS) on land transport guides NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi (NZTA), KiwiRail and local authorities on land transport investment. The current GPS was released in June 2024. The current GPS prioritises economic growth and productivity, maintenance and resilience, safety, and value for money. It includes an expanded Roads of National Significance programme and places greater emphasis on infrastructure delivery and network performance. On 13 August 2026, the Minister of Transport released a Ministerial Statement on Land Transport to inform preparation of Long-Term Plans (LTPs) and Regional Land Transport Plans (RLTPs) ahead of the next GPS. The Government has indicated that a draft GPS 2027-37 will be released for public consultation in early 2027. The Ministerial Statement signals that the future GPS is likely to have an overarching focus on value for money, investment discipline, maintenance and renewals, resilience, transit-oriented development, economic growth and productivity, and safety.

	The South Island Regional Transport Committee Chairs Group and the Otago and Southland Regional Transport Committees submitted on the current GPS with input from Environment Southland staff. Staff have undertaken the necessary modifications to align the Regional Land Transport Plan with the current GPS. The Ministerial Statement provides an early indication of likely priorities for GPS 2027-37 and assists preparation of the next Regional Land Transport Plan. As the RLTP must give effect to the GPS, the Regional Transport Committee will need to take account of emerging national priorities while retaining flexibility until the draft GPS is released for consultation in early 2027. NZTA has now released an initial draft Investment Prioritisation Method (IPM) 2027 to support development of continuous programme and improvement activity bids for the 2027-30 National Land Transport Programme. The draft IPM incorporates technical updates to the previous methodology and reflects the direction signalled in the Ministerial Statement, although it may be refined following release of the draft GPS 2027-37. NZTA has also advised that additional supporting documents, including a Draft State Highway Asset Management Plan and Draft State Highway Investment Proposal, will be released to support development of the 2027-30 National Land Transport Programme.
2024-2027 National Land Transport Programme	NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi (NZTA) released the 2024–27 National Land Transport Programme (NLTP), to meet the Government's strategic priorities set out in the Government Policy Statement on Land Transport (GPS) 2024. The National Land Transport Programme is a three-year programme of prioritised activities with a 10-year forecast of revenue and expenditure. It is prepared by NZTA to give effect to the GPS and reflects a partnership between NZTA (which invests National Land Transport Fund funding on behalf of the Crown), and local government (which invests on behalf of ratepayers). Regional summaries are available of the NLTP forecast investment. Otago/Southland regional summary – NLTP 2024-27 [PDF, 142 KB]
Amendments to the Public Works Act ***a) Public Works (Critical Infrastructure) Amendment Act*** ***b) Public Works Amendment Act***	On 25 February 2025, Land Information Minister Chris Penk announced reforms to the Public Works Act 1981 (PWA), aimed at improving infrastructure delivery. A subsequent announcement on 10 March 2025 introduced an accelerated land acquisition pathway for critical infrastructure projects, including Fast-track projects and Roads of National Significance. The Public Works (Critical Infrastructure) Amendment Act 2025 was enacted in August 2025 and inserted a new Part 2A into the Public Works Act 1981, creating an accelerated acquisition process for a limited class of infrastructure projects. The Public Works Amendment Act represents the second phase of the Government's reform programme and introduces broader structural changes to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and clarity of land acquisition, objection, and compensation processes under the Public Works Act. Key changes include: • introducing incentive payments to encourage early agreement for land acquisition • increasing recognition payments for affected landowners • streamlining objection and compensation processes • enabling coordinated land acquisition for connected infrastructure projects • providing faster land acquisition processes for emergency recovery activities • clarifying and simplifying statutory processes while retaining protections for landowners. The Act received Royal Assent on 25 September 2026. The Government has stated that the reforms modernise a legislative framework that has not been substantially updated

	since 1988 and will help reduce delays, costs, and uncertainty associated with infrastructure delivery.
	As a public entity responsible for key public works such as flood risk management, Environment Southland is likely to be affected by the changes. Staff will continue to monitor implementation of the legislation and assess any implications for Council projects and land acquisition processes.

Other Infrastructure	
National Infrastructure Plan	The Infrastructure Commission released the final National Infrastructure Plan on 17 February 2026 following consultation on the draft in 2025. It appears that the Plan provides a system-wide assessment of infrastructure pressures and outlines a practical pathway for improving how NZ plans, funds, maintains and delivers infrastructure. Key themes include improving asset management, prioritising cost-effective projects, and strengthening resilience in response to demographic change, climate impacts and ageing infrastructure. See here for the beehive press release. Notably, the final plan places a much stronger emphasis on flood infrastructure compared with the draft plan. The Plan identifies 16 system-wide recommendations and 10 priority actions for the next decade. On 16 June 2026, the Government released its formal response, supporting all 16 recommendations (three in principle) and confirming action on all 10 priority areas identified by the Commission. The Government noted that 11 of the 16 recommendations align with work already underway, including: • integrated spatial planning • implementation of the National Adaptation Framework • time-of-use pricing • road pricing reform • infrastructure investment improvements. In addition, the Government committed to four further actions: 1. reviewing the land transport funding system 2. legislating for departments and Crown entities to publish long-term investment plans and report on asset management 3. strengthening participation and data quality within the National Infrastructure Pipeline 4. improving public sector infrastructure project leadership and capability. The Government's response is available here.
	The national plan is expected to have a significant impact on the national infrastructure policy which would in turn affect Environment Southland's operations and the broader Southland region. Environment Southland's submission, provided to the Commission in August 2025, advocated for increasing focus on flood mitigation infrastructure amongst other things (Objective ID: A1314818). The Plan's focus on improved asset management, greater transparency, and long-term investment planning is expected to have implications for reporting, programme sequencing and funding expectations. Staff will continue to monitor implementation of the government's response to the Commission's recommendations.
Regional Infrastructure Fund	The RIF delivers on the Government's promise to address the regional infrastructure deficit. It will help boost the New Zealand economy, increase regional prosperity, and create jobs.

	The RIF, $1.2 billion over three years, is administered by Kānoa – Regional, Economic Development & Investment Unit (Kānoa – RD). The RIF is a capital fund. Funding support is primarily provided through a mix of loan and equity investments. The RIF will invest specifically in regional infrastructure, making investments in projects that boost regional growth, resilience, and productivity. This includes building new infrastructure and improving existing structures to benefit regional businesses, organisations, and communities. More information is available here.
	For Southland, the RIF co-investment scheme currently supports various projects across the region. - A suspensory loan of up to $15.35m has been made available to Southland District Council to build the first stage of a solar farm, and network upgrades to replace diesel-generated electricity for Rakiura/Stewart Island's 494 permanent electricity connections. More details are available here. Click here for the SDC webpage on Rakiura energy solutions. - $14.9 million will support a new package of work designed to further reduce flood risk for Invercargill City, Gore and Mataura, and for communities in the lower Ōreti catchment. More details can be found here. - It was announced on 14 November 2025 that the Government is investing a $2.2 million RIF funding loan towards the development of an aquaculture centre of excellence in Southland at the Ocean Beach site near Bluff. - On 21 January 2026, the Government announced a $3.1 million loan through the RIF to initiate an industrial subdivision near Gore. Construction is expected to commence in mid-2026. See here for more details. - On 12 August 2026, the Government announced a $15 million Regional Infrastructure Fund investment to support the development of a $31 million critical minerals and green hydrogen facility in Southland. The project is intended to support regional economic development, advanced manufacturing, and emerging energy technologies, with the RIF investment comprising a mix of loan and equity funding.
Infrastructure Funding and Financing Amendment Act	On 26 November 2025, the Government introduced this Bill as part of Pillar 2 of its Going for Housing Growth programme. The Bill amends the Infrastructure Funding and Financing Act 2020 to broaden the scope of levy-funded projects beyond housing-related infrastructure to include transport and water services. It also removes barriers to levy use, enables levy deferrals to improve affordability, and streamlines approval processes to accelerate urban development. The Bill completed its passage through Parliament on 28 July 2026 and has received Royal assent. The Government has stated that the amendments will provide councils and infrastructure providers with greater flexibility to fund and finance infrastructure required to support housing growth and urban development, while reducing reliance on upfront rates funding and development contributions. Key changes include: • Broadening the range of infrastructure projects eligible for levy funding, including transport and water infrastructure. • Enabling levy deferrals to improve affordability for households. • Simplifying and streamlining the approval process for levy-funded projects. • Improving the flexibility and attractiveness of the Infrastructure Funding and Financing regime for councils, developers, and infrastructure providers.
	Environment Southland will continue to monitor implementation of the amendments.

Other Topics	
Simplifying Local Government proposal	The Government's reform programme is occurring alongside the Local Government Commission's investigation into potential reorganisation of Southland's councils. The Head Start submission period closed on 9 August 2026. Two proposals were submitted for Southland: a one-unitary-authority model supported by Invercargill City Council, and a two-unitary-authority model supported by Southland District Council. Gore District Council subsequently withdrew its support for the Head Start proposals and instead resolved to continue participating in the Local Government Commission's investigation process. Environment Southland has publicly expressed support for Invercargill City Council's development of a one Southland-wide unitary authority. Following assessment of the 18 Head Start proposals, the Government has announced that decisions on the next phase of the Head Start process have been deferred to allow additional assessment of proposals and further consideration of implementation issues. The Government is also continuing to consider arrangements for areas that do not proceed through the Head Start pathway.
	The Government's local government reform programme and the Local Government Commission's investigation into Southland local government reorganisation could have significant implications for governance arrangements and the future delivery of regional functions. Environment Southland lodged its submission on the Government's reform proposals on 20 February 2026 (Objective ID: A1563609) and continues to engage with territorial authorities, iwi partners, central government agencies, and the Local Government Commission. Environment Southland has publicly expressed support for Invercargill City Council's one Southland-wide unitary authority proposal. Staff will continue to monitor developments and provide advice to Council as decisions are made and the future reform pathway becomes clearer.
Crown Land Legislation Amendment Bill	In April 2026, the Government introduced the Crown Land Legislation Amendment Bill, which proposes changes to how Crown pastoral lease land in the South Island High Country can be used. The Bill would allow pastoral leaseholders to continue farming while also undertaking a wider range of additional activities, such as farm shops, small-scale hospitality, horticulture and cropping, and renewable energy projects, subject to approvals. The Bill is intended to give leaseholders greater flexibility to diversify their income, streamline approval processes, and reduce compliance requirements, while maintaining or enhancing the inherent values of High Country land. The Bill has been introduced to Parliament and will proceed through the Select Committee process, including public submissions.
	Southland contains 13 active Crown pastoral leases. Staff will continue to assess the implications of the proposals for these lease areas and the wider region.
Local Government (Rates Capping) Amendment Bill	On 25 August 2026, the Government introduced the Local Government (Rates Capping) Bill. The Bill would establish a rates-capping regime under which councils would generally be required to keep annual rates increases within an initial target range of 2-4 per cent. Water services would be excluded from the regime and continue to be regulated separately. An independent regulator would be established to monitor compliance, assess exemption applications, provide implementation guidance, and advise on future target ranges.

	The Bill passed its first reading on 1 September 2026 and has opened for public consultation. The select committee is expected to report back to the House in March 2027. Councils will be required to have regard to the target range when preparing Long-Term Plans from 1 July 2027. The regime is proposed to become fully binding from 1 July 2029. The Bill includes time-bound exemptions for exceptional circumstances, such as natural disasters, and for situations where councils can demonstrate a justified need to operate outside the target range.
	The proposed regime has the potential to significantly influence Council's long-term financial planning and funding decisions. Councils will need to consider the target range when preparing future Long-Term Plans and may need to utilise exemption processes where circumstances justify rates increases outside the prescribed range. The interaction between the proposed rates cap, ongoing local government reform, resource management reform, and other regulatory changes will continue to be assessed as the Bill progresses through Parliament. Environment Southland submitted on the original proposal (Objective ID: A1417886). Staff are currently preparing a submission on the Bill, with submission closing on 1 December 2026. Staff will continue to assess the potential implications for Council and monitor the outcome of the consultation process as the legislation progresses.
Local Government (System Improvements) Amendment Act	On 7 February 2025, the Department of Internal Affairs proactively released a Cabinet paper on Local Government System Improvements, outlining the Government's proposed 'back to basics' reforms for local government. The Local Government (System Improvements) Amendment Act received Royal Assent on 18 September 2026. The Government has stated that the Act is intended to reduce pressure on rates, strengthen accountability and transparency, improve financial discipline, and refocus local government on core services. Key changes include: • Refocusing the purpose of local government through removal of the four well-beings • New requirements for measuring and publicly reporting council performance • Mandatory disclosure of contractor and consultant spending • A stronger focus on core services and infrastructure • Strengthened accountability and transparency requirements • Regulatory relief measures for councils • Restricting voting rights on council committees to elected members, while continuing to allow non-elected members to participate in an advisory capacity, except where voting rights arise through statutory or Treaty settlement-based arrangements. In addition to measures aimed at strengthening accountability, transparency, and financial discipline, the Act includes changes intended to improve councils' ability to recover growth-related infrastructure costs associated with future Fast-track developments. These changes allow councils to amend Development Contribution policies in certain circumstances following Fast-track approvals and address situations where infrastructure impacts extend across council boundaries. The Government stated that the changes respond to concerns raised by councils regarding the impact of Fast-track developments on existing and future infrastructure requirements and associated costs.
	Environment Southland's submission was provided to the Department on 27 August 2025 (Objective ID: A1321306) and orally presented to the Select Committee.

	The development contribution changes may provide councils with additional tools to recover growth-related infrastructure costs arising from future Fast-track developments. While the direct impacts are likely to be greater for territorial authorities responsible for transport and water infrastructure, the changes remain relevant in the context of wider local government reform, infrastructure funding arrangements, and the proposed rates-capping regime. Staff will continue to monitor implementation of the Act, including the issued Groups of Activity regulations, and assess any implications for Environment Southland and the wider local government sector.

9.6 Strategy, Policy and Regional Planning Group Update

Report by: Liz Devery, Regional Planning Manager & Marcus Roy, Strategy & Policy Manager
Approved by: Hayley Fitchett, General Manager Strategy and Regulation
Report Date: 11 November 2026

Purpose

This report is an update on the work being carried out by the strategy and policy, and regional planning teams.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Strategy and Policy Committee **resolve to:**

1 Receive the Strategy, Policy, and Regional Planning Update Report.

Background

The Strategy and Policy team is responsible for:

- Developing clear strategy, corporate plans and defined priorities;
- Proving coordination and support for the management and successful performance of the organisation's key groups of activities/portfolios – air quality, biosecurity and biodiversity, climate change and community resilience, coast and marine, regional leadership, and water and land;
- Leading the generation and reporting of data and insights;
- Providing policy advice;
- Monitoring plan effectiveness;
- Managing the review of, and Council's response to, national direction and reform.

The Regional Planning team is responsible for:

- Developing resource management and regional plan and policy development;
- Providing drafting leadership.

Matters of Interest

Information about national and regional matters of interest that have arisen since the last Strategy and Policy Committee meeting and Council meeting is outlined below.

National

Changes to national legislation, and associated Environment Southland's submissions to central government, have slowed while the Central Government election process has been occurring. Future amendments are anticipated to the recently enacted legislation, irrespective of which coalition arrangement.

Once coalition agreements are in place, Council will be able to understand the intended political direction moving forward which will assist with providing clarity about our regional council functions and work programmes moving forward.

Regional

Navigation Safety Bylaw – Infringement Regulations

The Hearing on the Navigation Safety Bylaw has now been closed, with the final Hearing session being held Following the Council's decision on the Navigation Safety Bylaw, the proposed infringements have been sent to the Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport for consideration and to commence the regulation making process.

Appeals to the Proposed Southland Water and Land Plan

The Environment Court has directed Environment Southland to undertake a plan change process for Rule 78 (Weed and Sediment Removal) under section 293 of the Resource Management Act. This is because aspects of the proposed solution are outside the scope of the original appeal and cannot be resolved through the appeal process alone.

Environment Southland has prepared proposed amendments to Rule 78 that reflect the outcomes of agreements with the appeal parties, completed a section 32AA evaluation, and provided the relevant documentation to interested parties for feedback by 10 December. Following consideration of that feedback, any necessary refinements will be made before the proposed amendments are filed with the Environment Court for a decision.

This is the next step in a significant collaborative process involving Environment Southland and the appeal parties.

Technical work continues outside the Court in relation to the Water Quantity related appeal. The next reporting date for this appeal is January 2027.

Plan Modification proposals

No further updates have been received from the Minister Responsible for Resource Management Reform in relation to the proposed Plan Modifications being considered for the Southland Water and Land Plan in relation to wetlands and other positive on-farm actions, farm plans, and the management of beds of rivers for protection of infrastructure.

Natural Hazards and the Gore District Plan Review

Between the last Strategy and Policy Committee meeting and the drafting of this agenda (27 October 2026) the Regional Planning team have fielded 40 natural hazards related enquiries, with a total of 98 enquiries this financial year. This is an increase on the same period as last year, where there were 77 enquiries received.

It should be noted that some of these enquiries involve multiple follow up interactions, and some have required detail to address the Council’s obligations under the National Policy Statement for Natural Hazards. These enquiries were from members of the public and organisations seeking information to inform potential subdivision and building consents, or to answer questions people have received from insurance and finance companies.

Regional Transport Model

The Transport Planning team has recently updated the Southland Primary Industry Export and Tourism Transport Flow Model. This tool helps build an understanding of how Southland's major industries and tourism activities rely on the region's transport network, and where the greatest economic value is moving across roads, rail and ports.

The update incorporates the latest available information, including 2024/25 export data, changes in land use and production patterns, updated tourism information and revised transport routes. The model estimates that around $12.7 billion of export and tourism-related economic activity depends on Southland's transport network, including

dairy, meat, forestry, aluminium and international visitor sectors. A number of industries have provided insight to contribute to the work.

The model will be used to support regional transport planning and regional spatial planning by providing informing decisions on infrastructure investment, network resilience and regional advocacy. It helps identify transport corridors that are particularly important to Southland's economy, where freight and visitor movements rely on critical routes, and where disruptions could have significant economic and community impacts.

This information will assist Environment Southland and its partners when developing the Regional Land Transport Plan, assessing future land use and transport scenarios, prioritising investment proposals and advocating for national investment in infrastructure that supports both Southland and New Zealand's export economy. The model will be presented to the Regional Transport Committee at its next meeting later this year.

While the model provides a useful regional overview, it relies on a range of assumptions about production, destinations and transport movements. It is therefore intended to support strategic planning and investment decisions rather than predict actual traffic volumes or freight movements with precision.

Regional Spatial Plan
Environment Southland councillors are well prepared for the 8 December joint workshop on the Murihiku Southland Regional Spatial Plan with the other three councils and mana whenua representatives.

The October Council paper and November workshop covered:

- The indicative programme timeline, including national direction and links with local government reform.
- The Joint Process Agreement (JPA), including committee membership, independent chairing, decision-making, secretariat hosting and mana whenua participation.
- Principles for community involvement, environmental stewardship and making best use of existing evidence and engagement.
- Indicative programme costs and options for sharing costs across councils.

The joint workshop will give participants an opportunity to compare their positions and identify where further work is needed before proposed arrangements return to councils for formal decisions. An Environment Southland position statement for Regional Spatial Planning has been developed.

Long Term Plan
Progress is occurring on the Long Term Plan despite central government elections and uncertainty about various parts of Regional Council functions. A workshop outlining the proposed areas of lift and drop in the 2027 long-term plan is scheduled for 24 November. Also, the workshop will identify potential consultation matters and options which will be brough back to Councillors in January prior to audit review in February.

Fit with strategic framework

OUTCOME	CONTRIBUTES	DETRACTS	NOT APPLICABLE
Managed access to quality natural resources	X		
Diverse opportunities to make a living	X		
Communities empowered and resilient	X		
Communities expressing their diversity	X		

Attachments
Nil

9.7 Update on Councillor Requests and Actions

Approved by: Hayley Fitchett, General Manager Strategy and Regulation
Report Date: 1 October 2026

Purpose

This report captures Councillor requests and actions that have occurred during Strategy and Policy Committee meetings and provides an update on how these are being responded to.

Date	Councillor Request/Action	Update
August 2026	What was the total cost of securing the Rule 24 Environment Court Decision	Verbal update to be provided at meeting
August 2026	Who is going to lead follow-up work regarding ownership, maintenance responsibilities and potential MOU arrangements for the Tuatapere Domain Flood Banks?	Verbal update to be provided at meeting

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Strategy and Policy Committee **resolve to:**

1 Receive the report - Update on Councillor Requests and Actions.

Attachments

Nil

10 Extraordinary/urgent business I Panui autia hei totoia pakihi

11 Public excluded business I He hui pakihi e hara mo te iwi

At the time of the agenda closing, no public excluded business received for the meeting.