

Natural Environment

Te Taiao



What are these chapters about?

The Natural Environment Values chapters in the Proposed Far North District Plan – Decisions Version (PDP-DV) manage how activities and development interact with the district's natural environment. These chapters focus on protecting and managing important natural features and ecosystems while allowing for appropriate use and development.

The PDP-DV covers four key Natural Environment topics:

- **Natural Character** (wetland, lake and river margins).
- **Natural Features and Landscapes** (Outstanding Natural Landscapes and Outstanding Natural Features).
- **Coastal Environment.**
- **Ecosystems and Indigenous Biodiversity.**

Together, these chapters provide a framework to protect important natural values, recognise existing activities and support appropriate development.

What does the Proposed District Plan – Decisions Version (PDP-DV) do?

The PDP-DV:

- Protects important natural values, including coastal areas, rivers and wetlands, outstanding landscapes, and indigenous biodiversity.
- Manages the effects of land use, subdivision and development on the characteristics, qualities and values that make these environments important.
- Recognises that some activities, including farming, infrastructure and residential development, have a functional or operational need to locate in natural environments.
- Provides clearer, more consistent rules that focus on managing effects rather than preventing use.
- Aligns district plan provisions with national and regional policy direction, including the Resource Management Act and Northland Regional Policy Statement.

Following submissions and Hearings Panel recommendations, several refinements have been made:

- The scope and purpose of each natural environment chapter have been clarified to avoid overlap.
- Objectives and policies have been refined to consistently refer to characteristics, qualities and values, and to focus on effects management.
- Rules have been adjusted to reduce unnecessary consent requirements, particularly for:
 - Existing buildings and lawfully established activities.
 - Farming and rural land management.
 - Infrastructure maintenance and upgrades.
- The Ecosystems and Indigenous Biodiversity chapter no longer includes mapped Significant Natural Areas (SNAs), with future implementation of the National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity to occur through a separate plan change.
- Greater clarity has been provided on how national environmental standards, such as the National Environmental Standards for Freshwater (NES-F), interact with district plan rules.

What's changed from the Operative District Plan (ODP)?

Compared with the ODP, the PDP-DV does not rely on a single, integrated set of natural environment chapters. Instead, natural environment matters were managed through a mix of zones, overlays and topic-specific provisions, often resulting in duplication and overlap.

Key differences introduced by the PDP-DV include:

- Consolidating natural environment matters into clear district-wide chapters (Natural Character, Natural Features and Landscapes, Coastal Environment, and Ecosystems and Indigenous Biodiversity).
- A clearer distinction between the coastal environment, freshwater margins, outstanding landscapes and features, and indigenous biodiversity.
- More explicit recognition of existing lawfully established activities, which were often less clearly provided for under the ODP.
- Updated objectives, policies and rules that are better aligned with current national and regional policy direction.
- Greater consistency in how effects on natural values are identified and assessed across the district.

Overall, the PDP-DV replaces a more fragmented ODP framework with a clearer and more consistent approach to managing natural environment values.

When do I need a Resource Consent?

You may need a resource consent if:

- Your proposal does not meet permitted activity standards in a natural environment area.
- You are proposing new buildings, earthworks or vegetation clearance in sensitive locations such as outstanding landscapes, coastal areas, or wetland and river margins.
- Your activity may have effects on important natural values.
- You are creating additional allotments through subdivision within an area covered by a natural environment overlay.

What do I need to know?

Before starting a project in an area with natural environment values, it is important to:

- Check whether your site is affected by Natural Character, Natural Features and Landscapes, Coastal Environment, or Ecosystems and Indigenous Biodiversity provisions.
- Understand which activities are permitted and where resource consent may be required.
- Consider how your proposal may affect natural values, including landscapes, waterways and indigenous vegetation.
- Seek pre-application advice from Council where proposals are complex or located in sensitive environments.