

Modernising the concessions system

The Government is proposing changes to make it faster and easier to get concessions on conservation land, unlocking greater economic activity while protecting nature.

What the concession system is

Most economic activities on conservation land – like tourism businesses, visitor accommodation, and energy infrastructure – require permission from the Minister of Conservation. These permissions are known as concessions. Concessions ensure activities can occur on conservation land while protecting conservation values and the public interest.

Thousands of businesses already operate on conservation land, contributing millions of dollars to local economies.

Why changes are needed

Slow and complex processes

- DOC receives 1,500+ concession applications each year and manages 4,000+ active concessions.
- There are currently no statutory timeframes for decisions.

Too much red tape for low-impact activities

- Most applications are assessed individually, even when activities are low risk and their impacts are well understood.
- This slows down the system and diverts attention away from high-impact proposals.

Inconsistent and inefficient processes

- Limited standardisation means similar activities can be treated differently.
- This makes decisions slower, and compliance is hard to monitor consistently.

Barriers to effective engagement for businesses and Treaty partners

- Delays reduce certainty for businesses wanting to invest in conservation land.
- Treaty partners are frequently engaged on large numbers of low-impact applications, creating unnecessary administrative burdens.

What the changes are

✓ Pre-approved and exempt activities

A new National Conservation Policy Statement (NCPS), designed to replace existing general policies, will:

- Exempt some low-impact activities from requiring a concession.
- Pre-approve some low-impact activities that can be managed through standard conditions and monitoring.

This means:

- No individual assessment will be required for these activities.
- Some activities will not need a concession at all.

These changes are expected to remove up to 30 - 40% of current applications from the system



A streamlined concession process

The Bill will streamline concessions processing by introducing:

- End-to-end statutory timeframes for concession decisions. The Minister of Conservation can extend timeframes, but must provide reasons to applicants.
- Clear grounds on which the Minister may decline applications at early in processing.
- Automatic extensions when more information, third-party reports or advice are required.
- Suspension of processing when requested by the applicant, or when processing fees are unpaid.
- Clear timeframes for Treaty partner input (a default timeframe of 20 working days).



Modernised contractual management

The Bill will standardise the ongoing management of concessions by:

- Allowing the Minister to set standardised conditions for concessions and providing more detail about how activity fees may be set in regulations.
- Allowing longer lease terms (up to 60 years) where the useful life of fixed assets or structures associated with the concession is longer than 30 years, or the concession provides critical infrastructure.
- Making it easier to transfer a concession to a new operator (for example, when a business is sold).
- Allowing the Minister to grant concessions for use of Crown-owned wharves that sit next to conservation land.



Competitive allocation made simpler

The Bill will make it easier to run an allocation process for concession opportunities. One key change is that the Minister will be able to decline an application early in processing to instead run an allocation process, rather than having to process any application because it has been submitted. Changes to the allocation process will also reduce double-handling by removing the need for business to apply for the competitive process and, if selected, again for the concession.

The Minister of Conservation will continue to have the discretion to decide when and how to run an allocation process. This doesn't apply to concessions where regulations say that an allocation process cannot be used.

How conservation values will be protected for exempt and pre-approved activities



Safeguards remain in place

Activities will only be exempt or pre-approved where impacts are minimal. The NCPS will clearly state where exemptions and pre-approvals do and do not apply.

If an exempt or pre-approved activity has a greater impact than expected, it can be paused and reviewed.

How businesses and tourism operators will benefit from the changes

The changes will make it faster and easier to get concessions. In addition, a large number of activities will be exempt or pre-approved, meaning business either won't need a concession, or will be able to get instant approvals for standard low-impact activities.

What this means for existing concession holders

Long-term certainty is important for businesses that invest in assets on conservation land. However, important concessions should not be automatically “locked in” with one holder forever. Competition helps ensure the best proposals are selected and opportunities remain open over time. Regulations can exempt some concessions from competitive processes, where appropriate.

Why timeframes can be extended

- **Clear expectations:** Statutory timeframes create transparency and accountability, and DOC can report against them.
- **Flexibility where needed:** Concession applications vary in scale and complexity. Extensions help ensure decisions remain robust and lawful.