

Conservation Amendment Bill

The Government wants to modernise the conservation system to make it more efficient, fit-for-purpose, and enable more economic activity on public conservation land while delivering for nature.

Public conservation land makes up nearly a third of New Zealand and is critically important to iwi and communities, with thousands of businesses operating on this public land and contributing to regional economies. Nature is also critical to New Zealand's national economy; it is the selling point for our exporters and the biggest drawcard for international visitors.

Between November 2024 and February 2025, public consultation took place on proposals to modernise the conservation system. Thousands of submissions were received and helped inform final policy decisions.

The Conservation Amendment Bill will update the legal system the Department of Conservation operates within, to unlock faster processes, improve decision-making, and provide more certainty and clarity for communities and businesses. It will also allow for more economic activity where appropriate and will mean that international visitors could be charged to visit some special places, providing revenue for conservation.

The Government is committed to upholding Treaty settlements and rights under the Marine and Coastal Area (Takutai Moana) Act 2011.

Why change is needed

An outdated law

- The Conservation Act is nearly 40 years old.
- Who our visitors are, how businesses operate, and even how conservation is done, has all changed.
- The law hasn't kept pace with these changes.

An overly complex system

- Outdated rules and overlapping plans create a complex system.
- In many cases, proposals must be assessed against multiple, sometimes conflicting documents, even where impacts are well understood and manageable.

Decisions are slow and expectations are unclear

- The system creates complex processes that make it hard to make decisions and operate at a pace you'd expect in 2026.
- The Conservation Act is also silent on what "giving effect to Treaty principles" means in practice. This creates uncertainty and makes it harder to achieve timely and consistent decisions.

Unlocking sustainable development

- Together, these issues undermine conservation outcomes, frustrate communities and iwi, and hold back investment, innovation and sustainable regional development.
- The changes will modernise the system, make it clearer for iwi and communities, provide more certainty for businesses and allow DOC to operate more efficiently.



What the Bill changes

Simpler, clearer planning

The Bill modernises the conservation planning system to make it easier to understand, navigate and keep up to date by:

- Replacing two outdated national policies with a single National Conservation Policy Statement (NCPS) that will provide clear, consistent national direction.
- Replacing overlapping regional and local plans with a single layer of area plans.
- Making it easier and faster to update plans to respond to changing pressures and priorities.

Faster, more efficient concessions processing

Thousands of businesses and community groups already operate on public conservation land, particularly in tourism and recreation. The Bill changes the concessions system so approvals for activities on conservation land are faster, more consistent and proportionate to risk, by:

- Introducing statutory timeframes and streamlined public notification requirements.
- Allowing low-risk, low-impact activities to be pre-approved or not require a concession.
- Making it easier to run allocation processes for concessions and easier to transfer concessions when businesses change ownership.

Additional funding for conservation

The Bill enables a new funding source to support conservation and visitor infrastructure by:

- Allowing the charging of international visitors at highly visited sites.
- Ensuring new revenue is reinvested directly into conservation work and visitor facilities.
- Confirming New Zealanders will continue to access public conservation land for free.

Strong protections for nature

The Bill keeps conservation at the heart of the system by ensuring that:

- Conservation remains the Act's primary purpose.
- Development can occur only where it is not inconsistent with conservation at each place.
- Robust safeguards apply to land exchanges or sales, with the highest-value conservation land being ineligible.

Clearer Treaty obligations

The Bill provides greater certainty for Treaty partners, applicants and decision-makers by clarifying how Treaty principles are given effect to in conservation decision-making. The Bill does this by:

- Clarifying the processes and steps required to give effect to Treaty principles in concessions, management planning, visitor amenities areas and land exchanges and sales.
- Clarifying that section 4 of the Conservation Act does not require the Minister to initiate an allocation process to grant a concession for an activity.

What are the next steps

The Select Committee stage will provide a further opportunity for the public to share feedback and make recommendations to inform the Committee's consideration of the Bill.