



# Strategic Intentions

## He Takunetanga Rautaki

2025–2029



Ministry for the  
**Environment**  
*Manatū Mō Te Taiao*

Presented to the House of Representatives pursuant  
to section 39 of the Public Finance Act 1989

Published in February 2025 by the  
Ministry for the Environment  
Manatū mō te Taiao  
PO Box 10362, Wellington 6143, New Zealand  
[environment.govt.nz](https://environment.govt.nz)

ISBN: 978-1-991140-56-2 (online)  
978-1-991140-57-9 (print)

Publication number: ME 1866

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# Statements of responsibility

## Minister's statement

I am satisfied that the information on strategic intentions prepared by the Ministry for the Environment is consistent with the Government's expectation of policies and performance.



**Hon Penny Simmonds**  
Minister for the Environment

4 February 2025

## Secretary for the Environment's statement

The Ministry for the Environment | Te Manatū mō te Taiao must publish its strategic intentions at least every three years as part of a transparent, accountable public service. These intentions outline how we plan to give effect to government priorities and our stewardship role, and how our performance can be measured. They also describe the way we will go about our work and how we are working to improve our capabilities.

In signing this document, I acknowledge that I am responsible for the information on strategic intentions for the Ministry. This information has been prepared in accordance with section 38 and section 40 of the Public Finance Act 1989.



**James Palmer**  
Secretary for the Environment

30 January 2025

# Message from the Secretary for the Environment

As New Zealand's lead advisor on the environment and climate, the Ministry advises central and local government and other decision-makers on the management of the nation's built and natural environments. We are the stewards of the regulatory systems for environment and climate change.

The management of New Zealand's environments, and the effects of climate change, is deeply interwoven with New Zealand's economic and social systems. We play a central role in integrating these considerations across the public sector, enabling the Government's broader objectives in housing, infrastructure, tourism, primary production, trade and transport.

Over the coming years, this will continue to be crucial as climate change and environmental degradation affect every part of life in New Zealand. Decision-makers face the challenge of meeting social and economic needs – now and in the future – while protecting urban and natural places, and building resilience to climate change and natural hazards. This requires careful consideration of trade-offs. We provide advice, tools and options to support decision-making, informed by robust evidence and analysis, to meet these challenges.

Over the past year, the Ministry has undergone significant change as we reset our operating model. We have reduced in size, to meet government savings objectives and to prepare for a pre-existing decline in funding. At the same time, we have refreshed our Strategic Framework to focus on delivering government priorities and other areas where we can have the most impact for New Zealanders.

Our focus for the next three to five years is shaped by five strategic priorities.

1. An effective resource management system.
2. Resilience to climate change and natural hazards.
3. A low-emission and resource-efficient economy.
4. Better evidence and data.
5. Relationships and investments for impactful solutions.

Anchored by our statutory responsibilities, this approach reflects our priorities within our current context and available resources, and what we consider matters most for New Zealand at this time. It also recognises that our success is achieved by supporting a system of central and local government decision-makers, communities and businesses, and Treaty partners, to deliver optimal outcomes on the ground.



**James Palmer**  
Secretary for the Environment

# Our role and purpose

## Our purpose

As Aotearoa New Zealand's lead advisor on the environment and climate, we enable people and places to thrive, now and in the future.

Hei kaitohutohu matua o Aotearoa mō te taiao me te āhuarangi, ka whakaahei mātou i ō tātou iwi me ō tātou wāhi ki te puāwai, ināiane, hei te anamata hoki.

## Who we are

The Ministry for the Environment was established under the Environment Act 1986. Its purpose is to advise the Government on all matters concerning New Zealand's built and natural environments. This includes climate and natural hazards, natural and physical resources, wider ecosystems, and the economic, social and cultural factors that matter to current and future generations.

We provide advice, tools and options for decision-makers to achieve their objectives and implement government decisions. The Environment Act requires that our advice takes a full and balanced account of:

- the intrinsic values of ecosystems
- all values which are placed by individuals and groups on the quality of the environment
- the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi
- the sustainability of natural and physical resources
- the needs of future generations.

We are the stewards of the regulatory systems for environmental management and climate change. We advise on how these systems support decision-making that contributes to environmental and climate outcomes now and in the future.

We produce environmental reports, including independent reports required by the Environmental Reporting Act 2015. These make science, data and evidence accessible to all New Zealanders. They empower individuals, households, communities and businesses to make informed decisions about their choices and the impact they may have on the environment and climate.

Our work is informed by evidence including science, data and place-based knowledge (including mātauranga), and insights from our relationships with local government, businesses, communities and the Crown's Treaty partners. It is these groups that make an impact on the ground.

We have a role in integrating the environmental and climate systems, working closely with other government agencies to deliver on the Government's priorities and work programmes.

## Our functions

Our functions are set out in the Environment Act and include:

- advising the Minister on:
  - policies for managing natural and physical resources
  - significant environmental impacts of proposals
  - ways of ensuring effective provision for public participation in environmental planning and policy processes
- obtaining information and doing research to inform the advice on environmental policies
- advising the Government, its agencies and other public authorities on:
  - the application, operation and effectiveness of specified legislation to achieve the objectives of the Environment Act
  - procedures for assessing and monitoring environmental impacts
  - controlling and managing pollution
  - identifying natural hazards and reducing their effects
  - the control of hazardous substances
- promoting environmental policies and education.

We have responsibilities under several acts. These include administering the Climate Change Response Act 2002, Resource Management Act 1991, Environmental Reporting Act 2015, Waste Minimisation Act 2008, and a range of Treaty settlement acts.

In our Climate Change Response Act role, we lead the development and implementation of emissions reduction plans and national adaptation plans, advise the Minister on setting emissions budgets, targets and the New Zealand Emissions Trading Scheme, and maintain the Greenhouse Gas Inventory.

Our Resource Management Act role includes supporting the Minister in their functions, duties and powers, including developing national direction, monitoring and intervening in matters of national significance, and directing plan preparation or changes. We also advise local authorities and monitor their implementation of the resource management system.

Under the Environmental Reporting Act we, in partnership with Stats NZ, provide independent national data and reporting on the state of and outlook for New Zealand's natural and built environments.

Under the Waste Minimisation Act, we administer the waste levy and manage the Waste Minimisation Fund and Contaminated Sites and Vulnerable Landfills Fund. We also undertake compliance monitoring and enforcement.

An important part of our regulatory stewardship is working with other agencies, Treaty partners and other participants to understand the implications of proposed changes, and to monitor and review legislation and regulations to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

## Monitoring and hosting

We are the monitoring agency for the Environmental Protection Authority and Climate Change Commission. We provide independent advice on how these Crown entities are carrying out their responsibilities.

The Ministry is also the host department for the Climate Change Chief Executives Board, which:

- provides strategic, cross-agency advice on the Government's climate change programme, in the context of broader government priorities
- monitors and reports on the delivery of actions in New Zealand's emissions reduction plan and national adaptation plan.

The Board is chaired by the Secretary for the Environment and comprises eight chief executives from across central government.



# Our operating context

New Zealand depends heavily on the natural resources that underpin the economy. They support the health, wellbeing and prosperity of the country's urban and rural communities. These resources are under pressure from global challenges, like climate change, and a local legacy of degradation in biodiversity, soil and freshwater within both urban and natural environments. If future generations are to enjoy the same resources as current generations, this will take an ongoing collective effort to better manage our impacts, particularly by businesses, local government and their communities, and central government.

## Environmental management

Despite considerable investment in policy and processes, the resource management system has not adequately delivered positive outcomes for the natural environment, communities, people and businesses, or cities and urban places. This has made it difficult to deliver necessary infrastructure, including adequate housing supply, while significant environmental degradation has continued. Further reform is needed across the extensive legislative and regulatory arrangements that manage the environmental effects of the nation's activities. This will remain a significant focus for the Ministry over the next five years.

## Climate change and natural hazards

New Zealand has seen an increase in the severity and frequency of adverse weather events due to climate change. Recent storms have highlighted the need for greater attention to national and community adaptation and for increased resilience to natural hazards. Our export industries, including agriculture, forestry and tourism, are particularly exposed.

Natural disasters have also highlighted the importance of global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. New Zealand is a beneficiary of the rules-based international order. It is critical to the country's standing, and to fulfilling trade and export opportunities, that New Zealand plays its part in these efforts.

## Economic context

New Zealand has recently experienced a period of slower economic growth and higher inflation, with constrained government revenue. This is putting pressure on people and businesses. There are also increasing cost pressures on communities recovering from natural disasters, and on local and central government to help build resilient communities and infrastructure. This requires cross-agency collaboration across all sectors.

The Ministry recognises the Government's expectation that public service agencies deliver high-quality, efficient and responsive services, while managing costs effectively. Following a period of rapid growth, the Ministry reviewed its operating model in 2023/24. We are in the process of reducing our workforce, in line with a baseline reduction of about 40 per cent between 2023/24 and 2026/27. The Government has emphasised the importance of fiscal discipline, innovation and collaboration to achieve better outcomes for New Zealanders. This is reflected in our refreshed strategic approach.

# Our Strategic Framework

*As Aotearoa New Zealand's lead advisor on environment and climate, we enable people and places to thrive, now and in the future.*

*Hei kaitohutohu matua o Aotearoa mō te taiao me te āhuarangi, ka whakaahei mātou i ō tātou iwi me ō tātou wāhi ki te puāwai, ināianeī, hei te anamata hoki.*

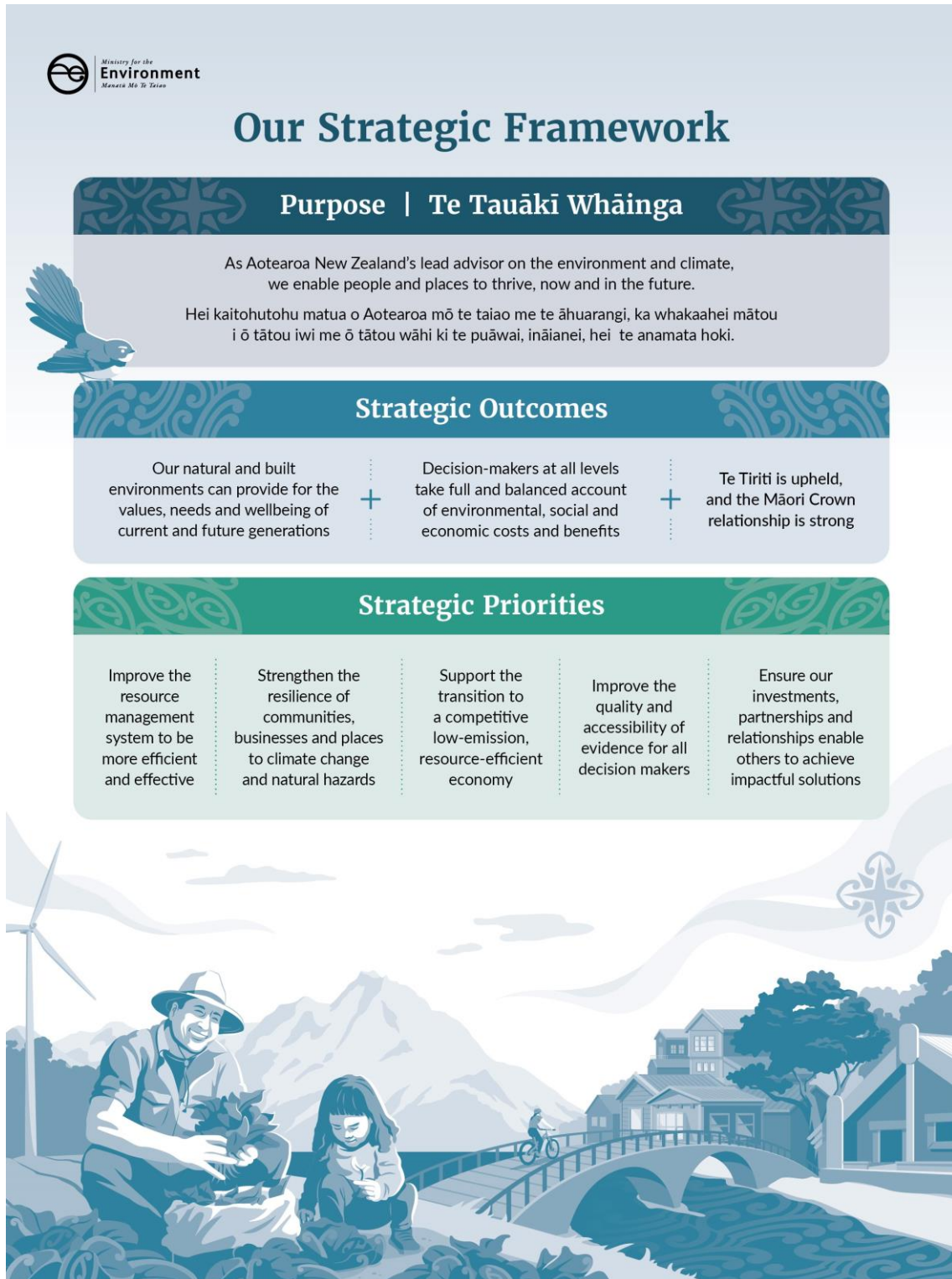
The Ministry's purpose statement (above) sits at the top of our revised Strategic Framework. Our new strategy provides the guiding star or whetū for the Ministry. It gives clear direction for our people, stakeholders and partners, and a practical framework to drive performance and shape our work programme and planning.

Over the next three to five years, we will focus on delivering the Government's priorities for the climate and environment, along with other areas where we can have the biggest impact for New Zealanders.

The framework consists of three strategic outcomes and five strategic priorities (see [figure 1](#)).

The outcomes carry equal weight and should be read together. Anchored in the Environment Act, they are designed to be long term and enduring. They are underpinned by five strategic priorities, which the Ministry will focus on over the next three to five years. This approach is supported by efforts to grow our capabilities: our people, knowledge, relationships and systems (see [Our capabilities](#)).

Figure 1: Our Strategic Framework



# Strategic outcomes

To achieve our long-term purpose, and deliver on our strategic priorities, we are working towards three strategic outcomes.

These recognise the intrinsic connection and dependencies between people, the economy, and the natural and built environments. For New Zealand to thrive, each of these elements matters.

The Environment Act 1986 outlines the Ministry's responsibility to take this holistic view. It defines the environment as the people and communities that are part of the country's ecosystems, along with natural and physical resources, and the social, cultural and economic conditions that underpin it all.

Our strategic outcomes are:

1. Our natural and built environments can provide for the values, needs and wellbeing of current and future generations.
2. Decision-makers at all levels take full and balanced account of environmental, social and economic costs and benefits.
3. Te Tiriti is upheld, and the Māori-Crown relationship is strong.

# Strategic priorities

Our work programmes are driven by five strategic priorities, along with the more detailed desired outcomes flowing from these, and the impacts we expect to achieve as a result. Through our annual report, we will measure whether we are on track to achieve our outcomes and provide accountability and transparency to Parliament, Ministers and all New Zealanders.

See also [table 1](#).

## Strategic priority 1 – Improve the resource management system to be more efficient and effective

The environmental management system includes the laws and institutions that influence how New Zealanders interact with the environment. It covers everything from natural resources to the way towns and cities are built. In the broadest sense, the system includes anyone making decisions that affect the environment.

The considered use of resources is vital for a thriving environment, economy and society. This is best delivered through a highly effective and efficient resource management system.

Our focus over the next three to five years will be on improving the system through legislative reform and guidance. This will help decision-makers deliver better housing and infrastructure outcomes faster, within environmental limits.

Desired outcome	Impact
DO1.1 The resource management system supports economic development within environmental limits.	I-1.1 The resource management system ensures simpler, proportionate, consistent and implementable decision-making.

## Strategic priority 2 – Strengthen the resilience of communities, businesses and places to climate change and natural hazards

As natural hazards and the impacts of climate change increase, the Ministry’s role will increasingly focus on supporting communities, businesses, local government and infrastructure asset owners to build their resilience and adapt.

We will do this in our role as advisors, providing information, data and evidence to support informed and considered decision-making at all levels.

Desired outcome	Impact
DO2.1 Decision-makers and communities are prepared for, avoid and adapt to changing risks at the national, regional and local level.	I-2.1 Policy and regulation support and incentivise decision-makers and communities to manage, mitigate and adapt to risk.
DO2.2 The resource management system protects New Zealand’s critical ecosystem services that buffer the impacts of climate change.	

## Strategic priority 3 – Support the transition to a competitive low-emission, resource-efficient economy

We will support New Zealand’s transition to a lower-emissions economy, that ensures enduring social and economic progress, and abundant natural resources, for current and future generations.

We have legal and practical obligations to support and report on New Zealand’s economic transition to lower emissions and greater resource efficiency. As the global economy increasingly factors in low-emissions requirements, local producers and businesses will need support to change their practices and take advantage of global and domestic shifts.

Our role will be to ensure the systems, frameworks and strategies are in place to support businesses, communities and local government to reduce emissions and improve waste management and recovery while remaining competitive.

Desired outcomes	Impacts
DO3.1 New Zealand’s greenhouse gas emissions are reduced and removals increased to meet domestic and international targets while maintaining the country’s global economic competitiveness.	I-3.1 Emissions reduction plans drive progress towards New Zealand’s low-emissions budgets and targets.
DO3.2 New Zealand increasingly becomes a resource-efficient economy and reduces impacts from waste.	I-3.2 The regulatory system for waste and investments improves effective waste management and minimisation and mitigates waste-related risks.

## Strategic priority 4 – Improve the quality and accessibility of evidence for all decision-makers

Managing New Zealand’s natural and built environments, resources, climate responses, and economic transitions requires a network of decision-makers across many systems, from individuals to businesses and government. These decision-makers rely on science, data and evidence to make the best decisions possible.

Our role will focus on:

- building the science, data and evidence base
- making this accessible and understandable for all decision-makers
- meeting our statutory reporting obligations.

Desired outcomes	Impacts
DO4.1 Decision-makers have the best available evidence, including mātauranga, to make informed, timely and robust decisions.	I-4.1 Decision-makers are well supported by a fit-for-purpose, accessible, high-quality and continuously improving evidence base.
DO4.2 Evidence improves environmental and climate regulatory systems, processes and outcomes at the national and local level.	I-4.2 Regulatory systems and environmental and climate outcomes are monitored and evaluated to inform better regulation and practice.

Desired outcomes	Impacts
DO4.3 Māori rights and interests, including Treaty settlement commitments, are assessed and evident in advice provided to decision-makers.	I-4.3 Decision-makers have quality advice that upholds Te Tiriti and Māori rights and interests, including Treaty settlements.

## Strategic priority 5 – Ensure our investments, partnerships and relationships enable others to achieve impactful solutions

We need to understand the values and needs of New Zealanders to develop practical and useful policy and tools that support decision-makers and enable people and places to thrive. We leverage the knowledge and expertise of others, building collaborative relationships and partnerships, particularly with our Treaty partners, local government, primary and other industries, sustainable finance leaders, and other important stakeholders.

We will increasingly focus on:

- strategic investments that bring the greatest value for New Zealand
- co-investment opportunities, and supporting private investment, in environment and climate programmes and projects.

Desired outcomes	Impacts
DO5.1 Public and private investments are targeted to deliver impactful environmental solutions.	I-5.1a Public environmental investments are targeted and enable co-investment.
	I-5.1b Clear and credible pathways exist for private investment in environmental outcomes, including emissions reduction.
DO5.2 Partnerships expedite and expand impactful solutions.	I-5.2 Partnerships improve implementation in the environmental system, facilitate workable solutions and increase collective impact.
DO5.3 Relationships with Treaty partners are strong and enduring.	I-5.3 Engagement processes, capabilities and systems support collaborative relationships with Treaty partners that contribute to impactful solutions and uphold Treaty commitments.

**Table 1: Strategic priorities, desired outcomes and impacts**

<b>SP1: Improve the resource management system to be more efficient and effective</b>	
<b>Desired outcome</b>	<b>Impact</b>
DO1.1 The resource management system supports economic development within environmental limits.	I-1.1 The resource management system ensures simpler, proportionate, consistent and implementable decision-making.
<b>SP2: Strengthen the resilience of communities, businesses and places to climate change and natural hazards</b>	
<b>Desired outcomes</b>	<b>Impact</b>
DO2.1 Decision-makers and communities are prepared for, avoid and adapt to changing risks at the national, regional and local level.	I-2.1 Policy and regulation support and incentivise decision-makers and communities to manage, mitigate and adapt to risk.
DO2.2 The resource management system protects New Zealand's critical ecosystem services that buffer the impacts of climate change.	
<b>SP3: Support the transition to a competitive low-emission, resource-efficient economy</b>	
<b>Desired outcomes</b>	<b>Impacts</b>
DO3.1 New Zealand's greenhouse gas emissions are reduced and removals increased to meet domestic and international targets while maintaining the country's global economic competitiveness.	I-3.1 Emissions reduction plans drive progress towards New Zealand's low-emissions budgets and targets.
DO3.2 New Zealand increasingly becomes a resource-efficient economy and reduces impacts from waste.	I-3.2 The regulatory system for waste and investments improves effective waste management and minimisation and mitigates waste-related risks.
<b>SP4: Improve the quality and accessibility of evidence for all decision-makers</b>	
<b>Desired outcomes</b>	<b>Impacts</b>
DO4.1 Decision-makers have the best available evidence, including mātauranga, to make informed, timely and robust decisions.	I-4.1 Decision-makers are well supported by a fit-for-purpose, accessible, high-quality and continuously improving evidence base.
DO4.2 Evidence improves environmental and climate regulatory systems, processes and outcomes at the national and local level.	I-4.2 Regulatory systems and environmental and climate outcomes are monitored and evaluated to inform better regulation and practice.
DO4.3 Māori rights and interests, including Treaty settlement commitments, are assessed and evident in advice provided to decision-makers.	I-4.3 Decision-makers have quality advice that upholds Te Tiriti and Māori rights and interests, including Treaty settlements.
<b>SP5: Ensure our investments, partnerships and relationships enable others to achieve impactful solutions</b>	
<b>Desired outcomes</b>	<b>Impacts</b>
DO5.1 Public and private investments are targeted to deliver impactful environmental solutions.	I-5.1a Public environmental investments are targeted and enable co-investment.
	I-5.1b Clear and credible pathways exist for private investment in environmental outcomes, including emissions reduction.
DO5.2 Partnerships expedite and expand impactful solutions.	I-5.2 Partnerships improve implementation in the environmental system, facilitate workable solutions and increase collective impact.
DO5.3 Relationships with Treaty partners are strong and enduring.	I-5.3 Engagement processes, capabilities and systems support collaborative relationships with Treaty partners that contribute to impactful solutions and uphold Treaty commitments.



# How we will measure success

Providing transparent performance reporting to New Zealanders is an important part of our role as a Ministry. The impacts listed in table 1 indicate how we intend to measure our success. We will develop specific measures to track our performance and progress, and report on them through our annual reporting.

We will draw on different information sources. In some cases, we will need to adjust how we collect data, so it is more fit for purpose and clearly linked to the impacts. We may design new approaches where we do not have existing or the right kind of data. For example, our new strategic approach recognises more strongly the value of the built environment, and economic and social evidence. In other cases, we will need to look at a variety of datasets and evidence, to determine whether we are succeeding.

To track progress towards impacts, we will draw on evidence from different sectors, including research entities, local government, business and industry groups, and other central government agencies. This includes science, economic analysis and data, as well as technology (such as artificial intelligence and machine learning), modelling and projections. Where relevant, we will draw on interim indicators, case studies and qualitative data.

We will also look at trends and course correct when and where needed. In some cases, we will have enough evidence to inform our quarterly and annual business plans and priorities. But in other cases, it will take many years for the evidence to reflect the changes, and we may need to use modelling and projections. This is due to policy taking longer to have an effect in the environment and climate, and a variety of cumulative impacts influencing outcomes. We will also use this evidence to inform our policy development and advice for decision-makers.

Our annual reports will provide public updates on progress and where we need to make adjustments. Similarly, our regular reports (such as those under the Environmental Reporting Act 2015) will provide information on whether the intended changes are starting to emerge in the natural and built environments, and in climate mitigation.

# How we work

## Our new operating model

In late 2023, after consultation with staff, we introduced a new operating model. We ended the year with new business groups, a smaller leadership team, and a blueprint for transforming our ways of working. The new model anticipated the end of time-limited funding for large reforms and the need to further integrate the Ministry's functions after six years of rapid growth.

Following government savings directives, we carried out an additional round of structural change, streamlining business units and reducing staff levels. Staff reductions are being phased over two years, and we are on track to reduce staffing by 30 per cent by 2025/26.

We have consolidated our policy advice functions into two business groups: Environmental Management and Adaptation, and Climate Change Mitigation and Resource Efficiency. These reflect synergies in the work, including shared objectives and policy levers.

Policy functions are supported by four hubs.

1. Strategy, Stewardship and Performance: leads development of the Ministry's evidence, data and science base, and its strategy, planning and performance functions.
2. Partnership, Investment and Enablement: leads the approach to external engagement and supports others to implement and inform policy.
3. Business Transformation and Services: leads implementation of the new operating model, continuous improvement and provision of corporate services.
4. Māori Strategy and Performance (Tūmatakōkiri): provides strategic advice and guidance across the Ministry to ensure Te Ao Māori is brought into our work and that Te Tiriti is reflected in decision-making as required by our statutes.

Our focus is now on realising the potential of this new model, through efficiency gains, better integration and performance. We will:

- simplify business processes
- adopt new ways of working to better support how work flows and is distributed
- strengthen the capabilities needed to deliver on the new set of strategic priorities.

This will maximise our impact as a smaller ministry and deliver the highest possible value for New Zealanders.

## Our capabilities

We are committed to developing the capability of our people and organisation, to adapt to a complex and changing operating environment, and continue to deliver on government priorities.

## **Our workforce**

The policy decisions we advise on have wide-ranging implications for the environment, the economy, and New Zealanders' way of life now and in the future. To be successful, we need a diverse, multidisciplinary workforce that can distil complex issues into viable policy options, supported by high-quality enabling functions. We also need distinct capabilities to fulfil new or expanded functions, such as fast-track consenting.

A new capability framework will define the areas where the Ministry needs to excel, to fulfil its role in the years ahead. This will include deepening capabilities in analysing environmental data and doing economic and regulatory impact analysis.

We will introduce a new growth and performance framework, to align performance expectations and outcomes with our strategic priorities and support our people in their growth and development. We will continue to implement initiatives like Te Ao Hurihuri, our framework to equip people with the skills and knowledge to effectively engage with Treaty partners.

To ensure we can attract and retain talented people, we will:

- maintain a strong focus on diversity, equity and inclusion, aligned to the Public Service Commission's Kia Toipoto Public Service Action Plan
- ensure we provide a safe and healthy working environment.

## **Our relationships**

The Ministry works across regulatory systems with a wide range of participants. To advise well on these systems, we need good relationships with groups affected by or responsible for implementing different policies. Effective engagement helps us understand how regulatory regimes are working in practice and where they can be improved. This ensures that new approaches are practical and well informed. We also need strong connections with providers of science and data, to monitor New Zealand's environmental performance and understand potential impacts of policy.

Our focus is on:

- developing relationships to support shifts in policy priorities
- taking a more coordinated approach to engagement
- building greater continuity in our relationships.

Our Relationship Framework sets out how we will work with our strategic partners and stakeholders. This will help us better understand their contexts, priorities and operating environments, to inform our policy work. We will focus on local government, Māori, the urban and infrastructure sector, the banking and finance sector, industry groups and non-governmental organisations. Relationships with Treaty partners will be supported through more robust monitoring of the Ministry's performance in relation to Treaty obligations, as required under settlement agreements.

We continue to have a critical integration role across the public sector to deliver on the Government's priorities and work programmes within the environment and climate systems.

## **Our organisational systems and processes**

The Ministry's systems and processes need to evolve to reflect a smaller organisation with a different structure and focus. More broadly, fast-moving technology presents both threats and opportunities. Ongoing disruption by severe weather events reinforces the need for sustainable and resilient information technology systems.

We are focused on better connecting and streamlining our business systems, processes and services. By investing in tools (such as open data, machine learning and artificial intelligence) and more sophisticated digital service design, we can provide higher quality advice, improve public engagement and accessibility, and drive greater efficiency and cost-effectiveness throughout our work.

The Ministry maintains a significant focus on moving important systems, applications and information technology to the cloud, to improve business continuity.





*Ministry for the*  
**Environment**  
*Manatū Mō Te Taiao*



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