

HortNZ Policy Update | December 2025

HortNZ continues to advocate for growers and the horticulture industry in a time of rapid policy changes. This update includes information about:

1. Resource management reforms
2. Resource consent extension
3. Local government reforms
4. Food safety
5. Cost recovery – phytosanitary certification
6. Crop protection
7. Biosecurity
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Resource management reforms

RMA Replacement Bills

The Government has introduced two new bills to Parliament that will replace the RMA with a new resource management system – the Planning Bill and the Natural Environment Bill. HortNZ will submit on these bills and appear before the Select Committee. Submissions are due **13 February 2026**. As HortNZ analyses the bills and drafts our submissions, more information will be shared with growers.

The key thing to know now is that these bills set up the structure of the new resource management system (like the roles of councils in developing plans) – but they do not set the detailed policy for specific activities like fruit or vegetable growing. These details will come in the form of national direction and national standards.

HortNZ will be hosting multiple **online grower information sessions** in the new year, where growers are welcome to meet with our team to discuss our submissions on the Planning Bill, Natural Environment Bill and local government reforms. Feel free to drop-in to one or multiple sessions. Register [here](#).

Session times:

- Wednesday, Jan 14, 2026 12:00 PM
- Wednesday, Jan 21, 2026 12:00 PM

- Wednesday, Jan 28, 2026 12:00 PM

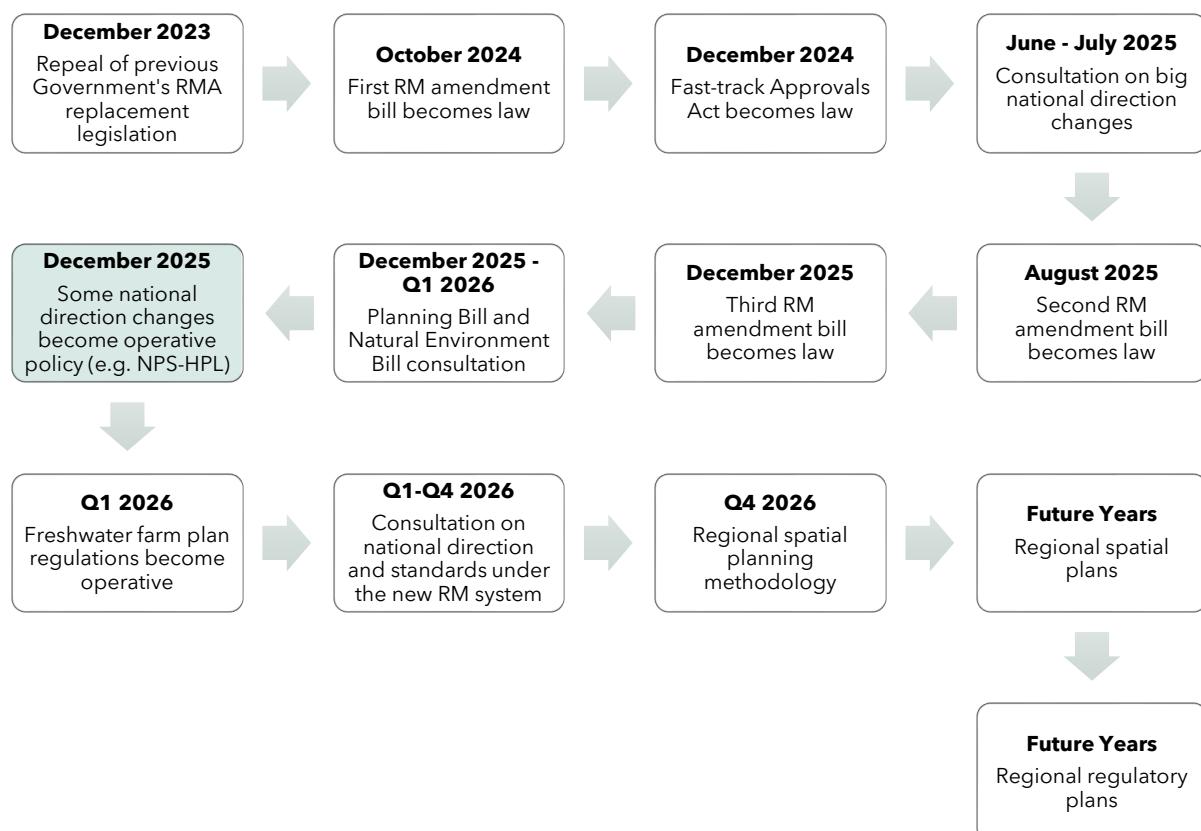
Share your thoughts directly with Emily Levenson, Environmental Policy Advisor, at emily.levenson@hortnz.co.nz or 027 305 4423 to feed into our submissions.

Changes to National Direction, including Highly Productive Land

At the end of July 2025, public consultation closed on a number of changes to national direction ranging from freshwater to highly productive land to electricity transmission. In December 2025, the Government announced changes to this national direction as a response to this consultation. The decisions will become operative in January 2026. The diagram below shows where this consultation fits (in blue) within the longer timeline of resource management changes.

However, it is important to note that a 'Plan Stop' is still in effect, meaning that councils cannot make new plan changes to give effect to these new policies, except when related to natural hazards or when the Minister approves a council application for an exemption.

Of most interest to growers, the Government has decided to amend the National Policy Statement for Highly Productive Land to open LUC 3 up for urban rezoning but not for rural lifestyle development. A full summary of which decisions have been made is available [on the HortNZ website](#).



Resource consent extensions

Disclaimer: Always seek independent planning advice for your own situation. This is an overview of Government changes, not advice for individual circumstances.

While there have been frequent recent announcements about changes to the planning system, these changes won't happen all at once. There is a transition period where the Resource Management Act (RMA) still applies, while the new system is being implemented.

In that transitional period, there will be some changes to how councils process consents. The intent is to give everyone time to adjust to the new system.

This week, Parliament passed an amendment to the Resource Management Act (RMA) under urgency to extend the duration of some resource consents. This amendment means:

- Resource consents that would otherwise expire before 31 December 2027 are automatically extended until that date;
- Recently expired resource consents (where an application for a replacement consent has been made, but not yet determined) are deemed to be reinstated and extended until 31 December 2027;
- The extension does not apply if it would push a water-related consent beyond 35 years.

You may hear about this change directly from your council. No action is required from consent holders for an extension under this amendment. You can continue to progress (or withdraw) any application to replace a consent that would be extended under this amendment.

Read the Government press release [here](#). HortNZ has also prepared a [question-and-answer sheet](#) for growers on how these changes fit into the proposed new planning system, which has been emailed to all growers.

We anticipate providing further information on transitional provisions as we work through the detail of the proposed RMA replacement bills.

Local government reforms

The Government is proposing changes to how local government functions. These are separate but related to the proposed changes to the resource management system.

What is the government proposing?¹

Most places in New Zealand have two separate councils – a regional council, and a city or district council (sometimes called 'territorial authorities'). Each have a separate set of elected councillors. There are also some regions such as Tasman where the functions of district and regional councils are combined, known as 'unitary authorities'.

¹ Adapted from the Department of Internal Affairs discussion document

There are 11 regional councils that govern services such as environmental management, regional transport planning, and civil defence. There are 67 city or district councils that govern services such as roads, water infrastructure, rubbish collection, libraries, parks, and land use planning. There are 6 'unitary authorities' that combine the two roles.

The Government is proposing to change the structure of local government in two steps:

Step 1: Instead of electing separate regional councillors, mayors would collectively lead regional issues and govern the regional council, forming a Combined Territories Board. The Government wants to know what people think about the appointment of Crown Commissioners (appointed by Central Government) to lead or join the board.

Step 2: This board of mayors would develop future-focussed plans for how the councils within their region can work together more effectively and efficiently. These plans will be developed in consultation with the public, examined independently, and be approved by the Government.

What does this mean right now?

This proposal does not get rid of regional council staff or their functions. Regional plans under the RMA are still in place with full effect. This is an early draft proposal to seek the views of the public on changing the way local areas are to be governed. Depending on public support, legislation will be introduced to Parliament in 2026 before the election to enact these changes.

HortNZ's submission

HortNZ will be filing a submission on the local government reforms, due to the Department of Internal Affairs on 20 February. We would love to hear from growers if you have opinions on these draft proposals. In particular:

- **What do you think is the best way for rural voices to be heard and represented in local government?**
- **Do you agree with replacing regional councillors with a Combined Territories Board of mayors?**
- **Do you think Central Government should appoint Crown Commissioners to these new regional boards?**

To share your views or talk about this consultation, please contact Charlotte Wright, Senior Environmental Policy Advisor, at charlotte.wright@hortnz.co.nz.

Food safety

Food Act Improvement Plan

In October 2025, the Minister for Food Safety and Minister for Regulation announced the Food Act Improvement Plan. This is a programme of work being led by MPI to make it easier to operate and innovate in the food sector.²

² [Cake makers to get a slice of red tape relief | Beehive.govt.nz](https://www.beehive.govt.nz/government/cabinet/ministers/ministers-for-food-safety-and-regulation/cabinet-ministers-announce-food-act-improvement-plan)

This announcement has led to the planning of a programme of work that aims to streamline registration and reporting requirements for the Food Act for the horticulture sector. This will look at requirements for GAP programmes and Food Act requirements to ensure duplication is reduced, including for verification. HortNZ and NZGAP are undertaking early engagement with New Zealand Food Safety to ensure our concerns are considered and addressed, with the aim to have some improved processes in place by mid-2026.

In addition, HortNZ is continuing to advocate for an improved overall approach to the way that industry programmes can be recognised under the Food Act. The two proposed approaches are:

- the establishment of a pathway for full recognition of industry programmes in the legislation itself; and/or
- exploring using the current exemption pathway for NZGAP certified growers.

We will have further updates in the first quarter of 2026. If you have any comments or views to feed into this, please contact Felicity Lawlor, Senior Risk Policy Advisor at felicity.lawlor@hortnz.co.nz or 04 470 5663.

Cost recovery

Changes to phytosanitary certification

MPI has recently consulted on two upcoming changes to fees being charged for our plant exporters:

- MPI is in the process of transitioning to a new electronic certification system called MPI Trade Certification, which will replace several existing systems for exporters including ePhyto. From February 2026, the new system will be used for requesting, verifying and issuing phytosanitary certification. MPI recently consulted on proposals to recover costs for this new system. HortNZ advocated for the flat fee option (rather than sector specific) as this was most in line with cost recovery principles. Any new fees will come into effect from 1 July 2026.
- In addition, MPI consulted on recovering a deficit and increasing fees for the cost of phytosanitary certification itself. HortNZ submitted that the deficit should be funded by the Crown due to the time that has elapsed to incur the deficit. Fee increases should be reasonable and in line with cost recovery principles of equity, efficiency, justifiability and transparency. In addition, phytosanitary fee review should be part of the annual review process by MPI, to ensure deficits do not occur again in the future.

Feedback on cost recovery processes

MPI is asking for industry feedback on cost recovery processes. This includes whether increased transparency of decisions is needed; whether fees and charges should be increased incrementally over time instead of over three-year cycles; and whether annual data should be published showing the proportion of operational costs recovered through fees and charges.

If you have any comments or views to feed into this, please contact Felicity Lawlor, Senior Risk Policy Advisor at felicity.lawlor@hortnz.co.nz or 04 470 5663.

Crop protection

Using Codex MRLs

We have been working with the ACVM team at MPI regarding a proposal for the use of Codex MRLs instead of the 0.1mg/kg default, on a case-by-case basis. This would be for 'off-label' use of agricultural chemicals, where a MRL is not set already for an active ingredient and crop, and the default of 0.1mg/kg currently applies. We will have further updates in the first quarter of 2026.

If you did have any comments, please contact Felicity Lawlor, Senior Risk Policy Advisor at felicity.lawlor@hortnz.co.nz or 04 470 5663.

EPA Potential Prioritisation Framework for agricultural chemicals

We are seeking grower feedback on a potential framework proposed by the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) to better manage the long agrochemical products application processing queue. The policy intention is to prioritise those agrochemical applications that have the most benefit to end-users and New Zealand.

The draft framework proposes criteria (human health, environment, alignment, economy) and a percentage for each criteria to help determine which applications should be prioritised.

If you would like more information and/or to provide comments, please contact Natalie Wong, Senior Risk Policy Adviser (Crop Protection) at natalie.wong@hortnz.co.nz

Government progressing the Agricultural and Horticultural Products Regulatory Review Recommendations

HortNZ continues to monitor the Government's progress in implementing recommendations from the Agricultural and Horticultural Regulatory Review. Key updates include:

- The Agricultural and Horticultural Products Omnibus Bill is expected to be introduced in early 2026. This Bill makes changes to the HSNO Act and ACVM Act that are intended to improve access to agrochemical products. HortNZ will be making a submission when the Bill is open for consultation.
- The EPA and MPI are focused on processing more complex applications for new agrochemical products.
- A Trans-Tasman Memorandum of Understanding was signed in which aims to speed up access to agricultural compounds and veterinary medicines in the region.

Biosecurity

Biosecurity Act Amendment Bill

Cabinet has agreed to amend the Biosecurity Act, looking to incorporate changes by the end of 2026 with a possible bill as soon as the end of 2027.

Larger changes include higher infringements for breaches of the Act, system process improvements and efficiencies, more flexibility for activities under the Government-Industry Agreement and in the organism management space, as well as stronger shift towards implementation good biosecurity practices.

The proposed changes by and large align with HortNZ's and the wider horticulture industries' positions.

MPI's Plant Import System Reform

In March 2025, the Minister for Primary Industries (MPI) started a systems overhaul project for plant imports. Following several workshops across the country and with industries involved with the importation of plants - primarily plant germplasm - that reform has completed two phases - 'Discovery' and 'Defining'. We are still awaiting updates on next steps for developing solutions.

Import Health Standards

Between 2 October and 2 December, MPI consulted on changes to the Import Health Standard for Plants for Planting. The Kūmara Import Health Standard was of interest for the horticulture industry. This consultation is an extension of MPI's previous consultation on a project suspending numerous unused or out-of-date Import Health Standards. MPI proposed the addition of four diagnostic tests to enable the safe importation of kūmara plants for planting.

This announcement led to a plan to streamline registration and reporting requirements for the horticulture sector under the Food Act. This will look at requirements for GAP programmes and Food Act requirements to reduce duplication, including for verification. HortNZ and NZGAP are undertaking early engagement with New Zealand Food Safety, with the aim to have improved processes in place by mid-2026.

Upcoming consultations

- **Import Health Standard for Fresh Grapes**
- **Import Health Standard on Changes for Seeds for Sowing**

If you did have any questions or comments, please contact Alex Bisson, Risk Policy Advisor at alex.bisson@hortnz.co.nz.

Rural recycling

Green light for Rural Recycling Scheme

The Government has agreed to make it compulsory for producers and importers of in-scope plastics to be part of the Rural Recycling Scheme for agrochemicals, their containers, and farm plastics. Regulations are now being drafted, and the scheme is expected to come into force in late 2026/early 2027.

For growers, nothing would change in your day to day. **You can keep using Agrecovery and Plasback services as you do today.** Over time, the intention is that farm plastics

recycling will become easier and more accessible for growers. We will keep you updated as this policy is implemented.

For more information on the policy, visit [Product stewardship agrichemicals, containers and farm plastics regulations | Ministry for the Environment](#)

Information on service providers is available on [Agrecovery](#) and [Plasback](#) websites.

HortNZ's recent central government submissions

Topic	Date	Submission
Grocery	18 November 2025	Fast Track Amendment Bill
Export	21 November 2025	Proposed updates to MPI's cost recovery for plant and forestry export certification
Organics	2 December 2025	Organics Standard Notice - Tranche 1
Food Safety	5 December 2025	Proposed updates to recover costs for MPI's new Trade Certification system

HortNZ's regional involvement

Region	Update
Auckland	<p>Auckland water consents</p> <p>Auckland Council are yet to release the information package for consents expiring May 2026. The government has just passed an amendment to the RMA under urgency to extend consent duration. HortNZ is working to understand the implications for the Auckland consents and will update you in due course.</p> <p>Auckland Council Plan Change 120</p> <p>Auckland Council have received Ministerial approval to notify proposed Plan Change 120. Plan Change 120 is focused on housing intensification and resilience, including natural hazard and climate change resilience.</p> <p>HortNZ has developed a submission, and a draft is available for grower comments on request. The submission period closes 19 December 2025.</p> <p>Further information can be found on Auckland Council's website. For further information or feedback please contact Leanne Roberts, Senior Environmental Policy Advisor, at leanne.roberts@hortnz.co.nz.</p>

WHERE TO GO FOR MORE INFORMATION

- [HortNZ website](#)
- Email info@hortnz.co.nz

To discuss these policy updates further, feel free to contact the team:

- Resource management reforms, organics, waste: Emily Levenson, emily.levenson@hortnz.co.nz
- Local government reforms: Charlotte Wright, charlotte.wright@hortnz.co.nz
- Food safety: Felicity Lawlor, felicity.lawlor@hortnz.co.nz
- Crop protection: Natalie Wong, natalie.wong@hortnz.co.nz
- Biosecurity: Alex Bisson, alex.bisson@hortnz.co.nz
- Auckland: Leanne Roberts, leanne.roberts@hortnz.co.nz