

National Direction for Aquaculture – project overview

BACKGROUND TO PROJECT

MPI, MfE and DOC are developing a proposal for National Direction for Aquaculture¹. Cabinet will consider the proposal in November this year, with a view to public consultation in November and December. The overall objective of national direction is to improve national consistency for the management of aquaculture, particularly existing aquaculture.

MPI have been working with MfE, DOC and an expert Reference Group over the past year to develop the proposal. The Reference Group includes representatives from the aquaculture industry, Te Ohu Kai Moana, Environmental Defence Society, and regional councils (Waikato, Bay of Plenty, Marlborough, Southland).

WHAT IS NATIONAL DIRECTION?

The Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) provides central government (primarily the Minister for the Environment) legislative tools to set a consistent direction on topics of national importance. The tools include ***national policy statements*** (NPSs, which set out high level policy requirements for councils to deal with resource management issues) and ***national environmental standards*** (NESs, which prescribe technical standards, methods or other requirements for environmental matters). The Minister of Conservation is required to prepare the ***NZ Coastal Policy Statement*** (NZCPS), a national policy statement which applies from the limit of the Territorial Sea to the boundary of the coastal environment.

The National Direction for Aquaculture project will focus initially on an NES. It is anticipated that the project may also require additional national policy – this will be confirmed following public consultation later this year.

WHAT IS PROPOSED?

The matters national direction currently seeks to address are summarised below.

Re-consenting

The objective for national direction in relation to re-consenting is to:

- Increase efficiency of the re-consenting process; and
- Provide improved certainty for the re-consenting of marine aquaculture activities within environmental limits

National direction would emphasise that the plan development process (rather than consent-by-consent) is the most effective and efficient means for councils and communities to determine areas that are appropriate and inappropriate for aquaculture (taking into account all relevant values in the coastal marine area).

¹ Note: the focus of this work is marine aquaculture (i.e. aquaculture which occurs within the coastal marine area) and does not include land-based aquaculture.

The proposal for re-consenting differentiates existing aquaculture activities based on two decision points: firstly whether RMA planning has been undertaken in accordance with the NZCPS that clearly identifies where aquaculture is appropriate, and secondly whether the existing marine farm is located in an area identified through the planning process as being an appropriate place. The proposal is for a more enabling framework where farms have been determined to be in an appropriate location.

The proposal provides potential options to address the issue of existing marine farms that are identified as being in inappropriate locations.

Transitional provisions would be in place where RMA planning to identify areas appropriate for aquaculture has not yet occurred.

Bay-wide management

The particular purposes for national direction on bay-wide management could be:

- Providing a mechanism to manage cumulative effects of all of the farms within a specified location
- Enabling joined up science, information and monitoring
- Providing for reconfiguration of the farms in order to best manage effects
- Providing for reconfiguration of and alteration to the farms to enable the more efficient allocation of space and to increase productivity.

Bay-wide management would not be mandatory for regions. Each region would determine for itself whether bay-wide management is appropriate.

Innovation and research

The purpose of national direction for innovation and research activities is to better enable (within environmental limits):

- Changes to existing farms to increase efficiency and productivity (changes of species and or technology/methods of farming)
- Experimental aquaculture that is small scale and short term.

Research currently being undertaken by Cawthron Institute into grouping aquaculture species by like effects will directly inform this proposal.

Biosecurity

The objective of developing national direction for aquaculture biosecurity is to provide a nationally consistent and coordinated approach to marine farm biosecurity. It would aim to standardise on-farm biosecurity practices which prioritise prevention and risk minimisation. It links to the *On-farm Biosecurity Management Project* and *Aquaculture NZs A+ New Zealand Sustainable Aquaculture Programme*.

Any mechanisms developed under the RMA will need to be cognisant of, and consistent with mechanisms for national direction under the BSA, to enable comprehensive and effective management of marine farm biosecurity risks and potential adverse environmental effects, and to avoid duplication of regulation.

NEXT STEPS

Agencies will continue to work with planning consultants to further develop the proposal, including preparation of a discussion document for public consultation, over the coming months. This will include further Reference Group meetings, and early engagement with iwi, councils and key stakeholders through August and September.

Cabinet is due to consider the proposal in early November with a view to approving public consultation, which would occur in November and December.

We are aiming to have the NES signed off by Cabinet by mid-2017.