

MARCH 2026

Te Uru Kahika Pānui

E ngā iwi, e ngā hapu, e ngā mana whenua, tēnā koutou katoa.

Regional and Unitary councils (collectively called Te Uru Kahika) offer our sincere thanks for your support in preparing submissions on the Natural Environment and Planning Bills. Your guidance continues to shape how councils engage with Te Tiriti o Waitangi and advocate for iwi and hapū interests in the resource management system.

This pānui summarises the key Māori rights and interests and Te Tiriti o Waitangi themes across regional and unitary council submissions (15 of 16 councils and Te Uru Kahika). It is shared to acknowledge your contribution and keep you informed about sector-wide perspectives.

Across the motu, most councils are strongly aligned: they want a resource management system grounded in Te Tiriti, with ongoing protection of Treaty settlements, and practical pathways for iwi and hapū leadership. A few councils made submissions that were much lighter on these topics, focusing instead on other elements of resource management reform.

1. STRONG SUPPORT FOR TE TIRITI AND MĀORI GOVERNANCE

Most councils called for a system that upholds Te Tiriti across all functions - not just plan-making. Of these, submissions consistently sought a substantive Treaty clause and warned that, as drafted, the Bills weaken iwi and hapū rights. Many stressed that without systemwide obligations, Treaty commitments risk becoming procedural rather than substantive. Many councils recommended a variety of changes to the goals, noting that the proposals are too narrow and have no hierarchy, risking Māori goals receiving less weight than others in some places.

2. PROTECTING TREATY SETTLEMENTS DURING TRANSITION

Most councils expressed concerns about a “protection gap” and too short a timeframe for renegotiations, leading to legal and practical risk for both councils and iwi. Many recommend that existing settlement arrangements continue until new ones are confirmed, and that the Crown - not councils - ensure “equivalent effect” (or stronger) before the new system switches on. It was emphasised that place-based Treaty settlement instruments must be explicitly recognised so their authority is not eroded.

3. MĀORI GOVERNANCE, REPRESENTATION AND PARTICIPATION

A high proportion of councils raised concerns that the Bills reduce iwi and hapū participation across the system. Many supported guaranteed mana whenua seats on Spatial Planning Committees and decision-making roles. Most councils supported enabling new Mana Whakahono ā Rohe agreements, expanding Joint Management Agreements, and allowing transfers of powers to iwi. The need for equitable pathways for hapū and unsettled iwi was highlighted by many, as well as the removal of barriers such as “qualifying resident” tests and high notification thresholds. Many commented on the challenges associated with tight timeframes.

4. RESOURCING MĀORI INVOLVEMENT

Many councils were clear that the system cannot function without adequate resourcing for iwi and hapū. Māori involvement is heavily frontloaded in limits setting, spatial planning, plan development, and Compliance, Monitoring and Enforcement (CME), and thus needs adequate resourcing.

5. SITES OF SIGNIFICANCE AND REGULATORY RELIEF

Concerns were raised by many councils that including Māori sites in a regulatory relief regime could discourage councils from advocating for their protection and shift the financial burden to ratepayers. The preferred approach recommend by some is to remove the regulatory relief provisions, or at minimum exclude Māori sites and require Crown co-funding.

6. INTEGRATING THE TWO ACTS

A number of councils seek a fully integrated system, with aligned national direction and limits. Several councils highlighted the need for explicit recognition of Māori rights and interests in freshwater—either directly or through settlement instruments—and for national direction to reflect this.

Ngā mihi nunui ki a koutou for the expertise and time you continue to share with us. We look forward to continuing this mahi alongside you.

