

Long-term visions for freshwater

Visions are the foundation to build strong freshwater outcomes into your regional plan!

Our NPS-FM position in a nutshell

Your long-term visions for freshwater are critical. They guide how the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management (NPS-FM 2020) is implemented. A vision must stand on its own and presents an opportunity to be aspirational, while also being practical about what can be achieved and by when¹.

Your visions are closely linked to Te Mana o te Wai and the hierarchy of obligations² which should reflect your community and tangata whenua voice³. Visions are objectives in the Regional Policy Statement (RPS) and will direct all other parts of implementing the NPS-FM. To help the Vision do its job, they need to be SMART.

The NPS-FM directive

Visions will become objectives in your RPS. All policies in your RPS must achieve the visions and all aspects of your regional plan must give effect to the long-term visions.

The NPS-FM includes other processes and requirements that stem from the visions. Their purpose is to achieve the vision. Long-term visions should be used as a key 'check in' for implementing the rest of the National Objectives Framework (NOF) process. At each stage in the NOF process, you must check back in with your long-term visions to ensure they are being achieved.

The long-term vision is central to implementing the NPS-FM. It will be easier to assess the long-term vision, and demonstrate how it is being achieved, if that vision is SMART (more on that later). Essentially, if the purpose of a vision is vague or unclear, demonstrating that you have achieved the vision becomes more difficult.

The list below outlines other processes and requirements you should consider while preparing your visions.

Make sure your visions can help to:

- Assess whether an FMU, part of FMU, or catchment can provide for its long-term vision⁴;
- Determine whether the health and well-being of water bodies and freshwater ecosystems need to be improved to achieve the vision⁵ (if catchments do not provide for the long-term vision set by your communities and tangata whenua);

¹ Clause 3.3(2)(b) & (c) of the NPS-FM 2020

² Clause 3.2(2)(b) of the NPS-FM 2020

³ Clause 3.3(3)(a) & (c) of the NPS-FM 2020

⁴ Clause 3.3(4) of the NPS-FM 2020

⁵ Clause 3.3(4) of the NPS-FM 2020

- Conclude when an environmental outcome has fulfilled the relevant long-term visions and the objective of the NPS-FM⁶;
- Set target attribute states in ways that will achieve the environmental outcome for the relevant values and long-term vision⁷;
- Set limits on resource use that have regard for the long-term vision⁸;
- Set environmental flows and levels that achieve the environmental outcome for the relevant values relating the FMU (or part of the FMU) and relevant long-term visions⁹;
- Ensure monitoring methods contribute to evaluating progress towards achieving long-term visions¹⁰;
- Determine whether, after having regard to the relevant long-term visions, it is appropriate for rivers to return to hard-bottomed states¹¹;
- Assess at least every 5 years, the extent to which the long-term vision is being achieved.

Long term visions must be developed for each FMU, or part-FMU, and should be specific to that place. Multiple visions may be developed to address the range and scale of values in different places (for example the FMU, part of an FMU or catchment level) and amongst various communities and mana whenua. Visions must be developed for both degraded catchments and catchments that are currently in an acceptable state.

Freshwater long-term visions must set goals that are ambitious but reasonable and must identify timeframes to achieve each goal. The timeframes must also be both ambitious and reasonable. A vision could involve a two-step or staged approach with short-term and long-term goals complimenting each other. Short-term goals, such as halting the decline of a place that is nearing an ecological tipping point, may be immediate - supporting a longer-term vision to move the water body towards an improved state to be achieved over time¹².

⁶ Clause 3.9(5)(b) of the NPS-FM 2020

⁷ Clause 3.11(7) of the NPS-FM 2020

⁸ Clause 3.14(2)(a)(i) of the NPS-FM 2020

⁹ Clause 3.16(2) of the NPS-FM 2020

¹⁰ Clause 3.18(3) of the NPS-FM 2020

¹¹ Clause 3.25(2)(c) of the NPS-FM 2020

¹² Ministry for the Environment. 2022. Guidance on the National Objectives Framework of the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management. Wellington: Ministry for the Environment.

There are specific processes that must happen when developing long-term visions. These include:

- engagement with communities and tangata whenua about their long-term wishes for the water bodies and freshwater ecosystems in the region. In the case of tangata whenua, the council must actively involve them (to the extent they wish to be involved)¹³; and
- being informed by the history of, and environmental pressures on the FMU, part of the FMU, or catchment¹⁴;
- expressing what communities and tangata whenua want the FMU, part of the FMU, or catchment to be like in the future¹⁵.

What do we want to see?

Long-term visions describe:

- what we want a catchment to be like in the future,
- provide the reference point for how well we are doing over time, and
- form objectives in the regional policy statement.

To make sure long-term visions are effective, they should be written as SMART statements.

We believe that SMART visions must be:

Specific: about what the vision will achieve – *what, where, when*, and if relevant - *who* will help achieve it.

Measurable: to know when the vision has been achieved, and to track progress towards it over time.

Achievable: by those who must achieve the vision, while still being aspirational.

Relevant: to the environment, specific place, community, and mana whenua the vision relates to.

Time-bound: by stating when the vision will be achieved.

Visions should be drafted so that they can be readily expressed as objectives in the regional policy statement. Unlike more traditional RPS objectives, which often set out a response to a problem or issue, vision objectives should be future focussed. Objectives that set out that an issue will be resolved are not setting out an aspirational future state.

The long-term visions are for freshwater. They must give effect to Te Mana o te Wai, be consistent with and implement the hierarchy of obligations. That means the priority of all visions and subsequent decisions must first provide for *the health of freshwater* in and of itself, and

¹³ Clause 3.3(3)(a) and 3.4

¹⁴ Clause 3.3(3)(b)

¹⁵ Clause 3.3(3)(c)

above all else. The health needs of people, access and the social, economic, or cultural well-being of individuals or communities are second and third tier considerations. The vision is first and foremost for the wai (water).

Visions are expressions of where we need to be, so they need to be relevant. We expect to see multiple visions that are appropriate for the characteristics and values associated with different places and communities. A single broad region-wide one-size-fits-all vision is unlikely to be appropriate or useful.

Long-term visions are a cornerstone of the NPS-FM Framework so they must be clear, measurable, and specific. They need to clearly express what communities and tangata whenua want the FMU, part of the FMU, or catchment to be like in the future.

We believe visions should also be set with a maximum timeframe of 30-years so that momentum and progress can be seen within a generation. Within these timeframes, we would like to see short-term goals set over the next 10 years to create milestones that support the long-term vision. Short-term milestones are more tangibly recognised and accessed and are a useful tool for maintaining momentum over the lifetime of a vision. Long-term vision should deliver restoration of freshwater bodies and ecosystems within a generation.

There is a real opportunity here to develop visions that motivate New Zealanders to achieve vibrant, resilient, and healthy water bodies and freshwater ecosystems, not just a minimum requirement to improve them. Visions must set the direct and motivate people to act!

How should the NPS-FM be implemented?

Clear engagement

You must engage with communities and tangata whenua¹⁶ to identify long-term visions, environmental outcomes, and aspects of the NOF¹⁷. Developing a clear engagement plan with input from the community and tangata whenua at the beginning of the process will make sure people know when and how to be involved. An engagement plan also allows the council and the community to coordinate other work that needs to happen around the engagement process, such as information gathering and reporting.

Clear reporting to inform vision development

It is important to understand the current state and pressures on the FMU or area to which the visions apply. The NPS-FM requires that vision setting is informed by an understanding of the history of, and environmental pressures on the FMU, part of the FMU, or catchment¹⁸. The council should collate and present this information in formats that people can understand so they can apply the data to their context. The council should also be clear about where there are information gaps and uncertainties.

¹⁶ Clause 3.3(3) of the NPS-FM 2020

¹⁷ Clause 3.2 of the NPS-FM 2022

¹⁸ Clause 3.3(3)(b)

In the right order

Visions are the starting point to implement the rest of the NPS-FM. Therefore, they should come first in the process. Reverse engineering visions after management responses have been chosen is unlikely to be successful and will significantly decrease the probability of meaningfully achieving Te Mana o te Wai. Taking time at the beginning of the process to properly develop visions will set a robust platform for meaningful long-term freshwater management.

We've put together some key points to get you started:

- What is the best information available? What information don't we know and what can be put in place to improve the vision development and review process in the future?
- Who is at the table and may be missing? An effective engagement plan can mitigate such gaps.
- What does our vision say about who we are, and what we value?
- What small- or large-scale change is required to realise this vision and who will be impacted (positively and/or negatively)?
- What opportunities exist and what limitations may there be to achieving this vision?

How we will know the NPS-FM is being achieved

SMART visions will be well-defined and specific enough to provide a high-level road map for meeting the objective and determining when it has been achieved. It will be positive, meaningful, and written to inspire.

Implementation Toolbox

The toolbox will continue to be developed as new information becomes available:

Tools:	are helpful diagrams, processes, or ways to support how you should implement the NPS-FM.
Examples:	provide text suggestions to help draft objectives (values and environmental outcomes), policies, and rules (limits) in your regional plans, including how and monitoring could be achieved. It includes examples of how attributes and base line states, target attribute states, environmental flows and levels, and other criteria, where appropriate, can be written or presented help to achieve environmental outcomes.
Case studies:	illustrate where the NPS-FM has been well applied (or not) throughout the country and provides national or international lessons to help implement the NPS-FM.
Evidence:	provides relevant case law to support how the NPS-FM must be applied.
Resources:	provide links to supporting literature and best information available to implement the NPS-FM.

Tools

The SMART checklist for freshwater long-term visions:

Specific freshwater visions:

- articulate precisely what needs to be accomplished in the FMU, part of an FMU or catchment.
- are clear to all audiences and the community who will read and use this vision (test visions on different groups to confirm this).
- use plain language¹⁹ and avoid jargon.
- use verbs that direct a specific action.
- identify whose community and/ or mana whenua aspirations the place-based vision specifically relates to (they should not be generic regional visions and should relate to specific places or communities).

Measurable freshwater visions:

- include a way to acknowledge that the vision is being achieved, either through ways of measuring, observing, experiencing, or positively interacting with freshwater in the future.
- express a desired state that will reach above bottom lines and achieve Te Mana o te Wai.

¹⁹ <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2022/0054/latest/whole.html#DLM4357607>

- may specify where relevant data comes from to measure or determine a target is obtained (such as a survey, recording method, or publication) if specified monitoring plans do not exist.

Achievable freshwater visions:

- are ambitious freshwater goals that inspire action.
- are reasonable, not impossible, but require true commitment.
- recognise the history of, and environmental pressures on, the FMU, part of the FMU, or catchment, this may be expressed through past community experiences of a place.
- recognise the current knowledge, capacity and level of understanding required to ensure a vision can be achieved.
- where there is a long road from the current state, to meeting a vision, allow for appropriate transition time to achieve the vision, while maintaining that ambitious goal.

Relevant freshwater visions:

- relate directly to what needs to be achieved for freshwater health.
- reflect their communities and tangata whenua views and aspirations for the future.
- Be specific to the place/ location within the FMU, not generic to the region.

Time-bound freshwater visions:

- set a timeframe for achievement that is no longer than 30 years.
- set short term, interim goals to keep up the momentum. If waterbodies in the FMU are near a tipping point, the short-term goal should be to halt decline immediately.
- apply the right level of urgency to keep up momentum and avoid procrastination.

Examples

Vision examples:

By 2050, the Jellyfish River will be a thriving waterbody, that is a treasure for future generations, with healthy ecosystems and enough clean, clear water for our community to safely swim.

By 2044, the mauri of Starfish Lake will be restored. The ecosystems within and surrounding the lake will be healthy and well-functioning. We will be able to collect an abundance of healthy mahinga kai safely throughout the catchment.

There is no further decline in the trophic state of the Poara Estuary from its state in 2017, and by 2030 the natural connection between the awa and the moana through the estuary will be

restored. By 2050 the Poara Estuary will be restored to a healthy state of mauri ora with Estuary Trophic Index in the A Band.

Case studies

[When available]

Evidence

[When available]

Resources

[When available]

Fish and Game and Forest and Bird and Choose Clean Water have written this practice note to communicate their expectation on how regional councils should implement the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020 (NPS-FM) into their regional plans. This is one in a series of practices notes which have been prepared on various topics relating to NPS-FM implementation.