

Why should we consider law and policy when assessing, monitoring, and restoring the ecological health of our estuaries?

For iwi, communities, business and industry

For many people, concerns over the state of our estuaries and the health of these ecosystems have motivated a desire to take action. The complexity of estuarine systems is echoed by the ecological, social, cultural, and economic importance of estuaries and the growing awareness of the need to work collectively to improve them. Figuring out what actions to take requires finding the right tools and expertise to support the restoration goals. However, people with the best of intentions could find their efforts are undermined because they haven't considered what is possible to do, or to not do, based on the policy, planning and legal frameworks in place. In short, what do the rules say? And how do monitoring programmes and restoration activities pursued by iwi, community, business, and industry align with broader programmes of work?

What do we need to think about in terms of policy and legislation?

There are a number of different laws and policies that apply to the coastal and marine environment in Aotearoa New Zealand. Generally, these laws and policies focus on managing activities that affect estuaries, and which are widely dispersed across land and sea.

The New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement (NZCPS), which is a national policy statement under the Resource Management Act, is the main policy directly applicable to estuaries. Among other things, the NZCPS promotes restoration in preserving natural character and protecting natural features (Objective 2). In most cases, restoring estuaries will require actions to be taken by a range of organisations and people at multiple scales – including regulating land- and sea-based activities and their effects – as well as active restoration efforts.

Taking steps to restore the health of our estuaries

- 1. Find out what the regional policy and planning documents have to say about restoration**, and what the objectives are for the location where the proposed restoration will take place.
- 2. Find out what monitoring is currently being undertaken** by regional councils or other agencies as part of the process of developing a monitoring programme.
- 3. Find out what permits are required** by contacting the relevant regional council, in the first instance. It may also be necessary to contact MPI/Fisheries New Zealand or other agencies; this will depend on the kind of restoration activity to be undertaken (eg if structures are to be used, areas will be disturbed, or species are relocated).
- 4. Find out what other tools might be used to support restoration.** For instance, restoration strategies might include protecting an area or species by imposing a temporary closure such as a rāhui, a temporary closure of fishing area or restriction on fishing methods, taiāpure or mātaītai.
- 5. Find out what opportunities there are to invest in restorative marine economies** that also support blue economy opportunities.

Further reading

Rennie H (2022) [Characterising the regulatory seascape in Aotearoa New Zealand: Implications for policy and practice.](#)

Sustainable Seas National Science Challenge (2022) [Ecosystem service metrics for restorative marine economies in Aotearoa New Zealand.](#)

Sustainable Seas National Science Challenge (2022) [Reframing environmental limits for estuaries.](#)

Sustainable Seas National Science Challenge (2024) [Monitoring estuaries in a changing world: Lessons for designing long-term monitoring programmes.](#)

Taylor L, Te Whenua T & Hatami B (2018) [How current legislative frameworks enable customary management & ecosystem-based management in Aotearoa New Zealand – the contemporary practice of rāhui.](#)