



Environmental Policy Newsletter

December 2025

In this issue, 2025 ushers in change. What does MDRZs mean for Tasman. Up close and personal with natural hazards and [podcasts](#) for the holiday season.



Tasman stands on the edge of another big shift in how its land, water, and communities are managed.

Across New Zealand, the Government's resource management reforms are pitched as a once-in-a-generation reset: fewer plans, clearer rules, less resource consents and stronger environmental safeguards, all while trying to unlock housing, infrastructure, and regional development.

The new Planning and Natural Environment Bills aim to set firmer environmental bottom lines, simplify consent processes, and strengthen national direction so that similar issues are treated in similar ways around the country.

For a district that lives daily with the realities of floods, slips, coastal change, and growth pressure, these reforms are not an abstract exercise – they will shape what can be built where, what must be protected, and how costs and risks are shared.

Submissions to Government now open.

A more standardised national framework will still need to grapple with very local questions: where new housing should go as hazards intensify, how to protect productive land and biodiversity, what to do about vulnerable coastal settlements, and how to keep lifeline networks functioning under more frequent extreme events.

The coming New Year submission process to the Government on its the Planning and Natural Environment Bills is one of the key chances for Tasman's council, iwi, community groups, and sectors to test whether the proposed laws are fit for these realities – and to suggest adjustments so that the new regime works on the ground, not just on paper.

If the region uses the submission window well – bringing forward lived experience of storms and droughts, local knowledge of land and water, and clear ideas about where and how growth should occur – it can help shape a system that supports resilient, thriving communities rather than simply managing decline or retreat.

The opportunity now is for Tasman to speak with a clear, evidence-based voice about what “better planning for a better New Zealand” really needs to look like here, on this coast, in these valleys, for the generations who will call this place home.

Public submissions to the Government on the Planning and Natural Environment Bills are open till Friday 13 February. More details on the make a submission page which can be found on [Make a submission - New Zealand Parliament](#).

Follow Resource Management Reform on [Shape Tasman](#)



Understanding and Managing Our Natural Hazards.

In 2025, one of Council's goals was to provide the community with easily accessible natural hazards information to help them better understand Tasman's natural hazards and the impacts these hazards can have, so we collectively can make more informed decisions about managing our hazard risk.

The June and July 2025 flood events underscore why this work is so important planning for natural hazards and partnering with our community is essential for resilience.

A major step toward improving public awareness and resilience in 2025 was the launch of the **Natural Hazards Map Viewer** in late February. This easy-to-use online tool consolidates Council's hazard spatial data into a single platform, enabling residents to

see mapped natural hazards such as flooding, earthquakes, slope instability, and sea-level rise for their properties.

The viewer was designed to inform and educate our community about natural hazards before formal planning changes were developed, strengthening conversations about acceptable risk and future investment in resilience.

Building on this foundation, the **Tasman Resource Management Plan (TRMP) Natural Hazards Issues and Options Report** was released in March 2025.

This report provided an integrated stocktake of how the TRMP currently manages hazards like liquefaction, fault rupture, slope instability, debris runout, coastal hazards, flooding, and wildfire. It confirmed the importance of updated science, clearer mapping, and a more explicitly risk-based approach to reflect climate change, new national guidance, and lessons from past events.

Access to the TRMP was enhanced mid- year with the launch of a digital version featuring search, annotation notes, hyperlinks, and mapping tools available from anywhere at any time.

Community engagement on our natural hazards' issues ran from March to early May, supported by a six-week Natural Hazards Awareness Campaign and eight districtwide drop-in sessions in April. Over two hundred people attended, and thirty formal feedback responses—including from key agencies and community organisations—added depth to the technical work.

Feedback strongly supported a proactive, integrated approach, clearer rules, and stronger mapping for hazards, alongside long-term thinking, climate change integration, and nature-based solutions.

On 18 December 2025, the Government approved the National Policy Statement for Natural Hazards (NPS-NH), which takes effect on 15 January 2026. The NPS-NH sets a clear national framework for managing natural hazard risks under the Resource Management Act. It requires councils to use the best available hazard data and apply a risk-based approach when making planning and consenting decisions.

The Issue and Options work and the new NPS-NH will inform our response in the new year to the Planning and Natural Environment Bills that are the foundation documents to the government's resource management changes. It will also stand us in good stead with background information and national direction to support Council's wider natural hazards work programmes going into 2026 and beyond.

For more details on Tasman’s natural hazards planning work, visit [Shape Tasman – Natural Hazards](#).



Growing Smarter: Medium Density Housing in Tasman

Medium density residential zones are a key tool for how Tasman will grow, and Draft Plan Change 81 is the next step in putting that approach into practice.

Across growing towns like Richmond and Motueka, the concept of *medium density residential zones* is shaping how Tasman manages its future growth. A walk-through new neighbourhoods in parts of Richmond West already shows this approach in practice—modern townhouses and duplex-style homes blending within the existing streetscape.

Efficient Use of Spaces and Services

Medium density housing reflects international best practice in urban design and is supported by New Zealand’s national planning direction. It provides more compact homes and promotes well-connected, and sustainable communities to help Tasman maintain the character and identity we value.

Medium density zones provide a more efficient use of space within existing town boundaries and maximises the use of greenfield land. Building more homes close to existing services reduces the need for costly infrastructure expansion and protects more productive farmland from urban expansion.

Concentrating housing in appropriate places also makes it easier for council to plan, maintain, and invest in essential services such as water, roads, and wastewater.

There are clear environmental advantages too. When people live closer to work, schools, and shops, they can choose to walk, cycle, or use public transport, reducing dependence on private vehicles. Compact towns require less energy and land, supporting Tasman's wider goals for sustainability, climate resilience, and a lower carbon future.

More Housing Choice for a Changing Community

Medium density residential areas also open the door to greater housing choice. Smaller, well-designed homes can suit first-home buyers, older residents wanting to downsize, and families seeking a modern home near town amenities.

In locations such as central Motueka or the Richmond town centre, this style of development can help renew older neighbourhoods and bring more activity to local businesses and services.

Planning for the Next Decade of Growth

Plan Change 81 (Urban Growth) brings these ideas together for Tasman's next decade of growth.

It proposes a new Medium Density Residential Zone in towns including Richmond, Brightwater, Wakefield, and Motueka, enabling the development of more townhouses, duplexes, and smaller homes while protecting residential amenity, productive rural land and supporting infrastructure planning.

Where expansion is needed in towns such as Tākaka and Wakefield the Medium Density Residential Zone will be used to ensure land is developed efficiently into great new communities.

Stay involved through the Urban Growth Plan Change 81 page on Shape Tasman: [“Urban Growth Plan Change 81 | Shape Tasman.”](#)



Looking forward to a bumper summer

Mayor Tim King joined Kathryn Ryan on RNZ's Nine to Noon to talk about the resilience, courage and strong communities that met the challenges of 2025. It was a year that pivoted from extreme flooding and a State of Emergency to a point where the district can now look ahead to a bumper summer with an upswing in tourism and hospitality, a GDP uptick, positive momentum in primary production and horticulture, and a growing population.

[Play audio](#)



AI in the water: new era in whale rescue

A new pilot project in Mohua Golden Bay is using cutting-edge marine science and artificial intelligence to give rescuers earlier warning of potential whale strandings. The initiative, led by the HealthPost Nature Trust in partnership with Project Jonah and other agencies, centres on an offshore buoy system designed to detect pre-stranding behaviour and alert responders sooner.

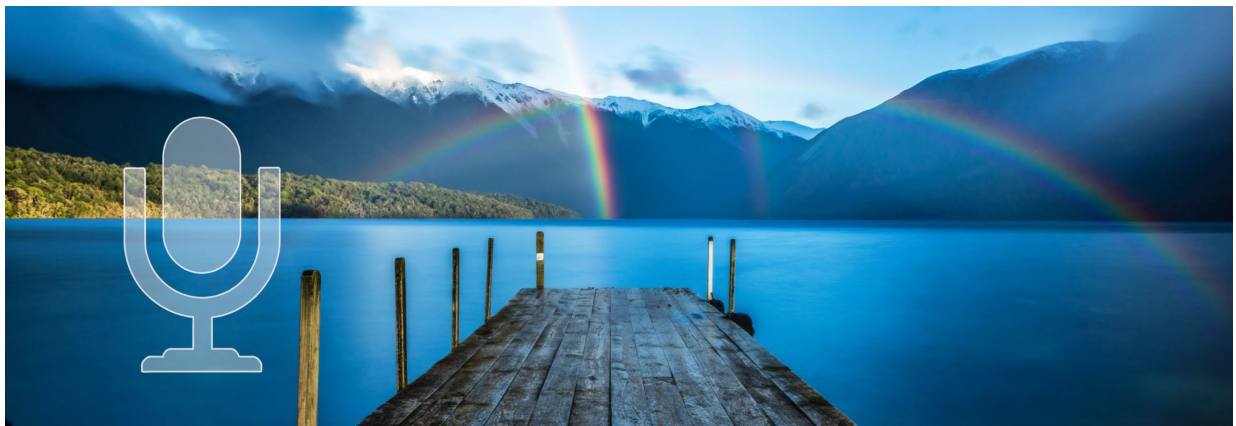
The technology builds on years of local conservation work at Farewell Spit and Wharariki, an area that has seen repeated mass strandings of pilot whales.

Project Jonah General Manager Daren Grover said the system has the potential to transform how communities respond when whales get into trouble. “Having reliable, early detection of pre-stranding behaviour could be a game changer. It gives us precious time to prepare, respond, and potentially reduce the scale of these events.”

With faster alerts, trained volunteers, iwi, and agencies can mobilise equipment and support before whales hit the beach, improving welfare outcomes and giving more animals a chance to survive.

For HealthPost Nature Trust, the deployment marks a milestone in a broader vision to restore and protect the Onetahua/Farewell Spit environment. “It’s exciting to bring leading marine science and AI together with very local, very human efforts here in Mohua, and after a few years of steady work it’s deeply satisfying to see something so tangible in the water,” said Trust representative Abel Butler.

The project underscores how community-led conservation, supported by innovation and strong partnerships, can deliver practical tools to protect both marine mammals and the wider coastal ecosystem.



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