FAQs – The Regional Spatial Plan (RSP)

What is an RSP?

An RSP is a new planning document that sets the strategic direction for growth and change in a region. It forms a chapter of the Combined Regional Plan as required by the Planning Act 2026.

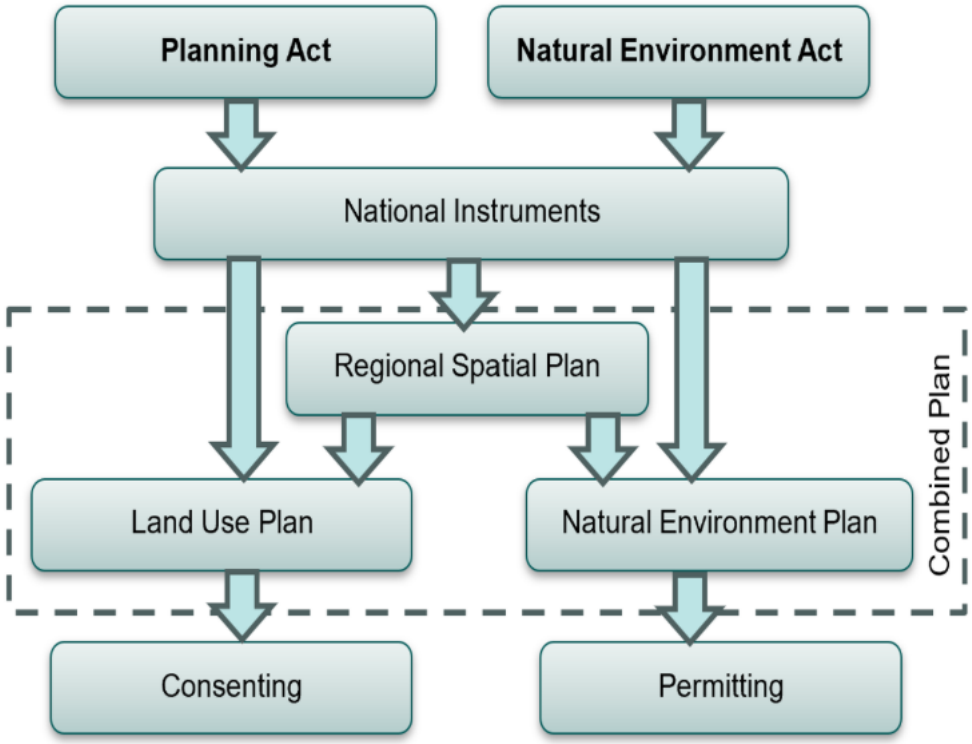
It must set out the key drivers of growth and change in the region, as well as map or record the broad spatial layout of the region over the next 30 years or longer.

In the Waikato, that is the region that includes the councils of Hamilton City, Waikato District, Waipā, Matamata-Piako, Hauraki, Thames-Coromandel, South Waikato, Ōtorohonga and parts of Taupō, Waitomo and Rotorua Lakes.

This includes priority areas for growth and change and the significant infrastructure needed to support it, significant constraints on development, priority areas for climate adaptation planning, and sites of significance to Māori.

These matters can be shown at regional, sub-regional or local scale but not at a site-specific or granular level.

Other key components of a Regional Combined Plan- the Natural Environment Plan, and Land Use plans- must implement the RSP.



Can there be more than one RSP?

No, there must only be one per region.

Who prepares the RSP?

The Spatial Plan Committee (SPC) is responsible for preparing the draft RSP and the supporting options assessments report. The SPC is supported by a secretariat (see section below). The secretariat undertakes the technical work to prepare the RSP.

Who makes decisions on the RSP?

The SPC isn't the decision maker, rather it makes recommendations to the local authorities in the region.

Local authorities each individually decide to notify the draft RSP for community engagement on the recommendation of the SPC. Local authorities also make decisions about the final version of the RSP based on recommendations from an independent hearing panel.

What about councils that are in more than one region?

Councils that are in more than one region can decide to opt out of having a member on the SPC that is preparing the RSP for a particular region but must be involved in at least one.

Who pays for preparing the RSP?

As it is a joint responsibility of the local authorities of the region, all local authorities should be contributing. The exact funding mechanism will need to be agreed through the process agreement.

What might a RSP look like?

A regional spatial plan must—

1. set out the key drivers of growth and change in the region
2. map or otherwise record the broad spatial layout of the region over the next 30 years or longer, including:
    a. priority areas for growth and change
    b. existing and future infrastructure that is of strategic importance for growth and change
    c. significant constraints on using or developing land and the CMA
    d. priority areas for planning for adapting to the effects of climate change

3. map or otherwise record each of the following in the region:
    a. existing and future designations that are significant for the district, region, or nation
    b. statutory acknowledgement
    c. any site of significance to Māori
    d. any customary marine title area and any protected customary rights area
    e. aquaculture settlement areas

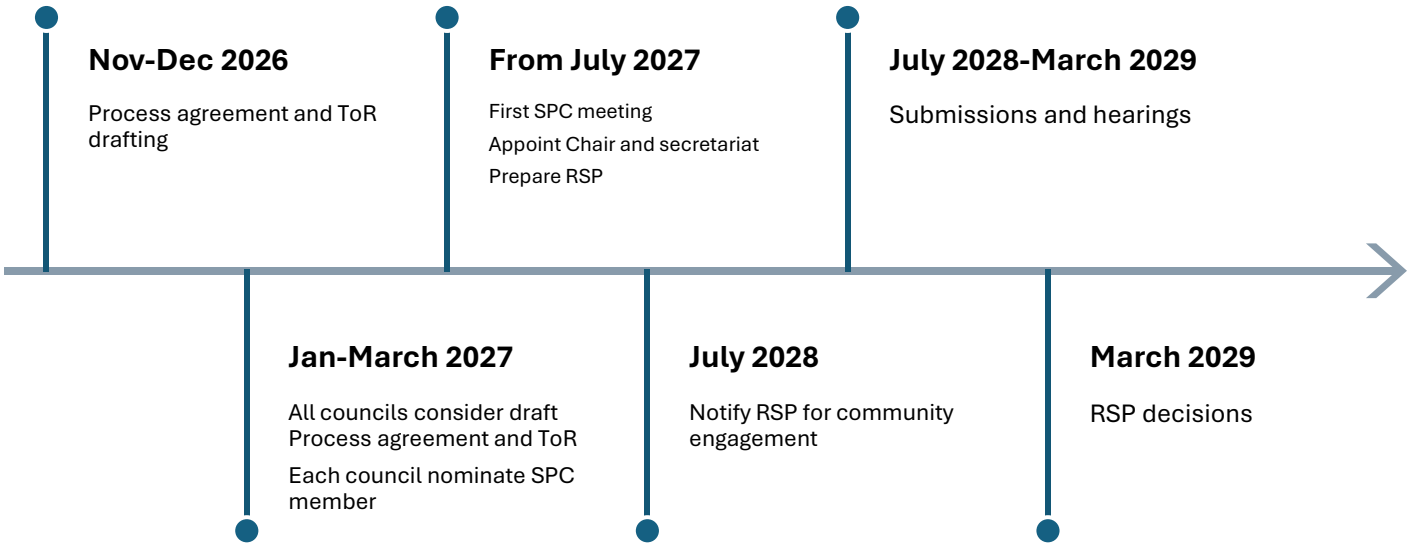
An RSP must include objectives, maps and actions. It may include policies, methods, or other types of provisions. An RSP must not include rules.

RPS must include standardised plan provisions as directed by national instruments.

What is the timeframe for preparing the RSP?

The first draft RSP is to be notified 21 months after royal assent of the Planning Act 2026 (30 September 2026). Decisions on the RSP are to be published 9 months after notification. The diagram below shows the timeline for key steps.

An RSP is required to be reviewed at least every 10 years, and may be reviewed more frequently if new information is required to be taken into account

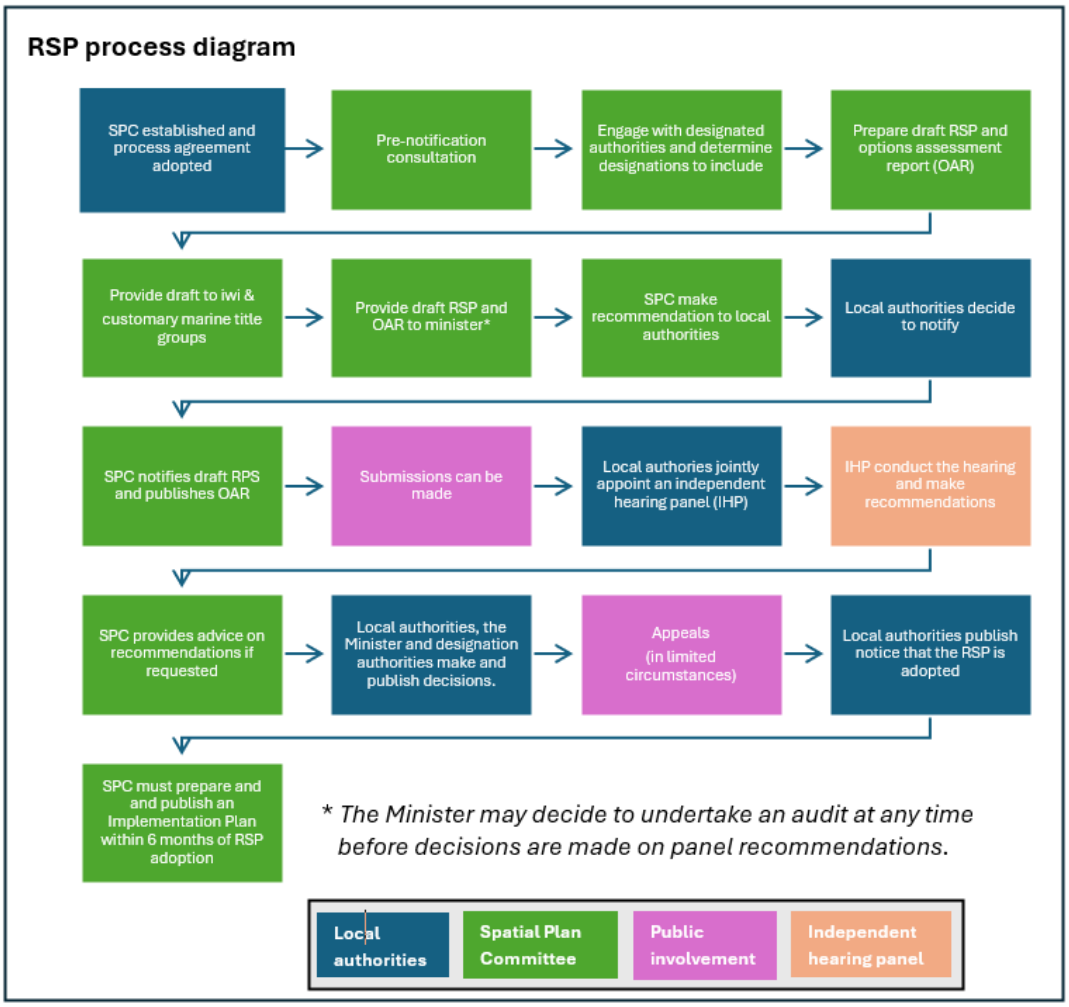


How will the process be set out and agreed?

The Planning Act requires local authorities to put in place a process agreement. Each local authority will need to adopt the process agreement.

What is the process for preparing the RSP?

The process is set out below. The first three green boxes do not have to be undertaken in this order, these steps are the steps that need to be completed before notification. They could be done simultaneously.



Has any work already been done?

Yes, WRC has already undertaken some preparatory work by completing a Regional Spatial Inventory and draft Framework. These can be viewed here: [Waikato regional spatial plan project | Waikato Regional Council]

Māori participation in spatial planning

Spatial planning is an opportunity to involve Māori in long term regional strategic planning.

The Planning Act sets minimum requirements for engaging with iwi and Māori through the process of preparing the RSP. These are:

- The SPC must have a member that has knowledge, skill, and experience relating to te Ao Māori and Māori development.
- The SPC must act in a manner that recognises that the identified Māori land is a taonga tuku iho when identifying future infrastructure may affect identified Māori land.
- The process agreement must include processes in to ensure that each local authority complies with any obligations under iwi participation legislation and any existing joint management agreements.
- The RSP must be prepared in accordance with iwi participation legislation.
- The RSP must include Te Ture Whaimana in its entirety and other provisions in the RSP must give effect to Te Ture Whamana. Te Ture Whaimana prevails over any inconsistent provision in a national instrument or regulation.
- The RSP must map or record:
    - any statutory acknowledgement:
    - any site of significance to Māori:
    - any customary marine title area and any protected customary rights area:
    - aquaculture settlement areas.
- In preparing the RSP, the SPC must have regard to the following:
    - Statutory acknowledgements
    - Any plan prepared under section 14 of the Māori Commercial Aquaculture Claims Settlement Act 2004
    - Iwi environmental plans
- Before the SPC notify the draft RSP, must consult on the subject matter with:
    - Iwi authorities
    - Any customary marine title group
- The SPC must also provide the draft RSP to iwi authorities before notifying and have regard to any advice they provide.

The process agreement will need to document how iwi and Māori will be involved in the process.

Process agreement

What is a process agreement?

The Planning Act 2026 requires the local authorities of the region to prepare a process agreement before establishing the SPC.

What should be in a process agreement?

The process agreement should cover how local authorities and the SPC will work. It should include matters such as:

- how decisions are made
- a disputes resolution process
- membership of the SPC
- how the RSP, SPC and secretariat will be funded
- who should be consulted with
- how the RSP can be future proofed for any Head Start proposals proceeding

How is the process agreement approved?

The draft process agreement will need to be approved by each local authority.

Can the process agreement be amended?

Yes, local authorities may amend a process agreement at any time by agreement and must publish any amended process agreement.

Spatial Planning Committee (SPC)

What is the SPC?

It is a joint committee set up by the local authorities in the region to prepare, review, amend, monitor and support implementation of an RSP.

Who is on the SPC?

Each local authority in the region is entitled to nominate a member to the committee but may agree not to. There needs to be a member that has te Ao Māori and Māori land development experience (which may be one of the members appointed by a local authority or can be an additional member).

The Minister may also nominate a member if he/she wishes and may appoint 2 or more with the agreement of the local authorities.

Do members have to be elected members?

No, clause 31 Schedule 7 of the Local Government Act 2002 excludes committees enacted under other legislation so members of joint committees do not have to be elected members.

Can there be additional members?

Yes, additional members can be agreed via the process agreement. Additional members could be an independent chair, additional members from local authorities, or community and iwi representatives.

How will disagreements be resolved?

The process for resolving disagreements can be set out in the process agreement and/or any dispute resolution process set by regulations. In the event that a disagreement cannot be resolved, the Minister makes a decision or refers it to an independent person to make the decision.

Does the SPC wind up when the RSP is adopted?

No, it will continue as the SPC is required to prepare an implementation plan, monitor and report annually on progress to implement the RSP, and regularly review the RSP. If a review recommends that the RSP be updated, the SPC is responsible for preparing an updated draft RSP.

The Secretariat

What is the secretariat?

The secretariat is a unit that is set up to provide the committee with technical and administrative support.

Who sets up the secretariat?

The SPC is responsible for setting up the secretariat in accordance with the process agreement.

Who is in the secretariat?

The secretariat must include 1 or more technical experts or advisors who are appointed by the chief executive of the Ministry and whose work for the secretariat is funded by the Crown.

Other members are likely to be local authority staff with the relevant skills to draft the RSP. This could be via secondment to the secretariat for the time period required.

Who directs the secretariat?

All members of the secretariat, including central government members, are subject to the direction of the SPC.

Councils and the RSP

What is the role of council vs SPC?

Local authorities have a decision-making role in the process – they set up the SPC through the Process Agreement, approve the draft RSP for notification, and make decisions on the RSP after submissions have been made and hearings held. The SPC's role is to prepare the draft RSP, make recommendations to the local authorities, and provide advice if requested. The SPC is also responsible for implementation planning, monitoring and reviewing.

How do district level growth plans fit in?

The RSP will complement and benefit from all of the work done by councils and agencies in spatial planning and placemaking, such as through the Future Proof growth partnership. District growth strategies will help inform the RSP plan as will other local strategies.

Growth strategies will help to build a broad picture of current and future growth across the region and the key strategic infrastructure to support it but won't be simply replicated in an RSP. Growth strategies and land use plans will provide the local level direction and context.

Will councils retain decision-making authority over local growth and development?

Yes, councils are responsible for preparing and adopting land use plans for their district. These land use plans will provide the local and property scale detail within the district but will need to implement the RSP.

How does Head Start fit in?

Regardless of the Head Start pathway, an RSP needs to be ready for community engagement within 21 months of royal assent which was granted on 30 September 2026. This is before the timeframe for any Head Start arrangements being in place. The process agreement should outline how the draft RSP can be prepared in a way that can adapt to any Head Start outcomes.

Central government involvement

What is Central Government's role?

Central government sets national direction to be implemented in the RSP, and may prepare regulations for aspects of the process such as:

- standardised RSP content
- a dispute resolution process
- SPC member or members
- appointment of a chair
- Staff for the secretariat (paid for by central government)

What other support might be provided?

Central government is preparing a national e-planning portal which will host regional combined plans. Central government is also working on some national data layers, such as a national flood map.

Will central government contribute funding?

Not at this stage.