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National Planning Standards  
Ministry for the Environment  
P O Box 10362  
Wellington 6143

By email: [planningstandards@mfe.govt.nz](mailto:planningstandards@mfe.govt.nz)

Dear Sir / Madam

**RE: National Planning Standards discussion papers**

The Independent Electricity Generators Association (IEGA) welcomes the opportunity to make submissions on the government's proposals to introduce National Planning Standards to be used in regional and district planning documents.

The IEGA comprises approximately 40 members who are either directly or indirectly associated with predominately small scale power schemes throughout New Zealand for the purpose of commercial electricity production.<sup>1</sup> IEGA members are small, entrepreneurial businesses, essentially the SME's of the electricity generation sector. Some members are dealing with multiple territorial authorities as they have generating plant, with essentially the same characteristics, located in different regions of New Zealand.

We strongly support the proposed National Planning Standards to create some consistency in approach to implementing the RMA and presentation of information.

While the following example may not be addressed by the current proposals it demonstrates how the current management of RMA requirements is creating complexity and unnecessary costs for business. Members with hydro generation plant construct and manage their plant to ensure fish can pass-by the dam. The method of fish passage should be the same nationwide for a specific type of fish. Currently each local authority can 'reinvent the wheel' and apply its own requirements for each fish species making the requirements different in, say, South Taranaki compared with the West Coast for the same type of fish.

This letter includes feedback on all the relevant discussion papers.

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<sup>1</sup> The Committee has signed off this submission on behalf of members

## INTRODUCTION TO THE NATIONAL PLANNING STANDARDS

The IEGA:

- a. supports achieving consistent implementation of National Policy Statements and other national directions. The discussion paper<sup>2</sup> refers to the NPS on Electricity Transmission. This is a good example however the same rationale applies to other NPSs. IEGA members have the most experience with the National Policy Statement for Renewable Electricity Generation.
- b. agrees with the key anticipated outcomes from implementing National Planning Standards. From the perspective of plan users<sup>3</sup>, IEGA suggests officials should not underestimate the time and cost for small business of understanding and operating with very different Plans when undertaking exactly the same business activity in different regions. It may become easier to use the same advisor across numerous regions rather than relying on regional specialists. Also precedents that arise from actions in one region could apply nationwide.

### DISTRICT PLAN STRUCTURE – Discussion paper B

It is interesting to be reminded that there are 67 territorial authorities and each is required by the RMA to have a district plan.

As discussed above, the variation in how plans acknowledge and implement national direction is, in our view, an unnecessary complication of current practice. We note the discussion paper states

*“The opportunity exists to mandate how plans refer to, and provide, a more consistent implementation of national direction.”*<sup>4</sup>

IEGA supports this approach.

#### **Options for plan structure**

We note that Table 5 on advantages and disadvantages of Option 3 lists one of the disadvantages of this option as

*“when a resource consent is required, it may be difficult to identify all relevant objectives and policies”*<sup>5</sup>

This criteria is not mentioned for Options 1 and 2. IEGA prefers the district plan structure option that makes the work required to get a resource consent the least complex and time consuming. IEGA suggests officials consider the above criteria for Option 1 and 2 in its deliberations.

We also support the plan structure that makes it most efficient to detail and demonstrate consistent treatment and implementation of national directions.

If Option 2 is still the preferred option, IEGA supports it. We agree that creating a document that minimises repetition and provides a clear line of sight between objectives, policies and rules will be easier to understand.

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<sup>2</sup> Ministry for the Environment. 2017. *Introduction to the National Planning Standards*. Wellington: Ministry for the Environment, page 7-8

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, page 13

<sup>4</sup> Ministry for the Environment. 2017. *National Planning Standards Discussion Paper B – District Plan Structure*. Wellington: Ministry for the Environment, page 7

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, page 21

## **ZONES AND OVERLAYS – SPATIAL LAYERS IN PLANS – Discussion paper C**

IEGA supports the intent of the proposals in this discussion paper, which is consistent with our key reasons for supporting National Planning Standards. Option 3 makes overall sense as it is likely to limit the need or desire for councils to create their own zones – recreating the situation we find ourselves in currently.

We support the proposal to standardise district wide nationally significant matters. These matters have been identified in resource management legislation and instruments as being significant across the whole of New Zealand and so should flow down easily into standardised district documentation. Standardising layers that manage district wide amenity values is also relevant to IEGA members and supported.

We note the proposed standardised plan content for some or all zones. Energy or electricity supply is experiencing change with new technologies providing distributed energy resources to consumers – on or near end users’ premises (ie could be in residential, commercial or industrial zones). Some examples are solar photovoltaic panels on homes, batteries storing this energy in homes, use of electric vehicles which both use and store electricity. IEGA submits it is important council planning instruments do not form a barrier to this innovation and investment in the energy sector. This equipment is or will be governed by safety and product standards that the council planning process can rely on.

## **STRUCTURE OF REGIONAL PLANS AND POLICY STATEMENTS – Discussion paper D**

The IEGA agrees with an integrated approach that combines regional policy statements (RPS), regional plans, regional coastal plans and rules if this will improve the usability of any RPS and regional plans and create more consistency. We also support the reasons given<sup>6</sup> for creating one structure for a combined RPS and plan.

A consistent ‘home’ for information arising from national direction documents would be useful. This would also be the home of information ‘mandated’ or provided centrally about implementation of national directions discussed in the Introduction to National Planning Standards as a Planning Standard outcome.

The IEGA agrees a national planning standard could usefully standardise some of the terminology used in RPS and plans<sup>7</sup>. We see benefit in standardising terminology used to refer to topics and themes and any other standardisation of definitions and terms that can be achieved.

## **DEFINITIONS – Discussion paper G**

IEGA supports the development of the set of around 90 standardised definitions to apply principally to district plans, but also to regional plans and regional policy statements where relevant. Officials should review the uptake of these standard definitions and also look to develop more over time.

Knowing in advance that a term is defined, applied and interpreted in the same way by different councils will greatly assist with re-consenting existing, or developing new, generation projects in different council areas. Consistency between district and regional plans will also be beneficial.

Table 1 lists indicative terms that could be defined in the National Planning Standards. We suggest checking that ‘Network Utility’ is not already defined in legislation.

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<sup>6</sup> Ministry for the Environment. 2017. *National Planning Standards Discussion Paper D – Structure of regional plans and policy statements*. Wellington: Ministry for the Environment, page 14

<sup>7</sup> Ibid page 21

We note the discussion about a standard definition for Infrastructure and Network Utility. The nesting structure used in the Auckland Unitary Plan appears easy to follow (although the third-level list may not be comprehensive).

#### **ELECTRONIC FUNCTIONALITY AND ACCESSIBILITY – Discussion paper H**

IEGA members are dispersed nationwide and often based in rural locations. We support the availability and accessibility of planning documentation on-line – subject to the quality of members' internet connection (which is outside the control of the Ministry). We note the government's targets with respect to the rollout of broadband to rural homes and businesses by 2025<sup>8</sup>. However, 2025 is still after the deadline Discussion paper H describes for achieving mature e-Delivery.

Forcing e-Delivery targets on some councils could increase the cost of applying for a consent – the value for money of this approach must be considered. We suggest the transition path could differentiate between councils that have the ability to fund change; the level of demand for their planning documents; and the local availability of high speed broadband for users.

We suggest the improved ability to search documents as well as ease of access/reference to other relevant documents on a council's website are the key benefits of improved e-Delivery.

#### **METRICS (how things are measured) – Discussion paper I**

The Discussion paper proposes to introduce standardised metrics in the National Planning Standards for earthworks, noise, light spill, and building bulk and location. The focus appears to be mainly on the standards / measures relating to non-commercial activity.

The most relevant metrics from these four might be earthworks and noise, given IEGA members' construct or operate plant to generate electricity.

#### **GENERAL PROVISIONS – Discussion paper J**

IEGA supports the preferred option outlined in this Discussion paper relating to standardising the content and location of general provisions as well as making better use of guides, web sites and other documents.

The IEGA would welcome the opportunity to discuss this submission with you in more detail. We would appreciate being added to your stakeholder list to ensure we remain fully informed about your work in this area.

Yours sincerely



**David Inch**  
Secretary

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<sup>8</sup> Ministry for the Environment. 2017. *National Planning Standards Discussion Paper H – Electronic functionality and accessibility of plans and policy statements*. Wellington: Ministry for the Environment, page 13 last bullet point