

Govt overhaul removes RMA 'handbrake'

Tuesday February 03, 2009
The New Zealand Herald

Prime Minister John Key has announced a number of changes to the much-maligned Resource Management Act (RMA).

The Government is making over 100 changes to the Act as it overhauls legislation which Mr Key said is a "handbrake on growth".

Changes announced today include getting rid of "frivolous" objections to projects and requiring councils to provide discounts for late processing.

The Resource Management Act has caused headaches for The RMA has been a source of huge frustration and National gave a businesses since its inception commitment that it would introduce legislation within our first 100 days in office", said Mr Key.

"New Zealand depends on the sustainable use of our natural resources for our economic well being. That's why the RMA is so crucial.

"But the RMA has been a handbrake on growth. It has led to uncertainty around developments and stalled projects, including those of national importance. We need to unlock that lost growth potential and untangle the red tape suffocating everyone from homeowners to businesses."

The Prime Minister called the reforms long overdue.

"And the current economic climate adds fresh urgency to the changes. We need to remove the barriers that stand in the way of improving New Zealand's infrastructure and the creation of new industries and jobs.

"Reforming the RMA will help ensure the future prosperity of our country", he said.

Key said the Government is committed to "future-proofing New Zealand's regulatory framework and dealing with the red tape".

"If we are to succeed as a nation, we need to work out ways to grow our economy without compromising our environment", he said. "I am confident these reforms achieve that balance."

Environment Minister Nick Smith said the reforms would enable local councils to make planning changes more quickly, and aimed to prevent companies using the law to stymie competition from rival firms.

"The Government is taking an innovative approach to major projects by increasing the input from local councils into a streamlined Board of Inquiry process. This recognises that major projects have both an important local and national dimension.

"These reforms have required a delicate rebalancing between the rights of people to participate in resource consent decision making, and to appeal decisions, and the need for efficient decision making."

The Resource Management (Simplify & Streamline) Amendment Bill, which contains more than 100 amendments, will be introduced to Parliament in February and referred to the Environment and Local Government Select Committee for public submission and hearings.

Reforms include:

- removing frivolous, vexatious and anti-competitive objections;
- creating an Environmental Protection Authority;
- streamlining processes for projects of national significance – for instance applications can be made direct to the EPA which can then send them to a board of inquiry;
- improving plan development and plan change processes – for example removing the ability to make general challenges or ones that seek the withdrawal of entire proposed plans;
- improving resource consent processes – one change was to require councils to give discounts for late consent processing;
- streamlining decision making – for example allowing applicants to go straight to the Environment Court without going through a local council first;
- improving workability and compliance; that included raising maximum penalties from \$200,000 to \$600,000 for RMA breaches by corporates and a \$300,000 maximum fine for individuals;
- improving national instruments – such as limiting appeals on changes to plans and regional policy statements which are implementing national policy.

Mr Key said the changes would assist the Government in building infrastructure of national importance as well as making it easier for businesses to start new projects.

- NZPA

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