

Hon Chris Bishop

Attorney-General
Minister of Housing
Minister for Infrastructure
Minister Responsible for RMA Reform
Minister of Transport
Associate Minister of Finance



15 September 2026

CB-COR3246 / 26-CORM-02544

Rt Hon Simon Upton
Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment
By email: Andrew.McCarthy@pce.parliament.nz

Dear Simon,

Thank you for your letter of 25 August 2026 regarding urban development and climate in the new planning system.

I appreciate the concerns you raise about the long-term consequences of urban development for heat, stormwater management and the liveability of our cities. As you note, decisions made today about urban form can have enduring effects on both community resilience and infrastructure costs.

Your comments are timely as officials continue work on the implementation of the new planning system, including the development of standardised plan content and national policy direction. A key objective of the reforms is to support well-functioning urban environments while ensuring that natural hazard risks and the impacts of a changing climate are appropriately considered in planning and development decisions.

While decisions are yet to be made about the extent to which urban heat and stormwater runoff will be addressed through national direction or local planning decisions, these issues are being considered as part of the development of the new planning system. The illustrative National Policy Direction sets out expectations for resilient urban development and natural hazard management, which is intended to support consideration of urban heat, stormwater management and the cumulative effects of development. The illustrative NPD is available at: <https://environment.govt.nz/assets/publications/RM-reform/Illustrative-National-Policy-Direction.pdf?v=5e015582f0604ab25fef1cbe51b5ecc4e2768c78>.

You also refer to the investigation into provisions of the Hamilton City Operative District Plan relating to housing development. As you are aware, that investigation is being conducted under a separate statutory process, which requires consultation with affected parties and assessment against the relevant statutory criteria. Officials are currently preparing advice on the findings of the investigation and submissions received through consultation, which I will consider before making any decisions on whether any changes to the plan are to be recommended.

More broadly, I agree that the planning system must be capable of responding to changing environmental conditions over time. As implementation work progresses, I expect officials to continue considering how national direction, standardised plan content and supporting guidance can assist councils to manage these issues effectively while enabling development and growth.

The New Zealand Flood Map (the Map) will not present or identify go or no-go areas for development, but will support improved understanding on current and future flood hazards. The Map therefore will support better decision-making about risk, but decision-makers will still need to consider other factors such as vulnerability, mitigation and how risk may change over time. More information on the Map is available at: <https://environment.govt.nz/what-government-is-doing/areas-of-work/climate-change/adapting-to-climate-change/national-adaptation-framework/new-zealand-flood-map/>

Thank you for sharing your views and the accompanying article. I appreciate your ongoing interest in these matters and welcome continued engagement as the new system is developed.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'CB', written over a faint circular watermark.

Hon Chris Bishop
Minister Responsible for RMA Reform