Hauraki Gulf Forum
Tīkapa Moana
Te Moananui-ā-Toi

SUBMISSION

Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill

Friday 13 February 2026

Hauraki Gulf Forum invited submission to the Environment Select Committee

Contact: Beth Rose
Executive Officer
Hauraki Gulf Forum
EO@haurakigulfforum.org.nz

Website: www.haurakigulfforum.org.nz

Introduction

1. We thank the Environment Select Committee for the opportunity to submit on the *Natural Environment Bill and the Planning Bill* (the Bills).

2. Parliament has already decided that the Hauraki Gulf warrants a distinct, integrated management framework because of its national significance and ecological vulnerability.

3. The *Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act 2000* (HGMPA) was established to recognise and manage the historic, traditional, cultural, and spiritual relationship of the tangata whenua with the Hauraki Gulf/Tīkapa Moana/Te Moananui-ā-Toi Marine Park, including its islands, shorelines and marine ecosystems.[1]

4. The Bills should clearly carry that decision forward rather than inadvertently dilute it.

5. We support reforms that improve environmental outcomes alongside decision-making efficiency. However, as drafted, key provisions in the Bills could erode protection for the coasts and islands of Hauraki Gulf/Tīkapa Moana/Te Moananui-ā-Toi (herein referred to as the Hauraki Gulf), potentially undermine integrated Gulf management under the HGMPA, and open new risks in the coastal marine area.

6. We submit a number of amendments to the Committee for consideration to rectify these gaps.

7. The Hauraki Gulf Forum is the statutory co-governance body established under the HGMPA to promote the integrated management and long-term protection of the Hauraki Gulf, its islands, and its catchments.[2]

8. The HGMPA recognises the Hauraki Gulf's national significance, setting out environmental and cultural values that must be upheld in sections 7-8. These provisions emphasise the need for coordinated, ecosystem-based management across land and sea; reflecting the complexity and importance of the Hauraki Gulf.

9. The Forum brings together tangata whenua, local government, and central government representatives, providing a collaborative governance structure for an area where management responsibilities and environmental pressures span multiple jurisdictions.

10. This context frames the importance of recent legislative action: the *Hauraki Gulf / Tīkapa Moana Marine Protection Act 2025*, establishing marine protection and a

[1] Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act 2000, s 3.

[2] Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act 2000, s 16.

network of marine reserves, high protection areas, and seafloor protection areas. This new protection regime reflects widespread recognition that the Hauraki Gulf's ecosystems require decisive, coordinated intervention to halt continued decline and allow recovery. The Forum plays a crucial role in guiding, monitoring, and advocating for this transition.

11. Despite this, the Bills do not reference the HGMPA. Their silence risks weakening the integrated management framework that Parliament previously established for the Hauraki Gulf.

12. The HGMPA sets clear statutory direction, particularly through sections 7–8, which currently carry operative weight in planning and consenting decisions.

13. To maintain statutory coherence and protect the progress made toward Gulf restoration, the new system must explicitly give effect to sections 7–8 of the HGMPA within future planning instruments, environmental limit-setting, allocation decisions, and consent processes.

The Bills are silent on a national taonga, the Hauraki Gulf

No explicit link to the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act 2000 (HGMPA)

14. The Bills do not expressly reference the HGMPA or incorporate its key management provisions (sections 7–8) into the new hierarchy of national instruments and regional plans, creating uncertainty about how the Hauraki Gulf's integrated management purpose will carry through under the new system.

15. Section 9 of the HGMPA currently ties sections 7–8 to *Resource Management Act (RMA)* instruments and decision-making (regional policy statements/plans, district plans, resource consents) and treats sections 7–8 as if they were a national policy statement.

16. With the RMA being replaced, this linkage disappears unless it is expressly reinstated in the new legislation. Without a clear cross-reference mechanism, sections 7-8 risk becoming aspirational rather than directive.

17. The HGMPA was designed to integrate land, freshwater and marine management. Recognition only within the *Natural Environment Bill* would fracture that intent and undermine Parliament's integrated land–sea management model.

18. In parallel, the *Hauraki Gulf / Tīkapa Moana Marine Protection Act* has newly expanded Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in the Hauraki Gulf (two marine reserve extensions, 12 high-protection areas, 5 seafloor protection areas). The Bills should be aligned to give effect to this regime and avoid subsequent planning instruments counteracting those protections.

Specific recommendations and clause-level changes

Embed the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park framework in both Bills

19. **Recommendation:** Add a single, upfront rule in Part 1 of each Bill requiring all decision-makers acting within the Hauraki Gulf to give effect to the management principles in sections 7–8 of the HGMPA.

20. This restores the functional status that those sections currently have under the outgoing RMA architecture and prevents any inadvertent downgrading under the new system.

21. This requirement should cascade through national direction, regional combined plans, and all resource allocation and consent decisions within the Marine Park area.

22. **Recommendation:** Direct the National Policy Direction (NPD) found in the *Natural Environment Bill* to include a dedicated "Hauraki Gulf chapter" that sets required environmental limits/targets for coastal waters and biodiversity, and prescribes overlays and methods that carry through the HGMPA intent and the 2025 Marine Protection network.

Shield coastal and island protections from "regulatory relief"

23. **Recommendation:** Exclude from the *Planning Bill's* relief regime (and any *Natural Environment Bill* cross-application) the following:

    a. areas mapped as High Natural Character in the coastal environment;
    b. outstanding coastal landscapes and features;
    c. sites/areas of significance to Māori within the coastal environment; and
    d. all mapped protections situated within the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park (both terrestrial margins and coastal edges).

24. Relief settings otherwise risk deterring councils from applying or updating these safeguards on private coastal or island land.

25. **Recommendation:** Make it explicit that any biodiversity-related relief mechanism cannot weaken wetland and estuary protections or rules that manage spillover effects on coastal wildlife (for example, shorebird roosts, penguin colonies) at the land–sea interface.

Keep coastal character and cumulative effects in scope

26. **Recommendation:** Amend the *Planning Bill's* effects provisions so that cumulative coastal character effects—including those below the "outstanding" threshold — remain accessible wherever public coastal values are implicated. This is essential for the Hauraki Gulf's shorelines and islands, where many small changes can add up to material loss of character and access.

Provide guardrails for coastal marine area (CMA) allocation, aquaculture and permit

27. **Recommendation:** In the *Natural Environment Bill* allocation clauses, require that any decision allocating occupation of space or authorising extraction of natural materials in the CMA must:

    a. align with coastal-water environmental limits;
    b. not undermine the 2025 Hauraki Gulf Marine Protection network; and
    c. give effect to HGMPA sections 7–8.

28. **Recommendation:** Where regulations are used to manage aquaculture, include a statutory consistency test with (a) the *Natural Environment Bill* coastal limits, (b) the HPA/SPA/marine reserve network in the Hauraki Gulf, and (c) any nationally approved implementation of Sea Change – Tai Timu Tai Pari in instruments or plans.

29. **Recommendation:** For CMA permits inside the Marine Park, set a lower notification/affected-person threshold than the default so that communities can participate in decisions over public seabed and waters of national significance.

Align the Bills with the *Hauraki Gulf/Tīkapa Moana Marine Protection Act 2025*

30. **Recommendation:** Add cross-references in both Bills to ensure all plans, permits/consents, and regulations:

    a. cannot authorise activities prohibited in high protection areas, seafloor protection areas or marine reserves (for example, dredging, bottom trawling or waste dumping); and

    b. must support the *Hauraki Gulf / Tīkapa Moana Marine Protection Act's* biodiversity objectives and reporting/monitoring duties—so planning tools implement, rather than erode, the new protection network.

Concluding remarks

31. Thank you for inviting us to submit our views and suggested amendments to these Bills.

32. We would be happy to speak to this submission in more detail, as well as to provide the Committee any assistance that is required.

About the Hauraki Gulf Forum

The Hauraki Gulf Forum is a statutory governance board established under the *Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act 2000* to promote the conservation and management of the natural, historic, and physical resources of the Hauraki Gulf, its islands, and catchments, for the benefit and enjoyment of the people and communities of the Hauraki Gulf and New Zealand.

The Forum consists of representatives from tangata whenua of the Hauraki Gulf and its islands; the Ministers of Conservation, Oceans and Fisheries and Māori Development; and elected members appointed by the Auckland Council, Hauraki District Council, Matamata-Piako District Council, Thames-Coromandel District Council, Waikato District Council and Waikato Regional Council.

The Forum is required to present triennial reports regarding the state of the environment of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park. More information on the Forum and the Marine Park is available at www.haurakigulfforum.org.nz

The Hauraki Gulf Marine Park

The Hauraki Gulf Marine Park is New Zealand's first marine park, established by the *Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act* in February 2000. At 1.2 million hectares (20 times the size of Lake Taupō) it stretches from Te Arai in the north to Waihi in the south and includes the Waitematā Harbour, Gulf Islands, Firth of Thames and the east coast of the Coromandel Peninsula. The Park is the seabird capital of the world, and a whale superhighway, but as successive State of the Hauraki Gulf reports have shown, it is a shadow of its former self.